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Table of Contents

Get a Global Perspective

As a graduate student, I discovered sociology for the first time. I was fascinated by the discipline's *relativizing* function. I mean that (generally) in a positive sense. Through its rigorous analysis of social structures and practices, sociology challenges things we take for granted, pointing out that how we do things is not the only way to do things.

Since then, my sociology training has helped me question the assumptions of my surrounding culture in many ways. It has helped me realize that children don't have to move out of their parents' house by age 21, that one doesn't have to take high school chemistry to be a meaningful member of society, and that a congregation's worship services don't have to last longer than an hour to prove that the church is deeply spiritual.

I don't do much sociology these days, but my cross-cultural experience through the World Evangelical Alliance has a similar effect. Understanding the worldviews of deeply committed Christians from the Majority World has compelled me to reexamine my own Western assumptions.

This issue of *ERT* presents a powerful example of a cross-cultural challenge. Along with original submissions, we often reprint articles that we think deserve global attention. WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher recently sent me Prabo Mihindakulasuriya's impressive article developing a theology of race and ethnicity, which initially appeared in the journal of Colombo Theological Seminary. I agreed that it merited reprinting. Tucked into this essay—longer than what we usually publish due to its sweeping, comprehensive scope—is a passage that seeks to relativize the worldview of politically conservative US evangelicals. Prabo suggests that many US evangelicals who critique opposing ideologies such as Marxism and progressivism are less able to constructively critique the ideologies of individualism and capitalism in which they are enmeshed. Whether you agree with him or not, such challenges force us to consider whether our cherished beliefs are really in line with God or just imbibed from our culture.

Coincidentally, both Prabo's article and the review of Steven Bryan's book in this issue cite the same portion of Scripture (Genesis 10–11) to demonstrate that cultural diversity is part of God's good plan and not the result of sinful hubris as exhibited at the Tower of Babel.

The first three articles in this issue also present alternatives to traditional perspectives, in various ways. Evert Van de Poll masterfully summarizes the reasons for tension between the Messianic Jewish movement and other Christian groups. James Edwards praises the Reformation of the 16th century but calls us to move beyond that Reformation in the areas of mission and evangelism. Andrew Messmer covers both mainstream and less credible viewpoints as he summarizes the history of textual criticism of the Bible. In addition, Alan Pihringer shows why C. S. Lewis's use of myth remains so effective and exemplary, and Richard Smith finds a capsulized presentation of the gospel in 1 Thessalonians 1.

Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

More Great Reading from the WEA

The publications and websites of the World Evangelical Alliance and its partners are some of the best ways to stay informed about developments in global Christianity. If you like the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, consider keeping up with these other sources.

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ERT (2023) 47:1, 6–21

Towards a Recognition of the 'Jewish Church': the Messianic Jewish Movement and Christianity in Dialogue

Evert Van de Poll

The Messianic Jewish movement presents unique theological and diplomatic challenges not just to the Jews whom they hope will come to honour Jesus Christ but to other Christian groups as well. This summary of a July 2022 conference clarifies the issues in a dispassionate, definitive way.

The international symposium titled 'Jesus: Also the Messiah for Israel? Messianic Jewish Movement and Christianity in Dialogue', which took place in Vienna on 11–13 July 2022, could well be called a unique event. Over 80 participants from the USA, Israel and numerous European countries gathered in a lecture hall of the stately, renowned University of Vienna to reflect on the relationship between the Messianic Jewish movement and Christian churches. They represented a range of faith traditions and theological persuasions: Messianic Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Evangelical and Charismatic.

In recent decades, there have been a number of meetings between Messianic Jewish leaders and representatives of Christian churches. Notable examples include the Helsinki Consultations of Messianic Jewish and Gentile Christian theologians between 2010 and 2018,[1] and the movement called Toward a Second Jerusalem Council (TJC2). The latter organizes national and regional meetings, aiming at 'repentance and reconciliation between the Jewish and Gentile segments of the Body of Messiah'.[2] But never before has such a broad spectrum of participants come together as at this symposium, held by TJC2 and the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Vienna. It included key persons already involved in the Helsinki

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1 This series of theological consultations began at Helsinki in 2010 and concluded at Dallas in 2018. There have not been notable activities since then. See https://worldea.org/yourls/47101.

2 Founded in 1996, TJC2 is an international organization with branches in various countries and regions of the world. Its aims are recognition, repentance and reconciliation, on an official level, with respect to the place of the Jewish believers in the body of Christ/Messiah. See https://worldea.org/yourls/47102.

Consultations, TJC2 and other Messianic-Christian encounters, as well as representtatives of the wider academic theological world. The event took place under the official patronage of Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna.

Over the years, I have become quite used to colloquia and seminars, but in retrospect I am still amazed at the pace, organization, multiplicity and diversity of topics of this symposium: 25 papers at a solid scientific level presented by top theologians, most of them delivered in pairs with one speaker reacting to another, plus the rounds of questions and some plenary discussions, all condensed into just over two days. (See the list of papers in the appendix to this article.) There was no time to see any of beautiful Vienna during those two days. We never wandered further than the restaurant across the road in front of the university!

We received a heart-warming reception at the Archbishop's Palace, where Cardinal Schönborn surprised the participants with a moving personal retrospective on the role of the Catholic Church in Austria with respect to persecuted Jews during the Second World War.

The heart of the matter for Messianic Jews

What was the essence of this series of studies? I asked that question not only to myself but also during a plenary discussion, if only to clarify what was at stake. The answer is not the same for Jewish believers as for Gentile believers in Jesus the Messiah/Christ.

'Messianic' Jewish believers

A growing proportion of Jesus-believing Jews consider themselves the visible Jewish presence in the church, in continuity with the Jewish assemblies of Jesus-followers in Jerusalem and Judea at the very beginning of church history. Much like the first followers of Jesus in the New Testament, they remain attached to their Jewish ethnic and sociocultural identity. For them, Jewish identity is not only essential with respect to their faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, but also existential. 'We simply cannot deny who we are. We are Jews, it is in our veins', exclaimed Antoine Levy, one of the speakers, at an emotional moment in the plenary discussion.

These Jesus-believers want to remain part of the Jewish people and be recognized as such in both the Christian and the Jewish communities at large. That is why they call themselves 'Messianic' rather than 'Christian'. The two terms have the same etymological meaning; 'Christian' comes from the Greek *christianos*. meaning a follower of Christ, and Christ comes from *christos*, which is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *mashiah* or Messiah. But the two have very different connotations, especially in the Jewish world, where anything 'Christian' is considered non-Jewish by definition, or even anti-Jewish.

These Jesus-believers have developed a deliberately Jewish expression of their faith in Jesus Messiah, although they are far from agreeing among themselves as to exactly how this should be given form or to what extent they should observe the commandments of Torah, which are so central to the practice of Judaism. And to what extent should they adopt rites and customs that have developed in rabbinic Judaism? Those who emphasize the need for Torah observance sometimes speak of the Messianic Jewish movement as Messianic Judaism, treating it as in fact a branch

of Judaism alongside the other branches (Orthodox, Reform/Liberal, Conservative/Massorti, Haredi).[3]

Jesus-believing Jews also have different views on whether they wish to live out and shape their Jewish identity within existing churches or in distinct Messianic congregations. 'Only about 10 per cent of them choose the second option', according to well-known theologian Richard Harvey. That would be around 15,000 of the total of about 150,000 Messianic Jews worldwide.[4]

On the basis of the latest available statistical data, Harvey and other researchers have proposed this conservative global estimate of 150,000 Jesus-believing Jews who identify as 'Messianic'. This would represent 1 percent of the total Jewish world population (over 15 million). This figure excludes those others who identify as Hebrew Catholics, Jews in the Orthodox Churches, or Israeli Christians of uncertain Jewish status from the former Soviet Union.[5] Harvey deliberately uses this conservative estimate to counter the exaggerated numbers sometimes put forward in publications about the Messianic movement.

Moreover, he uses the halachic, orthodox Jewish criterion of who is a Jew, i.e. a person born of a Jewish mother or who is a recognized convert to Judaism. If one uses the broader criterion of the Law of Return of the State of Israel, i.e. a person who has at least one Jewish grandparent, the numbers are much higher. Harvey estimates that there are approximately 715,000 Jesus-believers 'with a Jewish background', or almost 3 percent of the world Jewish population (estimated at over 24 million according to this broader criterion). But significantly, in Harvey's statistics the number of Jewish members of Messianic congregations does not rise above the already-mentioned figure of 15,000. In other words, believers who are Jewish according to the broader criterion of 'having a Jewish background' almost always affiliate with existing Christian churches.

Unity and distinction

At any rate, these figures are tiny relative to the overall Christian population. In purely quantitative terms, the Messianic Jewish movement is quite insignificant. It can therefore be easily overlooked by those who concentrate on the mainstream of church populations. But in qualitative terms, it is of paramount importance, at least according to the 'Messianics' themselves, because it represents the visible presence of the Jewish church without which the church of Jesus Christ would not be complete. And this brings us to what is at stake for them in the dialogue with Christianity.

For these believers, Jewish identity is not only an existential matter but also theologically significant. The reasoning is as follows. Through the eternal God's covenant with Abraham, his offspring the people of Israel were destined to be a channel of blessing for all nations. Since this covenant has been neither annulled nor replaced by the New Covenant, it is still valid, which means that the people of Israel are still chosen to play a role in God's plan for the salvation of the world. This makes

3 See e.g. David Rudolph and Joel Willits (eds.), *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

4 Richard Harvey, 'Introducing the Messianic Reality', symposium paper of 11 July 2022.

5 Harvey, 'Introducing the Messianic Reality'.

Jewish survival not only an existential but also a theological necessity, including for those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. That is why 'Messianic' Jewish believers insist that they should not be assimilated into the mass of Gentile believers, because that would surely lead in due time to the disappearance of a recognizable Jewish identity—through intermarriage, lack of Jewish education for the next generation, and loss of connection with the living Jewish community. On the contrary, they value their ethnic and cultural-religious identity alongside that of the believers from other nations, and they seek to express this in practical ways.

Mutual recognition

Moreover, Messianic Jewish believers are keen that the churches officially recognize the enduring calling of the people of Israel and the need for Jesus-believing Jews to maintain and express their identity as part of that people. When it comes to salvation by grace, there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Gal 3:27), but with regard to living out that faith, believers will always express it in accordance with a particular cultural and ethnic context. This applies to all Christians in general, and particularly to Jewish believers. So they want the churches to make room, theologically and practically, for a Jewish expression of faith in Jesus.

Just as Gentile believers are not required to become Jews to belong to the people of God, the Messianic movement contends, Jewish believers should not be pressured to become like the Gentiles. Even as the first Jerusalem council (Acts 15) dispensed Gentile believers from fully observing all the laws of the Torah, except four basic laws that were made obligatory, so Gentile believers should recognize that this decision did not concern the Jewish followers of Jesus, and that the latter should maintain their Jewish identity through a Jewish liturgical expression and a Jewish way of life. Hence the idea of a so-called Second Council of Jerusalem, which means that church leaders should somehow—through a kind of synod or council or common declaration—officially take a position in favour of the Jewish Church.

The heart of the matter: key questions for churches from the nations

Marginalization of Jewish believers in Jesus

There is a long history of marginalization of Jesus-believing Jews and of their assimilation to a Gentile Christian environment, often by force. In the early centuries, several historical church councils explicitly forbade 'Jewish practices'. This contributed to the marginalization and even extinction of the Judeo-Christian communities at that time. Living a Jewish life became ecclesiastically illegal. The disappearance of Jewish believers *as Jews* also had repercussions for the development of Christian doctrine. The Jewish perspective was lost. Significantly, there were no Jewish participants at the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries where epoch-making doctrinal decisions were made. Gentile Christian theologians developed their ideas of the 'new Israel', their catechisms and their eschatology, their liturgy and their calendar, their church structure and their pastoral practices—all without reckoning with any form of Jewish presence in the church.

Return of the Jewish voice

For a long time, the churches got away with this, because the Jewish voice had been almost totally silenced. Since the end of the 18th century, this voice has begun to be heard again, first among some isolated groups of Jewish believers here and there, then through the movement of Hebrew Christians in England and many other countries, and since the 1970s through the Messianic Jewish movement, which is steadily growing.

Since the early centuries, the recognizable Jewish presence in the universal church has been marginalized more and more and finally virtually excluded. The return of this forgotten part of the church, through the Messianic Jewish movement and Jesus-believing Jews in general, means that a Jewish voice can again be heard in the church.

When the movement of Hebrew Christians emerged within the wider Protestant-Evangelical stream, theologians and church leaders, including many Evangelicals, had a problem with their practice of circumcision and other Jewish festivals, rites and customs, condemning it as 'legalism', a return to 'being under the law', or a way to obtain salvation through 'works of the law'. The same critique is still voiced sometimes with respect to the current Messianic Jewish movement. Jewish believers consider this a serious misunderstanding of their motives.

The key question is whether the Jewish voice will be not only heard but also understood and taken seriously. Can Jewish believers have a voice in discussions of Christian theology, church administration, the renewal of liturgy, or the practice of evangelism and mission? Are other Christian participants in the current Jewish-Christian dialogue prepared to adjust their thinking and practice in the light of their encounter with the Messianic Jewish movement? These are crucial questions for Gentile Christian theologians and church leaders today; they constitute the heart of the matter for churches from the nations, and they have far-reaching consequences for all areas of church and theology, as was amply demonstrated at the symposium in Vienna.

Church of Jews and church of Gentiles

Jan Heiner Tück, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Vienna, invited the participants and their respective churches to make amends and to take up these challenging questions as he summarized the principles of the symposium:

> We assume that the Jew Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of Israel and the Nations. He has come—and will come again—in order to unite what is separated and to establish the Kingdom in its final fulness.
>
> We assume that the church was from the beginning a church of Jews and Gentiles. But already in the first centuries, the *ecclesia ex gentibus* has been more and more pushed aside by the *ecclesia ex circumcisione*, which has finally completely forgotten her. The return of the excluded church of the Jews through Jesus-believing Jews in the 19th century and the Messianic Jewish movement in the 20th century has to be interpreted as a sign for the churches. It should be

recognized as such in the conversation between Messianic Jews and Christian theologians.[6]

The organizers of the symposium realized very well that such a position has considerable consequences. It calls on the churches to critically re-examine their theology—especially their Christology, church doctrine, eschatology and liturgy—in the light of this sign.

Versus 'two ways of salvation' theology and replacement theology

The symposium title, 'Jesus—Also the Messiah for Israel?', was deliberately chosen to clarify the position of its organizers within the broader field of the relationship between the church and Israel, and in particular the Jewish-Christian dialogue. First, it alludes to the 'two ways' theology of two parallel paths to salvation, which holds that the people of Israel come to salvation through the way of the Torah while the Gentiles find salvation through Jesus Christ. An example of this view is a recent document from the Conversation Group of Jews and Christians, of the Central Committee of German Catholics, which affirms, 'We confess that God's covenant with the Jewish people means a way of salvation to God—even without acknowledging Jesus Christ.'[7] But this would imply that there are two peoples of God, one Jewish and the other Christian. How could that be? Doesn't this view make God into a bigamist, as Robert Spaemann put it? The symposium organizers shared this critique and wanted to steer away from the doctrine of two ways of salvation.

Second, the title alludes to the doctrine of replacement, which posits the rejection of Israel in God's plan and its replacement by the church, the new Israel. Several speakers argued that this doctrine is 'in need of revision'. In the words of Dieter Böhler, the replacement doctrine makes of God 'someone who has divorced his first wife to marry a new partner'.

The title of the symposium was applied to three specific areas, bringing to light its theological implications for Christology, ecclesiology and eschatology, respectively.

The Jewish Jesus, King of the Jews

The first major theme was that Jesus was and still is the King of the Jews. The Messianic movement emphasizes the Jewish identity of Jesus and his faithfulness to the Torah. This is for them an affirmation and an appreciation of their own Jewish identity and an example to follow.

This emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus corresponds to the trend in Christian theology in general, in its endeavour to bring to light the historical Jesus. For Christology, this means that the doctrine of incarnation—the Word become flesh in Jesus of Nazareth—is concretized: the eternal Word has become a Jew. But this is generally speaking a matter of history. The question of what this implies for the

6 Jan Heiner Tück, 'Introduction to the Theme and Subthemes of the Symposium', symposium paper of 11 July 2022.

7 Quoted by Tück, 'Introduction to the Theme'. The subsequent quotations from Spaemann and Böhler were also cited in Tück's paper.

relation between Jesus and the present Jewish people remains unanswered. For Christians, 'Christ' has become a sort of surname of Jesus, without realizing that it means Messiah, King of the Jews.

At the same time, Jewish authors have paid much attention to Jesus as a Jew, who practised the Torah and lived a Jewish life. As such, the historical Jesus is fully part of Jewish history. His person and his message are part of Second Temple Judaism. But this reappraisal of the figure of Jesus does not include a recognition of his messiahship.

The conviction that Jesus was, and therefore still is, the King of the Jews is at the heart of the Messianic Jewish movement. This belief of course distinguishes them from their wider Jewish environment, the vast majority of whom do not share this conviction. It also corrects the image that many Christians have of Jesus.

In a fascinating talk, the well-known Messianic theologian Mark Kinzer showed that Jesus was not only King of the Jews until his crucifixion—as Christians would generally agree—but also a Jewish king in his resurrection, ascension and glorification, and that He will return as the Jewish King of the Jews, something which Christians often forget. His Jewish humanity and his kingship over the Jews are not the temporal clothes of the first coming of the Messiah, but his enduring characteristics. This means not only that there was a special relationship between Jesus and the Jewish people of his day—a point on which Jews and Christians agree—but that he remains uniquely related to Israel, the Jewish people, throughout history. Therefore, he is also related to the Jewish people of today. In a way that we cannot fathom, he is still connected to this people as King of the Jews, including to that portion who does not believe in him as Messiah. Consequently, the whole church which confesses him as Messiah is also connected to that people. 'Built in the conviction that Jesus still is the King of the Jews is the connection between Christianity on the one hand and Judaism and the Jews on the other.'[8]

Unity and distinction: Jewish church and Gentile church

The second major theme of the symposium was ecclesiology. Christian thinking is traditionally dominated by a universalistic ecclesiology which capitalizes on Galatians 3:27: 'In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free.' In so doing, it tends to downplay concerns about identity.

One and two: bilateral ecclesiology

Messianic authors, on the contrary, insist that the body of Christ/Messiah is composed of two basic categories: the church of the Jews (*ecclesia ex circumcisione*) and the church of the nations (*ecclesia ex gentibus*). Their main New Testament reference is Ephesians 2, which develops the principle of 'the one new man', composed of Jews and Gentiles. They argue that this unity precisely presupposes the specific identity of each of the two groups.

Behind the Greek text, we should understand the Hebrew thinking that underlies it. The concept of 'one' in this passage should be understood against the background

8 Mark Kinzer, 'Jesus, King of the Jews: A Messianic Jewish Perspective', symposium paper of 12 July 2022.

of the Hebrew *echad*, which means 'one' not in the sense of uniformity or singularity, but in the sense of a conjunction, connection or covenant of two separate entities. Viewed from this angle, the Church is not complete when one of the two components is missing.

Messianic authors often quote 1 Corinthians 7:17–19, where Paul teaches as 'a rule for all churches' that 'each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.' They argue that this rule not only summarizes the preceding section on married life (7:1–16) but applies in an analogous way to Jews and Gentiles in the church, because Paul continues, 'Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised.' According to the Messianic Jewish reading of this passage, Jewish and Gentile believers should remain in the state or life condition in which they were when they came to faith in Jesus. In a detailed exegetical study of this passage, David Rudolph concludes that 'this situation, this setting-in-life in which the call of God has reached one, is now (by extension) itself described as a "call".' Therefore, Jewish believers have a calling to live out their faith 'as Jews', i.e. in a Jewish way.[9]

Mark Kinzer has called this Jewish-Gentile variegation the 'bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel'—a label that has caught on in recent years among Messianic authors and Christian theologians sympathetic to their cause. During the symposium, this was a catch phrase that dominated the discussions of ecclesiology.

Restored catholicity

This view of the church as a bi-unity of the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus* sheds new light on the catholicity or universality of the church. In fact, this catholicity was lost with the disappearance of the Judeo-Christian communities in the first centuries of the common era. 'The Catholic Church needs Messianic Judaism to restore the fulness of catholicity', affirmed the Messianic Dominican Antoine Levy and the German dogmatist Ursula Schumacher in their respective presentations. What they said with respect to the Catholic Church applies in fact to all churches which profess the universality of the church through the Apostles' Creed.

The 'church of the Jews' is not only a theoretical, theological concept; it also has very practical implications as the Jewish expression of the faith takes form within the historical, socio-cultural and religious context of this particular people.

Messianic Christian dialogue, in several streams

Closely linked to the second theme is the conversation between the Messianic Jewish movement and Christian churches, the two branches of the church according to 'bilateral ecclesiology'. That conversation is now possible again, after so many centuries of separation between the Christian and Jewish worlds. This symposium was a fine example.

9 David Rudolph, 'Paul's "Rule in all the Churches" (1 Cor 7:17–24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation', *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5 (2010): 3.

Dialogue: intra-Christian, Jewish-Christian and intra-Jewish

This symposium was a form of intra-Christian dialogue, about the place of the Messianic Jewish movement, or rather all Jesus-believing Jews in the church at large. This is quite different from a dialogue between Jesus-believing Jews and representatives of the various streams of Judaism. To date, this intra-Jewish dialogue is not taking place. We can only hope that this will come to pass, because Messianic Jews are situated not only within the Christian tradition but also within the Jewish people.

Even an intra-Christian dialogue with Messianic Jews is not at all a simple matter for the historical churches. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed and other ecumenical Protestant churches, which are engaged in some way or another in Jewish-Christian dialogue, fear that their relations with Jews will be jeopardized by also having an official conversation with the Messianic movement. Particularly complicating the matter is the fact that Messianic Jews are no longer recognized as Jews by other forms of Judaism, because (1) they have joined 'another religion' (i.e. Christianity) and (2) they have a reputation for wanting to evangelize and 'convert' other Jews.

But churches cannot avoid this conversation, because all Christians share with Messianic Jews the same fundamental conviction that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ. This binds them together as brothers and sisters in the faith. Moreover, the growing Messianic Jewish movement can no longer be ignored, as it has been all too often until now.

The remarkable role of the Catholic Church

In this respect, it is noteworthy that the Catholic Church has indeed changed its course. In 2004, a year before he became Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger met with representatives of TJC2. On that occasion, he spoke of an 'eschatological sign', namely that more and more Jews were coming to faith in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and the nations, 'without the influence of the church'—that is, independent of any organized Christian evangelization.[10]

Benedict's predecessor Pope John Paul II had already recognized the significance of the Messianic Jewish movement. For this reason, he established a theological study group in 2000, which began its work under Cardinal Georges Cottier and continued under Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, who led it until 2020. No wonder, then, that the symposium took place in Vienna, the home city not only of Cardinal Schönborn but also of his close associate Johannes Fichtenbauer, who coordinated the organization of the symposium, and the late Father Peter Hocken who had done valuable preparatory work for many years.

As for Pope Francis, he has expressed an explicit desire to deepen the dialogue between Christian theology and the Messianic Jewish movement.

Ecumenical Protestants: hardly any attention

Such a rapprochement is almost completely lacking in ecumenical Protestant churches and in the circles of the World Council of Churches. They do not seem to

10 Johannes Fichtenbauer, one of the organizers of the symposium who was present at that meeting, reported this in his welcoming address on 11 July 2022.

see the 'sign', nor do they recognize the need for dialogue. The same observation can be made concerning the vast majority of conservative national Protestant churches. Messianic Jews are systematically excluded from theological reflections, even when the topic concerns the relationship between the church and Israel. Their views and experiences are rarely taken into consideration.

From my own experience, I know how this works in the French Protestant Federation, where I am a member of the Commission for Relations with Judaism. We are engaged in all sorts of activities of Jewish-Christian dialogue. Recently, we prepared for publication a *Compendium* of all major declarations of representative Protestant bodies on the relationship between the (Protestant) churches and Israel, in France and surrounding countries.[11] The introductory chapter explicitly states that the Messianic Jewish movement was left out of the picture, even though the *Compendium* does include the 'Willowbank Declaration' of a group of non-Jewish Evangelical theologians sympathetic to the cause of Jewish believers.[12] My insistence on including texts from representative Messianic Jewish bodies did not carry enough weight to convince the commission.

Another recent example: in 2019, the Anglican Church published the declaration *God's Unfailing Word*, its first official document on the relationship between Jews and Christians.[13] It recognizes that the Anglican Church has had a long history of Jewish evangelism. But even though there has always been a considerable presence of Hebrew Christians and Messianic Jews, representatives of the latter group were not involved in the writing process and their concerns were left out of the picture. The document honestly recognizes this fact: 'The emergence over the last fifty years of the movement known as "Messianic Judaism" raises some difficult questions for the historic churches … addressing them does not fall within the scope of this chapter.'[14]

Many individual Protestant theologians and pastors take an interest in the Messianic movement and meet with Messianic Jews on a personal level, but their actions have had no implications for the official policies of their churches. Rather, they are a minority in their own context.

The challenges of the dialogue

But let us suppose that an official dialogue takes place between Messianic and Protestant church leaders, and that the dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church also becomes more official. What, then, are the challenges?

First, creating better understanding from both sides; getting to know more about the Messianic movement and helping Jewish believers to better understand church traditions.

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11 Serge Wüthrich (ed.), *Les relations entre chrétiens et juifs. Compendium de textes protestants* (Paris and Lyon: Fédération Protestante de France and Olivétan, 2022).

12 'Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People', Lausanne Committee on World Evangelisation, 1988. See https://worldea.org/yourls/47103.

13 Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, *God's Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian–Jewish Relations* (London, Church House, 2019).

14 Faith and Order Commission, *God's Unfailing Word*, 59, in the section on 'Mission and Evangelism'.

Also, recognizing the wrongs of the past with respect to Jesus-believing Jews, which can lead to reconciliation.

And then, identifying points of theological discussion in the areas of Christology, (bilateral) ecclesiology and eschatology, so as to arrive at a proper recognition of the Jewish church.

As stated above, the idea of a two-fold church is not just a nice doctrine but has tremendous practical implications. Messianic Jews will ask the church to make room for Jewish–Gentile diversity on all levels. Messianic leaders will ask churches to allow Jewish believers to express their faith in Jesus in a Jewish way. This implies liturgical forms and texts related to Jewish tradition, celebration of biblical and Jewish festivals and commemorations, creeds and catechisms that include the place of Israel in God's plan, teaching material on Jewish history and heritage alongside Christian history and heritage, and so on. They might also ask to have distinct Messianic congregations within the larger denominational structure.

All this is necessary from a Messianic Jewish point of view, but problematic from the church's point of view, because they are used to a uniformity of liturgy, doctrine and teaching.

But is this really so difficult as it seems at first sight? The Roman Catholic Church already has a number of Hebrew-speaking parishes in Israel, where the liturgy is adapted to the Israeli context. Some Protestant churches have developed a diversity in doctrine, teaching material and liturgical formats, to make room for different streams within their midst. Why not extend this diversity to groups of Messianic Jewish believers?

The Evangelical world: different attitudes

In the Evangelical stream of Christianity, things work differently because of its specific character. It is composed of Evangelical church denominations of the 'free-church type', as well as an Evangelical or Charismatic cross-section of the membership of historic churches (Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran). So who can speak on behalf of Evangelicals? Surely, there are Evangelical Alliances, national and worldwide, overarching the two components of the stream, but their representative status is limited to those denominations and individuals who are members. Their representatives can express, by extension, the views and concerns of all Evangelicals in certain matters, but this does not necessarily engage all Evangelicals in actuality. And it would be difficult for them to ask Evangelical churches to make room in their teaching and worship practice for Messianic Jewish concerns.

There have been numerous contacts between Evangelical and Messianic Jewish pastors and theologians, but these have usually taken the form of personal meetings or incidental conferences. Dialogue on the level of leaders of Evangelical denominations and Messianic Jewish organizations, let alone on the level of Evangelical Alliances, is quite another matter and very rare indeed, to the best of my knowledge. I would be happy to learn about any such examples.

Local autonomy

Evangelicals value, almost by definition, the autonomy of the local congregation. Given this congregationalist mindset in the Evangelical world, it is understandable

that the idea of an overriding national church order is not popular, and even congregations affiliated with a national union or federation generally attach great importance to a maximum level of latitude for the local congregation to decide how things should be done at the congregational level. In practice, this often means complete independence. There are national bodies, but they serve to define common doctrinal positions, coordinate joint activities, discuss general theological matters, organize pastoral training, recognize ministries and provide special services to all congregations. They can also draw up general guidelines for preaching and dealing with ethical issues, for example. But this does not develop into substantial top-down authority over local churches. At any rate, when a local church disagrees with the national direction, it often feels free to opt out, or dissatisfied individuals feel free to start a new congregation.

The net result of this congregationalist outlook is a wide variety of practices and views, albeit within the framework of a certain number of common convictions to which all Evangelicals are attached.

The Messianic movement is also to a large extent a cross-section of existing churches, like the Evangelicals in historical churches. Moreover, Messianic congregations correspond to the free-church model and the congregationalist outlook. As a result, the movement is a mosaic of organizations and congregations, different theological views, different ways of expressing Jewishness, and a host of leadership figures, each with a distinct following. There are several unions of Messianic congregations, as well as numerous training institutes and publishers of Messianic Jewish publications. This picture is much the same as that of the Evangelical movement.

Consequently, there is the same problem of representation: who speaks on behalf of whom? Here we have a complicating factor when trying to develop a Messianic Evangelical dialogue.

Israel and Messianic-minded Evangelicals

This is not to say that nothing is happening. On the contrary, an important part of the Evangelical movement is very much in favour of Messianic Jews, and all the more so because most Messianic Jewish believers have an Evangelical theological outlook and because the worship style of Messianic congregations is a blend of Evangelical, Charismatic and traditional Jewish elements. So there is a great deal of affinity between the two movements.

Moreover, Evangelicals have a long tradition of interest in the fulfilment of prophecy, including those prophecies that concern the restoration of Israel and the second coming of Christ. The emergence of the Messianic movement corresponds to these expectations. Often, Messianic Jewish practice is viewed as exemplifying the Jewish roots of Christianity, or the original Hebrew thinking of the Bible versus the Greek thinking of the later Christian churches. These considerations have led some Gentile Evangelical believers to join a Messianic congregation. In the Diaspora, many of these congregations have a large number of Gentile members, sometimes more than half of all members.

We also see a great interest among Christians in the biblical and Jewish festivals, Hebrew songs from the Messianic movement, the Hebrew language, Jewish religious

symbolism, and the Jewish context of Jesus, the apostles and the earliest churches. This creates a strong sense of affinity with the Messianic Jewish movement.

In some places, this sense of affinity can go so far as to uncritically extol all that is Jewish, and especially all that is Messianic Jewish. Where that happens, I think we need to step on the brakes and emphasize that believers from the nations do not have to become or behave like Jews to be authentic disciples of Jesus. This idealization of all things Jewish and of Messianic Jews in particular can also be embarrassing for Jewish people themselves. Moreover, such an attitude does no good for the Messianic-Christian conversation, because it erases rather than clarifies the distinction between the church of the nations and the church of the Jews.

Little attention at the institutional level and in theological institutes

Despite all the 'Messianic enthusiasm' in Evangelical circles, we find that at the same time, national church bodies, theological institutions and many pastors are rather indifferent towards the Messianic Jewish movement. This is either because they think in terms of the paradigm of the replacement doctrine, in which there is no place for a special way for the Jewish people, or because they view the interest of Christians in the Jewish people and their attitudes towards the state of Israel as a potentially divisive factor, causing them to avoid the issue so as to prevent turmoil. Whatever the motivation, the result of this lack of interest in Israel and/or the Messianic Jewish movement is that there is no attempt to understand their concerns, let alone engage in serious dialogue.

Land and end times

The third major theme of the symposium was eschatology. Messianic Jews, along with many Christians who live in the joyful expectation that Jesus the Messiah will come again soon, see the return of many Jews to the land of Israel and the growing presence of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem as eschatological signs pointing to the *parousia* of Christ, his glorious appearance as King of Israel and the world. This concrete, historic hope is a source of irritation to those churches in which the cry of 'maranatha' (O Lord, come!) has been almost or completely silenced.

The papers and discussions in this part of the symposium focused on the connection between Jesus' return and the people and land of Israel. Several speakers emphasized the biblical promise that the Messiah will appear on the Mount of Olives. Speaking to 'Jerusalem', i.e. the spiritual leaders of Israel of his day, Jesus promised that 'Jerusalem' would see him 'again', one day, when He will be welcomed by 'Jerusalem' as the One who comes in the name of the Lord (Mt 23:27ff; Lk 13:33ff). 'That clearly refers to the leaders of the then living Jewish people', explained Mark Kinzer, adding that 'such a welcome presupposes a Jewish presence in the land.'[15]

Such considerations naturally lead to the question of how the promises about the land relate to the contemporary state of Israel. In academic theological circles, this question is usually avoided, either because the land promises are spiritualized and applied to the universal church, in the framework of some kind of replacement doctrine, or because they are considered a tricky subject that only sows discord. On

15 Mark Kinzer, 'Jerusalem and the Return of Jesus', symposium message of 13 July 2022.

the other hand, there is the parallel circuit of pro-Israel Christians and organizations, also referred to as 'Christian Zionists', in which Evangelical believers actively support the Jewish return to the land and the development of a Jewish national existence in that land.

Theologians who dismiss the land promises as no longer applicable to the Jewish people, and who are critical of the so-called Israel-minded Christians, can get away with that as long as they argue as Gentile Christians among themselves. But as soon as Messianic Jews join the discussion, things change, because for them, the land of Israel is not a matter of 'interest in prophecy' or a 'hobby horse', but is intrinsically linked to the existence and survival of the nation to which they themselves belong. They strongly reject replacement theology. They generally see the return of Jews to the land from the perspective of the land promises in the Bible, even though they usually take a nuanced view of the political reality of the state of Israel and of the policies of certain politicians. They are also keen to show solidarity with their Arab brothers and sisters in the faith. This is precisely why it is so interesting to include Messianic Jews in the conversation about, for example, the attitude of Christians towards the state of Israel.

For the Messianic Jewish movement, a safe and independent Jewish existence in Israel is of existential importance. Anyone who enters into dialogue with them has to acknowledge this fact. During the symposium, not much was said about the political issues in Israel and the Middle East. Rather, discussions centred on the eschatological meaning of the Jewish return. Several papers brought to light how the development of modern Zionism and the rise of the Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jewish movement took place simultaneously in history, from the 19th century onwards. These two movements combined have led to the situation today, where there is an independent Jewish presence in the land (Zionism), which includes a Jesus-believing presence (Messianic Jews). In this situation, the promised return of Jesus to Jerusalem, to be welcomed by the leaders of the Jewish people, has become conceivable and realistic.

Mission missing

For all the good that the symposium offered, I did miss one thing. The conversation was not extended to the field of missiology, even though it has significant impact on how Christians think about mission. It affects not only views of Jewish evangelization—which is very sensitive in both Christian and Jewish circles—but also the mission of the people of Israel, the joint mission of Jews and Christians, and the special mission, perhaps, of Jesus-believing Jews. But it could be that the organizers have saved discussions of missiology for another time. I hope with all my heart that there will be a next time soon.

The contents of the symposium are too rich to summarize in this short article. I hope that the lectures and summaries of the discussions will be published soon. This will greatly help theologians, church leaders and Messianic leaders.

Appendix: Papers presented at the symposium

General introductions

Jan-Heiner Tück, Professor of Dogmatics, Theological Faculty, University of Vienna: 'Introduction to the Theme and Subthemes of the Symposium'

Richard Harvey, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies, All Nations Christian College, UK: 'Introducing the Messianic-Jewish Reality'

David Neuhaus, SJ, Former Patriarchal Vicar of Hebrew-Speaking Catholics in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem: 'Who Are the Hebrew Catholics Today?'

Christian Rutishauser SJ, Delegate for Schools and Universities of the Central European Province of the Jesuit Order, Rome: 'The Place of Encounter with Jews Believing in Jesus in the History of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue'

Hanna Rucks, Minister in the Protestant Reformed Church, Basel: 'The Place of Encounter with Messianic Jews in the History of Jewish-Protestant Dialogue'

Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Professor of Old Testament, Theological Faculty, University of Vienna: 'Post-Supersessionist Theology as a Challenge for Biblical Hermeneutics'

R. Kendall Soulen, Professor of Systematic Theology, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, USA: 'Post-Supersessionist Theology: *Ekklesia ex circumcisione* and *ex gentibus*'

Christology: The Jewish Jesus

Michael Theobald, University of Tübingen, Germany: 'Jesus, Messiah from Israel and Messiah for Israel'; response by Henk Bakker, Baptist Seminary, Free University Amsterdam

Helmut Hoping, Professor of Dogmatics and Liturgical Studies, University Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany: 'The Jewish Jesus and Its Implications for Systematic Christology'; response by Jonathan Kaplan, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism, University of Texas at Austin

Mark Kinzer, Moderator of Yachad BeYeshua, Messianic Jewish rabbi in Ann Arbor, Michigan: 'Jesus, King of the Jews: A Messianic Jewish Perspective'; response by Bernard Mallmann, Postdoctoral Assistant, Theological Faculty, University of Vienna

Bilateral ecclesiology

Thomas Schumacher, Professor of New Testament, University of Fribourg, Switzerland: 'Important Differentiation between Christians with Jewish and Non-Jewish Background in NT Ecclesiology? Annotations on the *ekklesia ex circumcisione* and the *ekklesia ex gentibus*'; response by Markus Tiwald, Professor of New Testament, Theological Faculty, University of Vienna

Etienne Vetö SJ, Director of Jewish Studies, Cardinal Bea Institute, Rome: 'Partings of the Ways'; response by Mariusz Rosik, Professor of New Testament, Pontifical Theological Faculty, Wroclaw, Poland

Ursula Schumacher, Professor of Catholic Theology and Religious Education, Pädagogische Hochschule, Karlsruhe: 'Post-Supersessionism and Messianic Judaism as a Challenge and Enrichment of the Understanding of the Church: Scope for Thought, Potential for Development and Need for Revision in Ecclesiology'

Antoine Levy OP, Professor, University of Helsinki and University of Eastern Finland: 'The Restoration of the *ecclesia ex circumcisione*'

The land and people of Israel, Jesus, and eschatology

Mark Kinzer: 'Jerusalem and the Return of Jesus'; response by Piotr Oktaba, Superior of the Institute of Religious Studies of St Thomas Aquinas, Kiev

Gavin D'Costa, Professor of Catholic Theology, University of Bristol: 'Catholic Minimalist Zionism'; response by Marianne Moyaert, Professor of Comparative Theology and Interreligious Dialogue, Free University of Amsterdam

Jan-Heiner Tück: 'Wiederkehr des Chiliasmus: Soll Augustins ekklesiologische Domestizierung des Millenarismus zurückgenommen werden?' (Return of Chiliasm: Should Augustine's Dcclesiological Domestication of Millennialism be Disavowed?); response by Ulrich Laepple, Assistant to the Chair of New Testament, Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal

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The Significance of the Reformation for the Global Church Today

James R. Edwards

We are all indebted to the 16th-century Reformation for its recovery of the biblical norms of faith and church. However, this message (delivered at a global conference last October) argues that today's church must fully recover the biblical norms of mission and evangelism to complete the Reformation vision of the church.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was the most profound reform in the history of Christianity, and it holds the potential to edify, advance and unify the global church of the 21st century.

I am aware how contrary this declaration may sound. It was the Reformation, after all, that cleaved Christendom into two hostile halves. Did not those two halves result in divisions and destruction in Europe, and then, as a means of limiting further divisions and destruction, did not those same halves separate peoples throughout Europe according to confessional traditions that still exist today? Were not the catastrophic wars of the 20th century waged among nations that are heirs of the Reformation? This unfortunate history has weakened the body of Christ and compromised the credibility of its witness to the gospel throughout the world.

All this is true, and more could be said. Nevertheless, by God's grace, in the 20th century salutary effects of the Reformation began to supersede or at least mitigate its negative effects. The yeast of the Reformation has risen most evidently among Protestants, but it is also evident to a lesser extent within Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The face of Christianity has been changed by other factors as well. In the 20th century, the three branches of Christianity stopped turning their backs on one another and began facing one another; they began talking with one another rather than against one another; and most significantly, they began working with one another rather than apart from and against one another—in theological education, ecumenical worship and programs of social outreach. A sterling example of this collaboration is the Vienna Christological Formula of 1976, which for the first time in history has succeeded in uniting all three branches of Christianity—Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant—in one Christological creed.

Furthermore, the phenomenal success of missions in the 20th century has borne witness to the world and to the church itself that the essence of the gospel that all Christians share in common outweighs the sectarian dogmas that divide Christians. Finally, the pervasiveness of secularism, particularly in the West, has broken down historic divides within Christianity. All these factors contribute to a new global

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landscape in which Christianity is ceasing to be determined by its historical denominations and confessions. The foremost issue today is more fundamental: namely, what it means to be Christian in an increasingly diverse and secular world.

The original Reformation

What made the Reformation such a profound reform within European Christianity 500 years ago, and what promise does this reform hold for edifying, advancing and unifying the global church of the 21st century? As we shall see, the Reformation did not address itself to the unconverted but to the *culturally* converted, in a setting in which both gospel and church were subordinated to the Catholic Church's struggles for power and prominence in medieval Europe. The Reformation was an ecclesiastical reform of those parts of Europe that were already indoctrinated in and indebted to Roman Catholicism.

European culture has changed greatly in the last five centuries, separating Europeans and their descendants from the wellsprings of the Reformation. The vast majority of Christians who live outside Europe are even farther removed from the Reformation's influence. Given these changing realities, what aspects of the Reformation are still salutary for the church of the 21st century, which is increasingly removed in time, geography and culture from 16th-century Europe? What elements of the Reformation are essential to recover, embrace and incorporate in the life and mission of the global church today?

The chief contribution of the Reformation was its reform of *fides* and *ecclesia,* faith and church. *Fides* concerns the nature of saving faith, and *ecclesia* concerns the form and function of the community of believers who profess that faith. The Reformers subjected *fides* and *ecclesia* to the test of four '*solas*' that they believed held the potential to purify and propagate the faith: *sola Scriptura, solus Christus, sola fide* and *sola gratia.* These *solas* became the four points of the Reformation compass that reoriented and reformed the medieval Catholic church. The first *sola—sola Scriptura*—was true north on the compass that determined the orientation of the other three *solas. Sola Scriptura* returned the Reformers *ad fontes*—to the *source* of the Christian faith in Holy Scripture. In Scripture, the Reformers recovered and restored the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, faith in Christ alone, and salvation by God's grace alone.

Sola scriptura attests that the Old and New Testaments are the unique and authoritative witness to God's saving revelation in Jesus Christ. As such, they are the primary and essential source of the church's proclamation. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy have historically located ecclesial authority in Scripture *and* tradition. The Reformers rejected this pairing, however, for they rightly understood that whenever Scripture is interpreted by tradition, it is inevitably superseded by tradition. For the Reformers, the sole and necessary interpreter of Holy Scripture is not tradition but the Holy Spirit, who witnesses to and through the gathered church where the gospel is rightly proclaimed and where the sacraments are rightly practiced.

Solus Christus attests to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, as the sole mediator of salvation, whose life, death and resurrection are the once-for-all means by which God has reconciled sinful humanity to himself. 'There is one mediator

between God and humanity, the human being Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for *all*' (1 Tim 2:5). 'There is salvation in none other, nor is there another name under heaven that is given to humanity by which one can be saved' (Acts 4:10). For Martin Luther, *solus Christus* was not simply a doctrine of Scripture, not even the central doctrine of Scripture, but the one and only lens through which the entire Bible must be read if God's saving revelation is to be properly understood, taught and proclaimed.

The third compass point is *sola fide,* 'by faith alone'. This quintessential Reformation hallmark asserts that salvation cannot be merited or earned by human works, no matter how noble and well-intended, but must be *received* solely by faith in Jesus Christ's once-for-all self-sacrifice on the cross. Faith in Christ's atonement for sinful humanity consists of three facets: *belief* in the claims of the gospel, *trust* in the person of Christ, and *commitment* to a life of witness. Such faith cannot be compromised or superseded by ecclesiastical assemblies, by popes or prelates, or by confessions or customs.

Fourth and finally, *sola gratia,* 'by grace alone', meant for the Reformers, and means for Christians of all times, that salvation is not deserved, nor can it be obtained by human abilities, powers and privileges, or determined by gender, race, ethnicity, wealth or nationalism. 'While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son' (Rom 5:10). *Sola gratia* attests to the redeeming grace of God that is promised to and received by sinful and unworthy humans who turn to God in humble and grateful faith.

These four *solas* constitute the enduring heart of the Reformation. They continue today to safeguard the purity of the Christian faith and the faithful mission of the Christian church. Two observations must be remembered in conjunction with them, however. The first is a negative one. The Reformation depended on alliances that often compromised the credibility of the gospel in subsequent centuries. Most prominent among these was the close alignment of the Reformation with the political forces of the late medieval world. Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony, shielded Martin Luther from papal reprisals that would have killed Luther and either diminished or terminated the Reformation. Ulrich Zwingli was killed on the field of battle while defending Swiss cantons which affirmed the Reformation against Roman Catholic cantons that opposed it. John Calvin sought political refuge in Geneva, Switzerland, from persecutions in France that killed hundreds of Protestants. These socio-political alliances were essential to the survival and success of the Reformation in the 16th century.

The perpetuation of such alliances in subsequent centuries, however, often compromised the witness of the church and divided Christians from Christians, ethnicities from ethnicities, nations from nations. The Thirty Years War and the Hundred Years War in Europe were examples of such divisions, as were World Wars I and II. These wars were waged by nations that are heirs of the Reformation. The alignment of church and state in the current war between Russia and Ukraine, with both countries claiming the sanction of the same Orthodox faith for their nationalistic goals, is the latest example of such alliances. Chapters 17 and 18 of the book of Revelation warn against such compromises of the gospel in the strongest possible terms. The employment of such alliances for ends other than those of the

gospel is a detriment and deterrent to the credibility of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the modern world.

A second observation about the Reformation of the 16th century concerns an omission rather than an offence. As noted earlier, the Reformation was not a plenary reformation of the church, but a partial reformation of those elements of medieval Catholicism that compromised scriptural norms so as to recover the purity of faith and the sanctity of the church. In this respect, the Reformation was a 'first-responder' reform that addressed problems critical to the survival of the Christian faith, but which left less urgent though still important needs either unaddressed or unresolved. Two needs in this latter category are the biblical mandates of mission and evangelism.

It may be surprising to some that the Reformation made virtually no contribution to world mission and evangelism. It did not inspire or launch missions to unreached parts of the world, such as Africa, South America or Asia; nor did the Reformation inspire witness to parts of the world dominated by non-Christian religions, including the Islamic world, which was hammering on the doors of Saxony precisely as Martin Luther was hammering his Ninety-Five Theses on the church door in Wittenberg. The sole attempt to advance the Reformation beyond the compass of Catholic Europe was Philip Melanchthon's translation of the Augsburg Confession into Greek, in hopes of co-opting Eastern Orthodoxy in the German Reform.[1]

The Reformation of the 16th century was thus an *unfinished* reformation, as are perhaps all reforms of the church. It remains for the church of the 21st century to commit itself to these unaddressed and unfinished reforms—to mission, evangelism and witness to the gospel throughout the world.

The reformation that is needed today

Although the 16th-century Reformation did not address mission, evangelism and global witness to the faith, it bequeathed the means by which today's church can address these issues. That means is *ad fontes*—a return to Scripture as the root and source of faith. When we look at the New Testament through the template of mission and evangelism rather than through the template of *fides* and *ecclesia*, we see three things: (1) an outline of the early church's *proclamation* of the faith; (2) examples of its *creeds* of faith; and (3) a clarion witness to mission and evangelism.

With regard to the first point, the New Testament reveals a three-point presentation of the gospel that scholars refer to as the *kerygma,* which is the Greek word for *proclamation*:

1. The promises of God in the Old Testament have been fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah.
2. The Messiah is Jesus Christ,
   - who did good and mighty works by the power of God,
   - who was crucified according to the will of God,
   - who was resurrected from the dead by God and exalted to heaven as 'Lord', and

1 On this effort by Melanchthon, see Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor Books, 1950), 99.

- who will return again in glory to judge and restore all things.

3. Therefore, let all who hear repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

The *kerygma* is the skeletal form of a faithful presentation of the gospel. The *kerygma* underlies nearly all the speeches in the book of Acts, and it forms the foundation of the New Testament epistles and gospels.

In addition to the proclamation of the gospel in the *kerygma,* the New Testament contains early creeds of gospel teaching. These creedal compositions, which preserve memorable doctrinal summaries that are often in verse form, are typical of the epistles of the apostle Paul (e.g. Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20), and especially the Pastoral Epistles of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus.

Third and finally, mission is essential to the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is the story of *missio Dei*—the God who sends his Son into the world, and the Son who sends his disciples throughout the world. Mission and evangelism concern the proclamation, planting and expansion of the gospel throughout the world. According to Mark 3:14–15, Jesus' call of the 12 apostles entails three responsibilities: to be *with* him, to be *sent* to proclaim the gospel, and to be *empowered* with his authority. Jesus reminds the disciples that 'the harvest is great, but the laborers are few' (Mt 9:37). The need for evangelism and mission is pressing, and then—as now—there are fewer workers than needed. Jesus desires that the Kingdom of God may be proclaimed in and to 'all the world' (Mt 24:14). In his final mandate—the Great Commission—Jesus tells the Twelve to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and to teach them to keep all his commandments (Mt 28:19–20).

Kerygma, creed and mission are essential to the New Testament witness to the gospel. There is an important difference, however, between *kerygma* and creed, on one hand, and mission and evangelism on the other. The New Testament is *prescriptive* with regard to the first two; that is, *kerygma* and creeds are carefully defined and their contents are prescribed. With regard to mission and evangelism, however, the New Testament is *descriptive* of many different means by which *kerygma* and creed are conveyed. The New Testament prescribes no program, blueprint, design, plan, system or strategy by which the church must disseminate the gospel in mission and evangelism.

Surprisingly, in fact, Jesus *inhibits* his disciples in the fulfilment of mission and evangelism. He instructs them what *not* to take. They must leave behind money, cloaks and extra clothing—the very things that would seem essential for such undertakings. Jesus summons his disciples for mission, and then he imposes a deterrent on their fulfilment of it. What purpose does this programmatic deficit serve in mission—a deficit that every preacher, evangelist, missionary and servant of Christ experiences in his or her call to bear witness to the gospel? The purpose, surely, is not difficult to discern, although it is often difficult to accept: Jesus wills his disciples to rely on his presence and purpose rather than on their own plans. He wills his disciples to depend on his power rather than on their resources. The divine deficit imposed on the servants of Christ is a severe mercy, for it reminds believers that Christ is not only the goal of mission but equally the *means* by which mission is fulfilled. 'I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling', said the apostle Paul. 'For my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration

of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in human wisdom but in the power of God' (1 Cor. 2:3–5).

It is instructive to recall that only in the apocryphal gospels—those gospels that were composed after the writing of the New Testament, and usually for heterodox or heretical purposes—do we find missionary programs prescribed. One example of such occurs in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas where, following the ascension of Jesus, the disciples gather to 'divide the regions of the world, that each one might go to the region which falls to his lot, and to the nation to which the Lord sends him' (Acts Thom. 1).

The New Testament, by contrast, testifies that mission and evangelism are scripted in radical *dependence* on Jesus.

- Jesus sends the apostles into mission without an itinerary or support apparatus (Mt 10:1, 7–11; 14; Mk 6:6–13; Lk 9:1–6; 10:1–12).
- The Holy Spirit scatters the church for mission in Samaria following the death of Stephen in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1–25).
- An angel of the Lord sends the deacon Philip to witness to an Ethiopian eunuch in a chance encounter (Acts 8:26–40).
- God summons the apostle Peter by a heavenly vision to proclaim the gospel to an 'unclean' Roman gentile in Caesarea (Acts 9:43–11:18).
- The Holy Spirit thwarts Paul's mission to Bithynia and Mysia in order to extend the gospel to Europe (Acts 16:6–10).
- God fulfils his promise for Paul to witness in Rome (Acts 9:15; 19:21; 23:11; 27:24) by delivering Paul to Rome as a prisoner in chains.
- The apostle Paul fervently desired to take the gospel to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28), but there is no evidence that he did so.

These abnormalities, indeed aberrations, are the DNA of biblical mission. None of the above missions is planned by the church. None is the result of a mission agenda. Each is orchestrated by the hand of the Holy Spirit, involving—from a human perspective—chance, surprise, mistake, hardship, persecution, even offence. The Holy Spirit extends the gospel by means and for ends that believers do not plan, by means and for ends that they often do not understand and that may even appear erroneous. It is precisely by such means, however, that the church fulfils the Great Commission!

The charge to bring the gospel to all nations is a divine commission. There is no incentive for world evangelism in the Old Testament. Apart from the enigmatic Servant of the Lord (Isa 40–66) and the prophet Jonah, the Old Testament offers neither instruction nor evidence for mission beyond the scope of Israel. In the New Testament, there is, of course, a precedent for world mission in the Great Commission of Jesus, in the apostles Paul and Peter, and in certain missionaries. But judging from the report of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, there was considerable resistance within the church as a whole to the expansion of the gospel beyond the scope of Israel.

Following the New Testament era, throughout the three often brutal centuries during which the early church bore witness within the Roman Empire, we know of only two factors that played significant roles in the conversion of the Empire. One was the institution of the church itself, which met weekly on Sundays to celebrate the

resurrection of Jesus, and which exemplified the power of the gospel to create a redeemed community among humanity; the other was martyrdom, the readiness of early believers to forsake their lives, when necessary, in testimony to their faith. The combined evidence of the Old and New Testaments and the early Christian centuries thus leads to one and the same conclusion: we are given no strategic plan or program by which early Christians transformed the Roman Empire.

This dearth of information is regrettable from our contemporary perspective, but it is not a failure of the early church; indeed, even today there are precious few records of the spread of the gospel around the world. In this respect, the book of Acts is a very unique document in the history of the church. There is a reason, however, for this dearth of documentation of 'the greatest story ever told', for the spread of the gospel is primarily not a human story. It is a *divine* story. It incorporates humans, of course, for the gospel is ineluctably incarnational, but the plot of the story is not planned by humans, nor is it always understood by them, and it is sometimes opposed by them. The Great Commission is a divine commission that can be embraced and fulfilled only by divine means: by the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, by human prayer, by faithful obedience and by the conviction that whenever and wherever the name of Jesus is faithfully proclaimed and witnessed to, the Holy Spirit fulfils his saving purposes in the world.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, the pilgrim way of the church is still guided by the four points of the Reformation compass: Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone and grace alone. The church of our day remains indebted to the Reformation—as will the church of the future—for its contribution in recovering and restoring the *kerygma* and creed of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Reformation of the 16th century was an unfinished Reformation, however. Hebrews 11:39 preserves an important declaration in this regard, namely that 'apart from us their work cannot be perfected.' Apart from the church of the 21st century, the Reformation of the 16th century cannot be completed or perfected. The Reformers in Wittenberg and Geneva are dependent on the church in Jakarta and Nairobi and Buenos Aires and Shanghai and Tehran to complete their work. The four *solas* that the Reformers bequeathed to us are the means by which we now hear and respond to the Great Commission, the biblical imperative to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. The global reformation that we celebrate and envision, and to which we now commit ourselves, is thus a fuller reformation, one even more attentive and faithful to the four *solas* than was the Reformation of the 16th century. For the recovery of *fides* and *ecclesia,* of *kerygma* and catechesis, is no longer confined to Europe but is addressed to the world.

We cannot predict the future of this new Reformation. We know only that when the gospel is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit bears witness and brings fruit in ways that 'eye has not seen and ear has not heard' (Isa 64:4; 1 Cor 2:9). The mission before us is the same mission that concludes the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts: 'to proclaim the Kingdom of God and teach all things about Jesus Christ with boldness and unhindered' (Acts 28:31).

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A History of Biblical Textual Criticism

Andrew Messmer

Textual criticism of the Bible is not a new science. It has been used by Jews and Christians for over 2,000 years, as a natural outworking of their belief in divine inspiration: if God has inspired a text to teach us about salvation, then we should preserve it as carefully as possible and restore it whenever necessary. This article surveys the history of biblical textual criticism, primarily in the Patristic and Modern periods. The Patristic period contains instructive examples of early textual criticism in practice, whereas modern textual criticism has relied heavily on published editions of both Testaments.

The Patristic period (2nd–5th century)[1]

The Patristic period demonstrates a widespread awareness of textual variants in biblical manuscripts, and of thoughtful and balanced attempts to adjudicate between them. In this section, we will look at Greco-Roman and Jewish precedents to Christian textual criticism, evidence of its widespread use amongst Patristic authors, and some examples that illustrate their method.

Precedents for Christian textual criticism

Christians did not invent textual criticism; they inherited it from their Greco-Roman and Jewish predecessors. Although in some sense Aristotle (4th century BC) may have been the first to practice some form of textual criticism, the science was founded in Alexandria by the city's first librarian, Zenodotus (early 3rd century BC), and one of his successors, Aristarchus (mid-2nd century BC), arguably the greatest textual scholar of antiquity. They were concerned primarily with preserving important Greek works, such as those written by Homer and Plato. As they began collecting manuscripts, they noticed that occasionally the manuscripts did not agree in their readings, and thus they developed textual signs to note these differences: the obelus (—) for spurious readings, the diplé (>) for notable language, the dotted diplé (>·) for disagreements with a previous textual critic's decisions, the asterisk (※) for

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1 For most of this section, see Amy Donaldson, *Explicit References to New Testament Variant Readings among Greek and Latin Church Fathers*, 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2009).

verses incorrectly repeated elsewhere, the stigmé (·) for possibly spurious readings, and the antisigma (Ↄ) for incorrect order of lines.[2] Although the Alexandrian scholars noted textual variants, offered commentary as to which variant they thought most likely, and interacted with the conclusions of others, they did not delete variants; instead, they let the readers come to their own conclusions.[3]

The beginnings of textual criticism amongst Jews are not as well known, but the practice goes back at least to the closing centuries before Christ. For example, the scribes at Qumran developed a system of signs similar to that in Alexandria, employing dots, crossed-out words, and parentheses to highlight textual anomalies, and occasionally they erased words (cf. 1QIsa[a]).[4] Similarly, although the rabbinic literature is notoriously difficult to date, it appears that other Jewish scribes from the early centuries of the current era strove to make precise copies of the biblical manuscripts, checked their work carefully and noted textual anomalies.[5] Around the 1st century AD, rabbinic Judaism standardized the Hebrew text, and later Masoretic scribes developed a highly sophisticated system for preserving it. This has become the basic text that has been used ever since by Jews and Christians alike.[6] Variants were essentially done away with at this stage, and thus textual criticism essentially ended until the 20th century with the discoveries of biblical manuscripts at Qumran in the Judean desert.[7]

Evidence of widespread use amongst Christians

During the Patristic period, textual criticism was not restricted to a few scholars who lived and worked in relative obscurity away from the life of the church, but was a common practice amongst exegetes, translators, pastors and laymen.[8] In fact, virtually every well-known author writing in Greek or Latin discussed textual variants; Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, Diodore of Tarsus, Epiphanius, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Isidore of Pelusium, Socrates, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Tertullian, Marius Victorinus, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Jerome and Augustine are just some of the names worth

2 As we will see later, a simplified version of this system was used by Origen in his work, and subsequently by other Christian textual critics.

3 A rare exception is Zenodotus, who deleted the variants that he deemed incorrect.

4 Cf. Emanuel Tov, 'Correction Procedures in the Texts from the Judean Desert', in Donald Parry and Eugene Ulrich (eds.), *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 232–63. Although this system is reminiscent of the one in Alexandria, any direct or indirect connection is still uncertain.

5 Cf. *Let. Ar.* 32; Josephus, *Apion* 1:42; *m.* Meg. 2:2; MoedQa. 3:4; Sota 5:5; *ARN* 34; *b.* Ketuv. 106a.

6 For more information, cf. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 24ff.

7 As opposed to their Alexandrian counterparts, the proto-Masoretic and Masoretic scribes saw variants negatively and thus did not wish to preserve them. However, there is also evidence that they did not change the text but, rather, found ways to deal with the anomalies; cf. *b.* Ned. 37b.

8 For example, Origen and Augustine were exegetes, Jerome was a translator, Irenaeus and Augustine were pastors, and Origen and Tertullian were laymen. John Chrysostom even discussed textual variants during his sermons, thereby bringing textual criticism into the very heart of church life.

mentioning.[9] Thanks to studies done in the last 50 years or so, we have nearly 200 documented examples where Patristic scholars discussed and/or attempted to resolve textual variants in the Bible.[10] They did not always agree on the solution, but they were deeply involved in the process and shared similar criteria for adjudicating between variants, as discussed below.[11]

Examples of textual criticism

Space limitations prohibit an extended discussion of how textual variants were discussed and resolved in the Patristic era. I will comment on the work of four important authors: Irenaeus, Origen, Ambrosiaster, and Jerome.

Irenaeus was arguably the most important theologian of the 2nd century, and his example of textual criticism is significant for two reasons. First, it is the oldest known example (mid- to late 2nd century).[12] Second, he provides his criteria for adjudicating between the variants. In the following example, Irenaeus is discussing Revelation 13:18 and the proper number for the beast: some manuscripts read 666, while others read 616. He writes:

> Such, then, being the state of the case, and this number being found in all the most approved and ancient copies [of the Apocalypse], and those men who saw John face to face bearing their testimony [to it]; while reason also leads us to conclude that the number of the name of the beast, [if reckoned] according to the Greek mode of calculation by the [value of] the letters contained in it, will amount to six hundred and sixty and six; that is, the number of tens shall be equal to that of the hundreds, and the number of hundreds equal to that of the units (for that number which [expresses] the digit six being adhered to throughout, indicates the recapitulations of that apostasy, taken in its full extent, which occurred at the beginning, during the intermediate periods, and which shall take place at the end),—I do not know how it is that some have erred following the ordinary mode of speech, and have vitiated the middle number in the name,

9 Following are some illustrative examples: Irenaeus, *AH* 5.30.1; Origen (Rufinus?), *Let. Afr*., 1–5; *Comm. Ps*. 77; *Comm. Matt*. 15.14; *Comm. Ser. Matt*. 134; *Comm. John* 6.40–41; *Comm. Rom*. 10.43.2; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Comm. Ps*. 77; *Dem. Ev*. 10.4.13; *Quaest. Marin*. 1.1–2; 2.7; *Supp. Quaest. Marin*. 4; Didymus the Blind, *Fr. 1 Cor*. 15:51 (cf. Jerome, *Ep*. 119); Diodore of Tarsus, *Comm. Ps*. 8:6b–7; Epiphanius, *Pan*. 1.8.1–4; *Anc*. 31.4–5; *Ep. Eus*. 238v–239r; Basil of Caesarea, *Eun*. 2.19; John Chrysostom, *Hom. John* 17; Isidore of Pelusium, *Ep*. 1576; Socrates, *HE* 7.32; Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Comm. Eph*. 5:14; Tertullian, *Con. Mar*. 5.13ff;. Marius Victorinus, *Comm. Gal*. 2:5; Hilary of Poitiers, *Trin*. 10.41; Ambrose, *Fid*. 5.16.193; Ambrosiaster, *Comm. Rom*. 5:14; *Comm. Gal*. 2:5; Jerome, *Hom*. 11 (on Ps 77; cf. *Comm. Matt*. 13:35); *Comm. Matt*. 27:9-10; *Comm. Gal*. 2:1–5; *Comm. Eph*. 5:14; *Ep*. 119; 120.3; *Helv*. 8, 16; Augustine, *Adult. conj*. 1.10; *Cons*. 3.29, 71; *Pecc. merit*. 1.13 (cf. *Ep*. 157.19); *Trin*. 1.13; *Ep*. 28; 40; 67; 71; 82; 112; *Chr. Doct*. 2:12; *City of God* 18:43; 15:14; *Faustus* 11.2.

10 Bruce Metzger published several works on the topic from the 1960s through the 1980s, but the best and most complete work is Donaldson, *Explicit References*. Donaldson offers some 191 examples (26 of which are debatable); technically, her study includes authors from the 2nd–12th centuries, but by her own admission most of her examples come from the 5th century and earlier (p. 35 n. 70).

11 This is not to imply that their shared methodology was intentional. Rather, when we compare their methodologies with each other, they overlap considerably, whatever the cause of that similarity may have been.

12 Many textual critics now argue that many variants, including the most interesting and important ones, were introduced in the 2nd century, when untrained people were the primary copyists.

> deducting the amount of fifty from it, so that instead of six decads they will have it that there is but one. [I am inclined to think that this occurred through the fault of the copyists, as is wont to happen, since numbers also are expressed by letters; so that the Greek letter which expresses the number sixty was easily expanded into the letter Iota of the Greeks.][13] (*Against Heresies* 5.30.1; *ANF* 1:558–59)

From this quotation, we can see that Irenaeus had four criteria: (1) He valued the older ('ancient') manuscripts over the newer ones. (2) He valued the better ('approved') manuscripts over the inferior ones. (3) He valued the oral testimony of John's followers. (4) He valued the reading that cohered with other parts of Scripture ('reason also leads us to conclude'). In addition, he offered a plausible explanation as to how the rejected reading could have arisen (copyists confused similar Greek letters). In summary, to use the language of modern textual critics, Irenaeus employed internal and external evidence in his attempt to adjudicate between the variants, applying the same basic criteria that biblical textual critics have used ever since.[14]

Origen is the most important textual critic during the Patristic era. His work on the Old Testament was more extensive than on the New Testament, but both are of paramount importance. His comments relating to textual criticism are numerous and at times quite extensive, and thus only a few examples can be given here.

Regarding his work on the Old Testament text, Origen's primary contribution was his *Hexapla*, the greatest achievement of Old Testament textual scholarship in all antiquity.[15] This work was a compilation of six different versions of the Old Testament, arranged in parallel columns. The order was as follows: Hebrew, Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, Aquila, Symmachus, Origen's revision of Alexandrian/Ptolemaic text, Theodotion.[16] This monumental work originally spanned 50 volumes containing an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 pages of text. Unfortunately, it was destroyed in the 7th century AD, and only small portions of it remain.[17]

Origen's method of marking variants in the *Hexapla* should also be noted. He was trained in Alexandria before moving to Caesarea where he finished the work, and he employed similar textual signs as the Alexandrian librarians to note the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions, of which he says he found

13 The concluding phrase is considered spurious by some modern critics and is therefore placed in brackets. Irenaeus is referring to the fact that the Greeks used letters instead of numbers to mark their calculations; the letter that represented 10 was I, and the letter that represented 60 was Ξ. He suggests that a scribe misread Ξ for I.

14 These criteria were not original to Irenaeus; they had previously been employed by non-Christian textual critics.

15 Origen briefly summarizes his work on the *Hexapla* in *Let. Afr.* (esp. §1–4) and *Comm. Matt.* 15.14.

16 There are two explanations for the order. First, it could be based on the order of translations and revisions: Aquila translated from the Hebrew, Symmachus revised Aquila, and Theodotion revised the LXX. Second, it could be in descending order based on literalness with respect to the Hebrew. This appears to be the case in most instances, but Theodotion's translation seems to be more literal than that of Symmachus.

17 However, the fifth column of Origen's *Hexapla* was translated in the early 7th century AD by Bishop Paul of Tella, in what is called the *Syro-Hexapla*. Part of this translation has survived in the 9th-century Codex Ambrosianus Syrohexaplaris. Currently much scholarly work is being done to recover Origen's *Hexapla*, with many volumes already published.

'thousands'. When he encountered a variant, his method was as follows: when a reading was found in the Hebrew but absent in a Greek copy, 'I marked, for the sake of distinction, with the sign the Greeks call an obelisk [—], as on the other hand I marked with an asterisk [※] those passages in our copies which are not found in the Hebrew' (*Let. Afr.* 4; *ANF* 4:387).[18] Notably (and this was quite standard for Patristic scholars), he did not feel free to delete the variant that he saw as inferior, but rather marked the variants and let the readers decide for themselves.[19]

Regarding Origen's work on the New Testament text, his work was broad and his treatment of textual variants varies greatly. At times, he merely notes a variant reading (e.g. *Comm. Matt.* 13.19); at other times, he offers separate explanations of each variant (e.g. *Comm. John* 1.35.40); and sometimes, he offers explanations of variants diametrically opposed to one another (e.g. *Comm. Rom.* 5.1.37)! In his commentary on Matthew, he voices his frustration with some of the variants found in various manuscripts: 'Now it is clear that many differences in the copies have come about either from the lazy indifference of certain scribes, or the misguided daring of some, <or from those neglectful> of the correction of the things written, or even from those who, in [their] correction, <either> added or subtracted those things according to their own opinions.'[20]

Two observations can be made about textual criticism from Origen's complaint. First, he attributes the differences unilaterally to the copyists, not to the biblical authors themselves.[21] This was due to Origen's belief in biblical inspiration and inerrancy.[22] Second, the variant to which Origen refers concerns whether the phrase 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' occurs in Matthew 19:19 in Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler (it does not occur in the parallel passages in Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20). This is one of the 'many differences' that frustrated Origen. We know that Jesus said this on at least one other occasion (cf. Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31), but the debate was over whether he said it here. Thus, in several instances the 'many differences' were variants that most laymen would find trivial and would be of

18 Origen also summarizes his work on the *Hexapla* in his *Comm. Matt.* 15.14, where he writes, 'The disagreement, then, in the copies of the Old Testament, we found to be cured, with God's help, when making use of the rest of the copies as a criterion. For, with the doubtful matters in the LXX arising from the disagreement of the copies, we made a judgment from the rest of the editions, [and] we preserved the agreement among them, and we marked with an obelus those [passages] <as> not found in the Hebrew (not daring to remove them completely), and we added other [passages] along with an asterisk, in order that it might be clear that we have added passages not found in the LXX from the rest of the editions in agreement with the Hebrew [text]. Indeed, he who so wishes may ac<c>ept these things, but to one whom this matter causes offense he may do what he wishes (concerning their acceptance, or not)' (trans. Justin Gohl). Jerome mentions Origen's marks in his *Pref. Pent.* (Gen) and *Ap. con. Ruf.* 2:25 (cf. *NPNF*2 3:515–16).

19 The Fathers were extremely hesitant to delete words from biblical manuscripts, lest they incidentally delete any inspired word of God. This practice is reflected in modern critical editions of the Bible, where variants are footnoted at the bottom of the page.

20 Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 15.14 (trans. Justin Gohl).

21 Ancient authors were well-acquainted with the mistakes that could be introduced into a text during the copying process, be it intentionally or unintentionally; cf. Strabo 13.1.54; Eusebius, *HE* 5.20.2 (citing Irenaeus); 5.28.15–18; Jerome, *Ep.* 71.5.

22 For a comprehensive survey of the Patristic view of inspiration and inerrancy, see my book co-authored with José Hutter, *La inerrancia bíblica* (Barcelona: Clie, 2021), esp. ch. 3, 'La inerrancia según la Iglesia primitiva'.

interest only to those seriously engaged in a close study of the text. Many Patristic authors took a pastoral approach to variants of this kind: whatever the original reading may have been, it does not affect our faith and practice, and therefore the matter should not cause doubt or concern.

Not much is known about **Ambrosiaster**,[23] but his commentaries were influential and well-respected in his time. In his commentary on Romans, he considers whether the word 'no' is present in Romans 5:14, that is, 'those who *did* sin in the likeness of Adam' or 'those who *did not* sin in the likeness of Adam'. He states that, since there are discrepancies in the Latin and Greek manuscripts to which he has access, he must use other criteria: 'I consider the correct reading to be the one which reason, history and authority all retain' (*ACCS* 6:137).[24]

As the quotation and its surrounding context show, Ambrosiaster uses four sources to decide between manuscripts: (1) the manuscripts themselves, both Greek and Latin; (2) reason, by which he refers to how each variant affects the exegesis of the text (we would call this 'context'); (3) history, by which he means that one variant can be verified by historical evidence while the other cannot (we would call this 'reason'); and (4) authority, by which he means previous scholarship—in this case, he cites Tertullian, Victorinus and Cyprian. As with Irenaeus above, Ambrosiaster uses what modern textual critics call external and internal evidence to help him adjudicate between the variants.

Jerome is the second most important Christian textual critic in the Patristic period, after only Origen. Jerome's major contribution to textual criticism was his Vulgate, a fresh translation of the Bible from the original languages into Latin. His primary focus was on translation, but textual criticism was a necessary first step in that task, and thus he had to deal with it frequently. His *Preface to the Gospels*, although specifically addressing his methodology with the four Gospels, succinctly summarizes his general practice:

> For if we are to pin our faith to the Latin texts, it is for our opponents to tell us *which*; for there are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies. If, on the other hand, we are to glean the truth from a comparison of *many*, why not go back to the original Greek and correct the mistakes introduced by inaccurate translators, and the blundering alterations of confident but ignorant critics, and, further, all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake? … I therefore promise … the four Gospels … have been revised by a comparison of the Greek manuscripts. Only early ones have been used. But to avoid any great divergences from the Latin which we are accustomed to read, I have used my pen

23 In fact, his name means 'would-be Ambrose'.

24 Quoted in Donaldson, *Explicit References*, 454. This variant was discussed by other Patristic writers, such as Origen (*Comm. Matt.* 5.1.37), and illustrates their hesitancy to exclude variants: although these variants are diametrically opposed to one another, several writers preferred to offer exegesis of both. Eusebius of Caesarea did something similar with Mark 16:9–20 (*Quaest. Marin.* 1.1-2). With respect to this phenomenon, Léon Vaganay and Christian-Bernard Amphoux make an interesting observation: 'It seems clear that what they saw in the text was a deeper meaning which could not be affected by any kind of textual alterations.' Vaganay and Amphoux, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, trans. Jenny Heimerdinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 92.

> with some restraint, and while I have corrected only such passages as seemed to convey a different meaning, I have allowed the rest to remain as they are. (*NPNF*[2] 6:488)[25]

From this quotation (and others), we see that two criteria were important for Jerome: (1) older manuscripts were to be preferred over newer ones, and (2) the original languages were to be preferred over translations.

Summary

Textual criticism was not a new science to Patristic scholars, but rather had been used and developed by Jews and Gentiles before them, and Patristic authors inherited their tools and methods. Although Patristic authors wrote at different times, at different places and for different purposes, they employed similar criteria to adjudicate between the known variants. Regarding the manuscripts, they preferred older manuscripts over newer ones, high-quality manuscripts over low-quality ones, and original languages over translations.[26] Regarding the variants, they tried to understand which variant made better sense in its immediate and broader contexts, attempted to explain how the less plausible variant could have arisen, and were hesitant to delete any variants from the manuscript tradition, preferring instead to note the differences, argue for their preferred reading, and allow readers to draw their own conclusions.[27] Their criteria and practice were essentially the same as those of modern textual critics.[28]

Medieval period (c. 6th–15th century)

During the Medieval period, there were no major advances in biblical textual criticism. At the risk of over-generalization, one could summarize this period as one of 'isolated preservation', meaning that scribes preserved their respective texts without comparing their manuscripts with others, especially if they were of a different language. As for the Old Testament, Jewish Masoretic scribes took steps to

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25 Although not included in this citation, from this same preface Jerome even references what modern textual critics call 'textual families': Alexandrian (Hesychius), Syrian (Lucian) and, by implication, Caesarean (Origen); cf. Donaldson, *Explicit References*, 289.

26 Some also had developed a very highly sophisticated understanding of textual transmission, such as when and why certain translations were intentionally changed; cf. Ambrosiaster, *Comm. Rom.* 5:14; Jerome, *Pref. Gen.* (cf. *Apology*, 2.25). Interestingly, there is not a great stress on valuing more manuscripts over fewer ones, since they understood that an error could have crept into the tradition at an early date and subsequently been copied extensively.

27 Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea said that they did not 'dare' to remove variants, since they might incidentally be removing Scripture (Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 15.14; Eusebius, *Quaest. Marin.* 1.1). When they could not determine which reading was the correct one, often they would offer exegesis of both variants and show how each could cohere with Scripture's broader teaching.

28 The only modern position that does not reflect Patristic criteria and practice is the *Textus Receptus* (*TR*). Regarding the criteria, *TR* advocates do not value high-quality manuscripts over low-quality ones, or older manuscripts over newer ones, nor do they attempt to explain how rejected readings could have arisen (except for the claim that heretics put them there on purpose). Additionally, they do not include variant readings, either in the margins or in a critical apparatus, but rather only produce the *TR*. On the contrary, modern editions of the Byzantine and critical texts generally follow Patristic practice and include variant readings in their respective critical apparatuses.

preserve the Hebrew text, and Christian scribes preserved the Greek LXX and the Latin Vulgate. As for the New Testament, Christians in the Byzantine Empire preserved what has come to be known as the 'Byzantine' or 'Majority' text type, and Christians in the West preserved the Latin Vulgate, again with little comparison between them. In the West, there are some instances of textual criticism by scholars such as Cassiodorus (6th century), Bede the Venerable (8th century), Roger Bacon (13th century), and Lorenzo Valla (15th century),[29] but their primary concern was to correct the Latin text of the Vulgate, not the Hebrew or Greek texts.

Modern period (c. 16th–21st century)

The modern period, especially from the 19th century to the present, has seen the science of textual criticism come into its own. This development is due not only to the invention of the printing press, but also to the great number of incredible discoveries of very old manuscripts of both Testaments. Space permits only a brief recounting of some of the most important moments in the development of modern textual criticism. Whereas the Patristic period focused on demonstrating the practice of textual criticism, here the focus will be on the development of textual criticism as a science, especially through the publication of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

Modern Old Testament textual criticism[30]

In February 1488, the father-son duo of Israel and Joshua Soncino edited the first Hebrew Old Testament with the famed printer Abraham ben Hayyim. In 1514, the Complutensian Polyglot was printed, but it was not published until c. 1520–1522 (see below). This edition benefitted from access to early Hebrew manuscripts that were critically examined and compared before publication. In 1516–1517, Felix Pratensis edited the First Rabbinic Bible with the famed printer Daniel Bomberg. However, this edition was not received well by Jews and academics, since Pratensis had left Judaism for Christianity in 1518, and scholars found many errors in his text. Thus, in 1524–1525, Jacob ben Hayyim reedited the text and produced the Second Rabbinic Bible, again printed with Bomberg. Both texts came from the Masoretic Text tradition (Ben Asher), and the second Rabbinic Bible became the standard Hebrew Old Testament text until the 20th century. Other editions were published, such as the Antwerp Polyglot (1569–1572), the Paris Polyglot (1629–1645), and the London Polyglot (1654–1657), but they follow the Complutensian Polyglot and Second Rabbinic Bible, and they did not advance textual criticism in any significant way.

However, this would change in the 18th century. In 1720, Johann Heinrich Michaelis (1688–1738) published an edition with a textual apparatus that included the most important readings of five manuscripts and 19 printed editions. In 1776–1780, Benjamin Kennicott (1718–1783) published an edition that records variants from 615 manuscripts, 52 printed editions and 16 manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch. In 1784–1788, Giovanni B. de Rossi published an edition that includes

29 Cassiodorus, *Institutes*, 15; Bede the Venerable, *Comm. Acts*; *Retr. Acts*; Roger Bacon, *Opus minus*; Lorenzo Valla, *Collatio novi Testamenti*.

30 Cf. Paul Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 97–103.

readings from 1,475 manuscripts and printed editions. However, most of the variants were considered insignificant, which led to a decline of interest in Old Testament textual criticism until the incredible discoveries from the Judean desert in the 20th century.

In 1929–1937, Rudolf Kittel (1853–1929) and Paul Kahle (1875–1964) published the third edition of the *Biblia Hebraica*, in which they abandoned the text of the Second Rabbinic Bible that had been used in the first two editions in favour of Codex Leningradensis, the oldest complete Hebrew text of the Old Testament, dating to AD 1008. The critical apparatus included variant readings from ancient translations (e.g. LXX, SP, Vulgate), and the fourth edition of 1967–1977 was able to incorporate the newly found evidence from the Judean desert, including Qumran. The work is now in its fifth edition, again taking Codex Leningradensis as the base text, but augmenting the textual apparatus considerably. Another edition is underway, which takes the Aleppo Codex (10th century) as the base text, but the project is not yet complete. Regarding Old Testament textual criticism, it is important to note that the base text is not a critical text that incorporates the best readings from several manuscripts, but rather represents one manuscript (Codex Leningradensis) with variants noted in the textual apparatus.

Modern New Testament textual criticism[31]

This period of New Testament textual criticism can be divided into three major phases: the rise of the *Textus Receptus*, the fall of the *Textus Receptus*, and the rise of the critical text. They will be treated in this order.

The rise of the *Textus Receptus*

Two important events that occurred in the mid-15th century advanced our understanding of New Testament textual criticism in the West: the invention of the printing press in 1440 and the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The former made it faster and easier to disseminate information (without variants in the copies), and the latter brought a fresh infusion of Greek manuscripts into the West as eastern Christians fled their falling empire.

The first Greek New Testament to be printed (but not published) was the Complutensian Polyglot, on 10 January 1514. This amazing work of scholarship was begun in 1502 and involved an entire team of experts from around Europe. The dedication to Pope Leo X says that the 'Greek copies' (notice the plural) were 'from the Apostolic Library' in Rome and were 'very ancient codices'.[32] Unfortunately, this work did not obtain papal sanction until 22 March 1520 and did not circulate widely until c. 1522.

The first Greek New Testament to be published (not merely printed) was that of Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), which he began working on around April 1515,

31 Cf. Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137–94.

32 Notice a similar methodology as that noted in the Patristic era: they valued old manuscripts, high-quality manuscripts and the original languages.

began printing on 2 October 1515, and finished printing on 1 March 1516.[33] He had access to about six manuscripts[34]—none of them a complete copy of the New Testament—and relied primarily on two of them, both from the 12th century.[35] Rather famously, his only copy of Revelation lacked the last six verses, so he was forced to retranslate from the Latin back into the Greek.[36] Erasmus published a total of five editions of his Greek New Testament: 1516, 1519, 1522 (which included the *Comma Johanneum*; cf. 1 Jn 5:7–8), 1527 (benefitting from the Complutensian Polyglot), and 1535.[37] Because it was the first published edition and much more affordable than the Complutensian Polyglot, Erasmus' Greek New Testament had great success and influence throughout Europe, becoming the textual basis for subsequent editions.[38]

Robert Estienne (1503–1559) published four editions of the Greek New Testament in 1546, 1549, 1550 and 1551, which proved to be very influential either by themselves or thanks to subsequent editions made by Jean Crispin or Theodore Beza (which differed very little from Estienne's text). His third edition—which reflects closely Erasmus' fourth and fifth editions—is important because it was the first to include a critical apparatus, and his fourth edition was the first to include verse numbers.

Finally, in 1633, in the preface to the second edition of their Greek New Testament, Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir boasted that '[the reader has] the text now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted.' The Preface was written in Latin, and the sentence just quoted contains the phrase 'Textum … receptum', from which is derived the phrase *Textus Receptus*. This was the first use of the phrase to refer to the text of the Greek New Testament, and thus the term *Textus Receptus* refers to this 1633 edition and other editions that are closely aligned with it. The Elzevir brothers' Greek text was taken primarily from Beza's 1565 edition and was thus very similar to Estienne's fourth edition of 1551. Except for a few exceptions, this text became the standard one that was printed until the 19th century.

Two important comments are in order, and they are somewhat antithetical to each other. First, the *TR* was based on a handful of late manuscripts and was standardized before the extraordinary discoveries of the 19th and 20th centuries.[39]

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33 Erasmus later said that this edition was *praecipitatum verius quam editum* ('precipitated rather than edited'). Frederick Scrivener (a *TR* advocate!) said it was 'in that respect the most faulty book I know'. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (London, 1894), 185.

34 Most of the manuscripts he used came from the collection that had been given to the Dominican monastery at Basel by Cardinal John Stojkovic of Ragusa.

35 Ironically, the oldest and best manuscript that Erasmus had was from the 10th century, but he used it the least because he thought it was inferior to the others.

36 By doing so, Erasmus introduced (at least) 15 words into the Greek text that have no manuscript basis whatsoever, but that still exist in the *TR* (cf. Rev 17:4, 21:16–19, 21). *TR* proponents are forced to argue that Erasmus' retranslation has uncovered the lost original wording of these 15 words in Revelation, something which defies the imagination.

37 Note that Erasmus was indeed employing principles of textual criticism in his revisions, as did subsequent editors of Greek New Testaments.

38 The first and second editions of 1516 and 1519 sold about 3,300 copies.

39 Especially important are the discoveries of Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, and of the papyri from Egypt.

There was no way that the Elzevir brothers could have anticipated these discoveries, but had they done so, it is extremely doubtful that they would have wanted their text to remain the standard one in the light of superior manuscript evidence. Second, one should not overlook the high degree of overlap between the *TR* and later critical editions. Although these two texts do differ in places, they have much more in common. The extent of textual agreement may be estimated at around 95 percent or higher, with most of the remaining 5 percent containing variants such as the one illustrated by Origen above. Consider that the great Reformation confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries were written by scholars and pastors who were reading the *TR*, and these confessions are still affirmed today by scholars and pastors reading a critical text. Therefore, both texts have led scholars and pastors to the same theological convictions.

The fall of the *Textus Receptus*

From at least the 17th century, those who worked with the Greek manuscripts noticed that they disagreed with each other on numerous occasions, and they began publishing editions of the Greek New Testament that included variant readings that differed from the *TR*. Brian Walton's (1600–1661) Polyglot Bible of 1655–1657 was the first that systematically collected these variant readings (including those of the recently discovered Codex Alexandrinus), and the critical apparatus itself was prepared by Archbishop Ussher. John Mill (1645–1707) continued in this line of work: his 1707 edition of the Greek New Testament included readings from nearly 100 Greek manuscripts and all the known patristic evidence.[40] In 1719, Edward Wells (1667–1727) published a text that differed from the *TR* in some 210 places, making him the first to abandon the *TR* in favour of what he considered more accurate readings (based on better and more ancient manuscripts).[41] Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), perhaps the most important New Testament textual critic of the 18th century, is credited with a number of innovations: he was the first to argue that manuscripts must be weighed and not merely counted, to divide the manuscript evidence into family groups (in this case, Byzantine and African), to include a system of letters representing his relative agreement with the *TR* in comparison to the variant under question, and to suggest that, when considering variants, the more difficult reading is to be preferred over the easier one.[42] Finally, Edward Harwood's (1729–1794) 1776 edition of the Greek New Testament relied primarily on the early Codices Bezae, Claromontanus, and Alexandrinus, thereby deserting the *TR* approximately 70 percent of the time when there was a variant under question. Thus, although the *TR* continued to be printed as the main text in editions of the Greek

40 In all, he noted some 30,000 variant readings (the vast majority of which were either nonsensical or of only minor import to the meaning of the text). He was attacked by Daniel Whitby (*Examen variantium lectionum* …) because he thought that the collection of variants placed the authority of Scripture in peril.

41 Richard Bentley (1662–1742) was planning an edition of the Greek New Testament that would differ from the Vulgate in 2,000 places and from the *TR* in 2,000 places. He hoped it would replace the *TR* and began raising money and preliminary research, but his death in 1742 halted the entire project.

42 This is known as *proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua*. The logic is that a scribe is more likely to make a difficult text easier to understand than to make an easy text more difficult to understand.

New Testament, there was a growing awareness of the presence of many variants in the Greek manuscripts, and that the *TR* did not always preserve the best reading.

The rise of the critical text

Historically speaking, it is difficult to determine who was responsible for the fall of the *TR*, but perhaps the best candidate is Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812). He developed 15 rules for New Testament textual criticism, many of which still are taken seriously today.[43] His editions of the Greek New Testament of the 1770s and 1800s were the first in Germany to abandon the *TR* at many places. Shortly after Griesbach, in 1788–1801, four Danish scholars were able to collate 172 Greek manuscripts, one of which was Codex Vaticanus (but only partially). Johannes Scholz (1794–1852) traveled throughout Europe and found 616 Greek manuscripts, thereby bringing the total to nearly 900. Thus, in a little more than 150 years after the *TR* was established, the knowledge of Greek manuscripts had increased from a handful of late manuscripts to nearly 900, including some very important ones from the fourth century.

Karl Lachmann (1793–1851) was the first to publish an edition of the Greek New Testament in 1831 that broke entirely from the *TR* as a base text.[44] With nearly two centuries of discoveries and research at his back, Lachmann's methodology was to base his text on the oldest Greek manuscripts available, the Old Latin, the Vulgate and patristic quotations. Lobegott Friedrich Constantin von Tischendorf (1815–1874) discovered more manuscripts and published more works on textual criticism than anyone else. Part of his fame is connected to his deciphering of Codex Ephraemi in 1840 and his discovery of Codex Sinaiticus in 1859. His eighth edition of the Greek New Testament of 1869–1872 is still of use to researchers today for its vast critical apparatus.[45]

In 1881, Brooke Foss Westcott (1825–1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828–1892) published their edition of the Greek New Testament after working on it for 28 years. This edition, along with its accompanying volume that explained its methodology, was important for three reasons. First, it relied heavily on Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, arguably the two most important Greek manuscripts of the New Testament at that time (and still very important today). Second, it systematized the principles of internal and external manuscript evidence. Third, they argued forcefully that the Byzantine text type is the latest one (with the Western, Alexandrian and 'Neutral' text types being older),[46] and that the *TR* represents the

43 For example, his first rule was that the shorter reading is to be preferred to the longer one (with many qualifications).

44 An important qualification is in order: with the textual evidence available to him at the time, Lachmann did not think it possible to produce the original text of the New Testament of the 1st century, but rather a provisional text of the New Testament as it would have appeared near the end of the 4th century.

45 Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813–1875) was another well-known textual critic of the 19th century. He published a six-volume edition of the Greek New Testament (1857–1872) which broke with the *TR* and (unwittingly) reflected many of the same critical principles as Lachmann. Tregelles was a theological conservative (for many years affiliated with the Plymouth Brethren) and a good example (although by no means the only one) of a respected, conservative textual critic who abandoned the *TR*.

46 Hermann Freiherr von Soden (1852–1914) was one of the few 20th-century scholars who continued to argue for the supremacy of the Byzantine text type (especially in its *TR* form).

latest form of the Byzantine text type. This called forth a reaction—based more on emotion and rhetoric than facts and argumentation—from staunch *TR* proponents such as John Burgon (1813–1888), whose fierceness helped to foment distrust of *TR* advocates in the realm of textual criticism.[47] Such a reaction is unfortunate, since many biblical textual critics seek to increase the church's confidence in the text of Scripture rather than to attack it.

Eberhard Nestle (1851–1913) based his editions of the Greek New Testament on Tischendorf's and Westcott and Hort's editions.[48] His work was taken over by Kurt Aland (1915–1994), and the Nestle–Aland version (currently in its 28th edition) quickly became the standard text of the Greek New Testament for students, pastors and researchers. It includes thousands of variant readings in its critical apparatus, as well as very helpful appendices with more textual information. In 1966, the first edition of *The Greek New Testament* was published, specifically designed for Bible translators; it is currently in its fifth edition. Since 1975, the Nestle–Aland and *The Greek New Testament* have had the same Greek text, thereby demonstrating the unity of modern textual criticism. These editions have taken advantage of the important discoveries of New Testament manuscripts in Egypt and elsewhere, many of which date to the 2nd to 4th centuries.[49]

As of today, we have some 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts, ranging from small fragments to the entire New Testament. Most date from the Medieval period, but hundreds of them come from the 2nd to 5th centuries. In addition to Greek New Testament manuscripts, we have tens of thousands of manuscripts of early translations, lectionaries and Patristic quotations, thereby enriching our knowledge of the text of the New Testament considerably.

Conclusion

Textual criticism is not unique to Christians, but rather something practised by everyone interested in uncovering the best readings of ancient texts. Since the beginning, Christian textual critics have used the same basic criteria for deciding between variants: older manuscripts are preferred over later ones, better manuscripts are preferred over lower-quality ones, and the original language is preferred over translations.[50] Also, it is important to explain how the rejected variant could have arisen and how the accepted reading fits with its immediate and broader contexts. Finally, it is important to keep variant readings and allow readers to make up their own minds regarding which is better. Christian scholars have followed these principles for nearly two millennia, and they should continue to guide us in the present and future.

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47 Westcott and Hort did not provide a critical apparatus in their edition (just some variants in the margins), which ironically had the effect of creating a new *TR* with no variant readings.

48 His first edition of 1898, combined with Westcott and Hort's 1881 edition, essentially ended the reign of the *TR*.

49 For a discussion of the contents of their manuscripts and their importance to New Testament textual criticism, cf. Andrés Messmer, 'Los manuscritos del Nuevo Testamento hasta el año 300', *Alétheia* 25, no. 2 (2019): 59–65.

50 There are some exceptions to this last criterion, especially at it relates to the relationship between the MT and the LXX. However, as a general rule, it is sound.

ERT (2023) 47:1, 42–52

C. S. Lewis' Use of Myth to Convey a Christian Worldview

Alan J. Pihringer

This article insightfully analyses the apologetic strategy inherent in Lewis' fiction, including his intent to appeal to the imagination as well as to rational argument and his method of embedding opposing worldviews in his stories so that he could critique them. Lewis' approach carries lasting value for our efforts to communicate the gospel to our postmodern and entertainment-oriented culture.

It is always a challenge to find the most effective means of communicating a Christian worldview to a modern (or postmodern) generation. Postmoderns present unique difficulties unlike those of previous generations in that reasoned logic with its pristine propositions does not sway them to contemplate Christian truths, nor does an abundance of empirical evidence move them towards faith.

Michael Ward emphasizes that today's generation does not care so much about truth as about whether something speaks to them personally. He writes, 'Our challenge in the post-Christian world is not so much to prove that Christianity is true as to show that it has meaning, that it is not gibberish. Unless people see that Christian terminology actually makes sense and is not a foreign language, they are unlikely to care whether it is also true.'[1] The visual and the emotional grab the hearts of the younger generation. How can one communicate a Christian worldview in a way that captures their attention so that they give it due consideration?

C. S. Lewis used fiction as a vessel of 'myth' to convey a distinctly Christian worldview—a method that has the potential to reach current generations effectively. Where crisp apologetic arguments might fall on deaf ears, innovative use of myth engages the imagination with an attractiveness that can cause people to question their longstanding presuppositions. Lewis surmised that myth 'in general is not merely misunderstood history … nor diabolical illusion … nor priestly lying … but, at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination.'[2] That is, myth expresses divine truth in a way that reaches the imagination as well as the intellect, as 'an important preparatory step for receiving the gospel of Christ'. It draws readers to give serious consideration to the claims of a

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1 Michael Ward, 'How Lewis Lit the Way', *Christianity Today* 57, no. 9 (2013): 38.

2 C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (1947; paperback ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 218, note 1.

Christian worldview.[3] The stories that contain the myth can get past psychological defences in a way that purely rational arguments cannot, appealing to people regardless of their religious (or non-religious) persuasion. As Lewis himself wrote, 'I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood.'[4]

Cultures from all historical periods have used stories containing myths (often articulated through cultural symbols) to convey their worldview to subsequent generations and thereby perpetuate their own unique views of reality. Every worldview has an overarching story expressed in myth, answering the pressing issues of human existence. While many moderns have attempted to demythologize beliefs about reality, others have begun to construct their own myths. Authors such as Lewis have set before them a myth that makes the Christian worldview a plausible alternative worthy of their allegiance.

This appeal to myth in no way denigrates or denies the existence of objective truth or actual historical events upon which the Christian worldview is founded. Neither does imagination neutralize the rational. On the contrary, as Holly Ordway notes, 'Reason and imagination are twin faculties, both part of human nature—and both given to us by God our Creator!—that, together, allow for a fuller grasp of the truth. Both of them are necessary and valuable. … It is the imagination that provides the foundation for the exercise of the reason.'[5] The fiction that uses the imagination to reveal the myth enculturates and contextualizes the truth for a particular generation.[6] Lewis is unique in that his fictional stories that encapsulate the Christian myth have endured over several generations and are still more than adequate to reach people's hearts and minds with the claims of Christianity. His unique gift of combining the rational with the imaginative keeps his body of work at the forefront of apologetic and worldview considerations.

I will first examine Lewis' concept of myth and its transmission. Then I will define what Lewis' Christian worldview entailed (the 'myth' that he held to be true). Finally, I will give a brief overview of how some of his fiction articulated the myth that reflected his Christian worldview.

Truth revealed in myth

The concept of myth is much more complicated than it first appears. Most modern notions of myth relegate it to an ancient, fanciful story of pure fiction or nonsense. Lewis, on the other hand, saw it as an 'imaginative experience' that 'relates truths of the most important kind'.[7] He regarded it as a means of communicating important

3 Stratford Caldecott, 'Speaking the Truth Only the Imagination May Grasp: Myth and "Real Life"', in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 87.

4 C. S. Lewis, 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said', reprinted in Lewis, *Of Other Worlds*, 37, quoted in Robert K. Johnston, 'Image and Content: The Tension in C. S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 3 (1977): 263–64.

5 Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2017), 10–11.

6 Oskar Gruenwald, 'Renewing the Liberal Arts: C. S. Lewis' Essential Christianity', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 14, no. 1 (2002): 14.

7 Wayne Martindale, *Beyond the Shadowlands* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 53.

realities from higher realms brought down to the level of man. To understand how his fiction relayed his worldview, one must grasp Lewis' conception of myth and its expression of higher truths.

Lewis' concept of myth

For Lewis, myth reaches something within mankind where mere propositional truths cannot reach—the imagination, which is the organ of meaning, something he considered a precursor to truth.[8] The imagination not only comprehends the myth itself, but also the reality to which it refers. Although Lewis might concur with the Reformers that the Fall affected the imagination (along with the rest of mankind's noetic structure), he nevertheless believed it was redeemable, through a 'baptism of the imagination' by which it perceives divine truth.[9] However, Lewis did not emphasize the imagination to the detriment of the intellect, since both qualities brought him to accept Christianity. Rather, myth enlightens the intellect by stoking the imagination. It uses the imagination to assist in an apprehension beyond mere intellect.

Myth is a vessel of truth that presents a truth principle in a story form that reaches the imagination, conveys a higher meaning that mere propositions struggle to fully communicate, and reaches a broader audience. In this sense, Lewis refers to the myth of Christianity that is still a reality. He explains:

> Now as myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth. The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth,* comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It *happens*—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. … To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other. … For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.[10]

Thus, myth given through story demonstrates nuances of reality and touches the hearts of people in ways that mere statements of fact are unable to do, all without losing the factuality of what it portrays. Myth moves outside or beyond fact to convey an otherness that only imagination can grasp, making that which is abstract more concrete.

Myth is not merely a statement of propositional truth given in generalizations, nor is it the same as allegory (although myth may contain allegory). Rather, myth makes the connection between a higher reality and human experience. Lewis wrote, 'What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality. … Myth is the mountain

8 C. S. Lewis, 'Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare', in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (1961; paperback ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012), 354.

9 See P. H. Brazier, 'C. S. Lewis and Christological Prefigurement', *Heythrop Journal* 48, no. 5 (2007): 758.

10 C. S. Lewis, 'Myth Became Fact', in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (1970; electronic ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 58–60, emphasis in original.

whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley. … Or, if you prefer, myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to. It is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular.'[11] Lewis understood that myth allowed insight into divine realities that are not the normal, everyday circumstances of mankind. To comprehend these realities, people must experience them, not merely discuss them. Myth opens the channel of personal, inward acquaintance, drawing in a generation that relies more on the visual and emotional.

Although Christianity offers a myth that is objectively true, Lewis perceived that pagan myths very dimly (though mixed with much error) offered faint glimpses into the true myth. Lewis assumed that pagan myths, though false, nevertheless revealed foretastes of the divine realm and of Christian truth. This relationship explained similarities between pagan ideas and the Christian faith. His works often referred to the examples of Balder, Adonis or Osiris, heroes who died and rose again, who were mythical types and shadows of which the incarnation of Christ was the reality. Lewis believed God could use pagan poets, authors and storytellers to portray images that point to the higher reality. Yet there are enough differences between pagan myths and Christian myths that any modernist critique of the historicity of Christianity is unfounded.[12] The Christian myth alone portrays the truly real in all its purity.[13]

Myth is the means of carrying that reality—the fulness of the Christian worldview—to the hearts of hearers in matchless ways. This is not necessarily unique to a Christian worldview, as many cultures have used folklore and stories as their chosen literary style to convey beliefs about their own context. Robert Johnston explains that 'myth alone is capable of transporting "adjectivally" that concrete reality that has too rich a meaning to be reducible to concepts and nouns. It alone can transfer an atmosphere (a *Weltanschauung)* from the world of the literary work to that of the reader.'[14] Lewis treated myth as a special literary genre that not only depicts higher realities but also has a narrative flow like other literary works, yet functions in a category all its own. Myth has its own style given in story form, with a generous use of pictures and images to portray ultimate truths.[15] And yet, the use of language in expressing what it desires to represent has a unique function in this genre. Lewis saw it as a form of *transposition*.

Expression through transposition

The higher realities (i.e. the divine, spiritual realities that myth portrays) have a loftier means (or medium) of expressing themselves. However, the lower realm of humanity is unable to comprehend such means of expression. Therefore, there must be a recasting from one means of expression to another—a transposition.

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11 Lewis, 'Myth Became Fact', 58.

12 C. Stephen Evans, 'The Incarnational Narrative as Myth and History', *Christian Scholar's Review* 23, no. 4 (1994): 389.

13 C. S. Lewis, 'Letter to Arthur Greeves, October 18, 1931', in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 1, *Family Letters 1905–1931* (2004; digital ed., New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 977.

14 Johnston, 'Image and Content', 258. Emphasis in original.

15 John T. Stahl, 'The Nature and Function of Myth in the Christian Thought of C. S. Lewis', *Christian Scholar's Review* 7, no. 4 (1978): 331.

Lewis explains the concept of transposition by using the example of a two-dimensional piece of art drawn on a flat piece of paper to represent the substance of a three-dimensional world. The lower expression is not as rich and vibrant as the higher expression, yet it is still a means of understanding for those who hear, read or see it, for it is a matter of perspective to grasp all the significance of what the expression represents.[16] Lewis clarifies, '1. It is clear that in each case what is happening in the lower medium can be understood only if we know the higher medium. … 2. It is of some importance to notice that the word *symbolism* is not adequate in all cases to cover the relation between the higher medium and its transposition in the lower.'[17] One must know something of the higher sphere to understand the transposition expressed in myth through the story that it tells.

Lewis sees the spiritual realm as that higher sphere with a richer medium, over against the natural world to which its meaning must be transposed.[18] Yet it would be wrong to suppose that the language used to articulate divine realities somehow made those realities less than what they really were. Transposition rightly communicates divine truths as well as possible, considering the limitations of the lower realm of communication. Rather than weakening that which is higher, transposition invokes the imagination to draw images of the eternal.[19] Myth uses the dialect of the natural world, appeals to pictures found within the natural world, and refers to deeds normally done within the natural world to bring to light truths of the spiritual world.

Transposition conveys the grand, overarching beliefs of a worldview about ultimate truth. This is no less true for Christianity. The Creator of the universe condescends in various ways to communicate with a finite humanity using their finite language, but Lewis found the most acute example of transposition in the incarnation of Christ: deity becoming man to give understanding in a way that man in the lower realm would not only comprehend but experience. Lewis then transposed these myths into his own stories so as to reflect those higher truths. Mark Freshwater indicates, 'Lewis showed in his [fiction] that the realities of the Gospel can be transposed into a fictional world … without distorting or detracting from the Christian message.'[20] What was the Christian worldview that C. S. Lewis accepted as transposed truth from heaven, which he in turn transposed into his own fiction?

Defining Lewis' worldview

Lewis summarized not only the content of his worldview but also its effects when he stated, 'I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.'[21] His Christian worldview enlightened all that he thought, wrote and lived. After his conversion, Christianity was not merely

16 C. S. Lewis, 'Transposition', in *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (1949; paperback ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 99.

17 Lewis, 'Transposition', 100–2, emphasis in original.

18 Andrew Walker, 'Scripture, Revelation and Platonism in C. S. Lewis', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (2002): 27–29.

19 P. H. Brazier, 'C. S. Lewis: A Doctrine of Transposition', *Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 4 (2009): 680.

20 Mark Edwards Freshwater, *C. S. Lewis and the Truth of Myth* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 127.

21 C. S. Lewis, 'Is Theology Poetry?' in *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (1949; paperback ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 140.

a set of propositions to which he assented, but a spiritual reality that captured heart, mind and imagination—myth recognized as fact. To understand his expression of myth within his fiction, one must understand the intricacies of the worldview that inspired its expression.

Lewis' Christian myth

Lewis held to most essential, orthodox tenets of a Christian worldview. He believed in a personal, transcendent God—'a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube.'[22] The Trinity is an example of a higher idea that, although difficult to conceive, one seeks to transpose as well as possible for human comprehension. Lewis believed that the triune God created the natural realm and is very much involved in its affairs. Lewis had no qualms with the possibility of theistic evolution or that the earth could possibly be billions of years old. Yet he had no doubt that the universe boasted a divine design, the handiwork of an all-wise God.

Jesus Christ as God the Son incarnate was the cornerstone of Lewis' worldview. Jesus is deity, existing before time and creation, begotten of God, becoming a man on this earth.[23] Everything that exists has its existence for Christ. Jesus Christ is the end of all things, not only for Christians and the church but for all creation. Lewis declares:

> The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him.[24]

The critical scholars of Lewis' day were skeptical of the divine claims about Christ and took every chance to cast suspicion. Lewis took the skeptics to task, rebutting their claims with reason and logic that cannot be ignored. Some of Lewis' most famous apologetic arguments for the Christian faith stem from his defence of Christ's divinity. One quoted most often—commonly referred to as the Trilemma—pointed to the absurdity of Christ's claims if he were anything less than divine. In short, Jesus claimed to be God, so he must be either God, a liar or a lunatic for saying so.[25] Lewis stood firmly on this most central piece of Christian faith: Jesus is God.

The reason why Christ became man is that humanity was trapped in sin and in need of a Saviour. Lewis affirmed that humans are sinful, with a tendency to make themselves the centre of their own personal little universes instead of God. Lewis viewed this self-centredness as the most basic of sins.[26] Even though he may have considered Genesis 3 (the account of the Fall) mythical (in the more common sense),

22 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; paperback ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 162.
23 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 157.
24 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 199.
25 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52.
26 C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940; paperback ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 70.

he nevertheless had a strong belief in man's sinfulness and disobedience to God.[27] The solution, and the reason for Christ's incarnation, was that 'Christ was killed for us. … His death has washed out our sins, and … by dying He disabled death itself.'[28] Lewis believed that Christ's death offers forgiveness, regenerates souls and provides the fulness of the real presence of Christ.[29] Through this real presence of Christ, one receives true spiritual life that sanctifies him or her, for without this life it is impossible to live in holiness.[30] He also believed in different eternal destinies for humans depending on how they responded to Christ in the present life, that Christ would return in the future, and that he would judge all people after their final resurrection.

Believing in a supernatural God, Lewis assumed that God could intervene in supernatural ways within the world. Both naturalists and religionists of his day criticized Christianity for its belief in miracles, so Lewis wrote an entire work in defence of this tenet. However, as Lewis succinctly summarized the issue, the reason why critics reject miracles is that they simply exclude the possibility of a God who intervenes in the world.[31] Believing in the supernatural also allowed him to believe in other supernatural beings, such as angels and demons, who operate in the natural world.

Lewis believed that the Bible is the Word of God, although he did not hold what is considered a pure evangelical view. He confessed that 'the Scriptures come before me as a book claiming divine inspiration.'[32] Yet his view of inspiration was complicated. Although inspired by God, he proposed, it was nevertheless generated by man and carries some of mankind's weaknesses. All of it is the word of God, yet for Lewis, not every part is so in the same sense.[33] The Bible is a lesser form of revelation (whereas the incarnation would be the highest), and it is also a transposition—God communicating great heavenly truths in lower, human language.

Lewis' critique of opposing worldviews

Lewis' worldview was not only displayed in the truths he held and the doctrines he taught; it was also further refined through the arguments he presented against opposing worldviews.

Although Lewis tackled the nuances of several non-Christian worldviews, he especially took issue with a few that he described as merely different variations of the same assumptions. Most of the philosophies that he confronted conceived of the universe as a closed system, unsusceptible to the outside, supernatural intervention of a personal deity. The view often called monism (which Lewis called 'everythingism') believes the universe is all that exists. This view then has two separate nuances, depending on where one begins ontologically. For those who believe in a god, this conviction leads to pantheism; for those who believe in the exclusivity of

27 James Townsend, 'Grace in the Arts: C. S. Lewis's Theology: Somewhere between Ransom and Reepicheep', *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13, no. 24 (Spring 2000): 60.

28 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55.

29 See Lewis, *Miracles*, 280–81.

30 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 159.

31 Lewis, *Miracles*, 130.

32 C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (1967; electronic ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 102.

33 Townsend, 'Grace in the Arts', 56.

matter and nature, it leads to naturalism.[34] Pantheism holds that there is no differentiation between God and the universe—they are completely, eternally united. Lewis described pantheism as a religion that disbelieves in miracles, and in which man speaks and creates the reality about God, rather than God speaking and creating the reality about man.[35] Lewis saw the Christian worldview as the only philosophy able to combat such thinking. Payne describes the contrast by saying that '[God] Who is the Uncreated made the created precisely so that He might love and commune with beings distinct from Himself. Lewis points out that the pantheistic aim of merging with the All is therefore a reversal, a doubling back on the path which God has mapped out for man; its goal is a type of unity which God has rejected.'[36]

Naturalism displayed itself in what Lewis called either scientism or modernism—referring to a belief in the eternality and exclusivity of the material world. When Lewis critiques scientism, he is not criticizing 'the careful and painstaking empirical methods by which scientists seek to establish facts and their causes, nor … the marvelous discoveries and technological fruits of science.'[37] Rather, he is criticizing the atheistic worldview that encompasses naturalism—the ideology that denies the supernatural and is hostile towards religion. This includes Enlightenment modernism that sought to find objective certainty and moral pathways apart from the Christian God. Lewis' critique also addresses the postmodernism of contemporary thought, where 'the very idea of absolute objective truth is considered implausible or held in open contempt.'[38] Lewis knew that these worldviews have consequences, declaring, 'The Christian and the Materialist hold different beliefs about the universe. They can't both be right. The one who is wrong will act in a way which simply doesn't fit the real universe. Consequently, with the best will in the world, he will be helping his fellow creatures to their destruction.'[39]

Thus, Lewis further defined his worldview through his opposition to non-Christian worldviews. When Lewis presented his Christian worldview through myth in his fiction, he included critiques and opposition within the stories as well, so that the reader would be able to distinguish the myth as fact from that which was false.

Christian worldview as myth in Lewis' fiction

Lewis captured the myth of Christianity and embedded it in his own stories to promulgate its truths in more modern ways and capture the imagination. 'Lewis's fiction transforms, or gives another substance to, one's image of fact.'[40] Through

34 Richard B. Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 41–42.

35 Lewis, *Miracles*, 129–33.

36 Leanne Payne, *Real Presence: The Christian Worldview of C. S. Lewis as Incarnational Reality*, rev. ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 27.

37 Thomas C. Peters, 'The War of Worldviews: H. G. Wells and Scientism versus C. S. Lewis and Christianity', in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 206.

38 Douglas Groothuis, 'The Biblical View of Truth Challenges Postmodernist Truth Decay', *Themelios* 26, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 14.

39 C. S. Lewis, 'Man or Rabbit?' in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (1970; electronic ed., San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 110.

40 Michael Edwards, 'C. S. Lewis: Imagining Heaven', *Literature and Theology* 6, no. 2 (1992): 111.

magical worlds and landscapes, epic battles and captivating characters, Lewis related ultimate truths in a fashion that bypassed any presuppositions the readers may have erected against Christianity—delivering the truth of the worldview in a way that remained faithful to the reality it depicted, but in a medium that excited both heart and brain, spirit and intellect. Lewis' numerous fictional works cover a wide array of topics within the Christian myth.

The Space Trilogy[41]

This trilogy (sometimes referred to as the Cosmic Trilogy or the Ransom Trilogy) follows the adventures of Elwin Ransom, a university professor who is kidnapped and forced to take a trip into space (Deep Heaven). He learns that the universe is controlled by a supernatural element and that the earth is under the rule of the Bent One (a type of Satan) who rebelled against Maleldil (a type of Christ, or possibly of the Trinity as a whole) and was condemned to Earth, thereby cutting Earth off from the other planets. The other planets remain uncorrupted and hear nothing of what happens on Earth (thus, it is a silent planet). Within the trilogy, Ransom faces off against both human and supernatural enemies on Mars, Venus and Earth.

Lewis' portrayal of the Christian myth describes a universe created by Maleldil, separate from himself, which is heavily influenced by the spiritual—including spiritual leaders called Oyeresu and spiritual servants of Maleldil called Eldila (angels). The Bent One has his own Eldila (demons). These spiritual powers work behind the scenes, influencing the course of history for good or for evil. Due to evil, the earth is out of sync with the rest of the created order. The antagonists in the novels seek to spread sin and evil throughout the universe as agents of the Bent One. The hero, however, does not sit on the sidelines but (like all humanity) is called to join in the fight against evil. For example, on Venus, in a new Eden, where an enemy tempts the innocent Queen to disobey the orders of Maleldil, Ransom is called on to fight on her behalf. After he wins that struggle, evil still reigns on earth. But there is an eschatological element according to which Maleldil will lead an army to conquer the Bent One and all the evil on the planet.

Lewis uses this trilogy as a counterpoint to naturalistic scientism. An antagonist in the series embodies the idea of progress through evolution and the philosophy that only through pure science will the human race endure. Lewis depicts scientism as backed by the devil, tempting the people of the world to become gods themselves, and seeking power over nature and others. Eventually, scientism becomes wedded to political power, forcing itself on the people and destroying anyone who would question its authority. Science is so abused and perverted within these novels that it dehumanizes mankind, making them little more than organic machines. Lewis saw a dangerous rejection of God and ethics within the naturalistic worldview, whereas he contended that science can have its proper place within a Christian worldview, helping us grasp the wonders of the created order. Lewis' Space Trilogy contains a myth that touches on many Christian worldview themes, critiques the naturalistic worldview, and vividly displays the reality of the supernatural that influences the affairs of man.

41 The trilogy includes *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945).

The Chronicles of Narnia[42]

The Chronicles of Narnia hover between 20th-century Earth and Narnia, the mythical realm through which Lewis transposes divine, Christian truths. Aslan, a large, talking lion in the Narnian realm, is described as the incarnated son of the Emperor-Across-the-Sea. He is the Christ figure within the stories—the king of the beasts representing the sovereign King of the universe. Aslan is described in terms of both dread and beauty, unsafe yet kind, but most definitely good. Lewis says that Aslan 'is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, "What might Christ become like if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in *that* world as He actually has done in ours?"'[43]

Lewis depicts Aslan as the Creator of all that is, presenting him as singing Narnia (and other worlds) into existence. Lewis also portrays him as the atoner for sin when a boy, Edmund, broke the laws of the Deep Magic. The White Witch (a type of Satan) points out that the penalty is death, and Aslan must follow the rules. Aslan gives himself in the boy's stead, is killed by the White Witch, but then rises from the dead—a picture of Christ's redemption and resurrection. Aslan appears to his people before going off again for a time (the Ascension). Lewis also depicts Aslan as the only one who can change the hearts and nature of man. One particularly contrary boy, Eustace, turns into a dragon due to his attitude and choices, and only through the help of Aslan is he returned to a human nature.

The Narnia experienced by the characters within the story is a mere shadow of the true Narnia, just as the earth and everything in it are mere shadows of heaven. As happened at the Fall, evil is introduced into the land of Narnia by an outsider. Yet at the end of the history of Narnia, a final battle ushers in the end of the world and a final judgement in which one's destination depends on how one perceived Aslan—just as earthly humans' final destination depends on what they do with Christ.

Lewis again critiques the worldview of naturalistic scientism. When a witch traps some characters in an underworld, she tries to convince them that there is no Narnia, just as naturalists argue against God, heaven and the supernatural. The characters do not fall for her reductionist arguments as they see how poor her arguments and her worldview really are.

The Chronicles of Narnia abound with Christian worldview themes, most decidedly focused on the incarnate Christ. As Colin Duriez summarizes, 'All seven of the Chronicles teem with Christian meanings … such as the true character of God and the nature of humanity, nature, heaven, hell, and joy. … The key to these meanings lies in the fact that Aslan is a figure of Christ, out of many possible figures of him. … If he or she is aware, the meaning of Christian truths often comes strangely alive.'[44]

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42 The Chronicles of Narnia include *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), and *The Last Battle* (1956).

43 C. S. Lewis, 'Letter to Mrs. Hook, December 29, 1958', in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 3: *Narnia, Cambridge and Joy 1950–1963* (2004; digital ed., New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 1004–5.

44 Colin Duriez, *A Field Guide to Narnia* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 69–70.

These worldview themes are but the proverbial scratching of the surface of Lewis' description and defence of a Christian worldview by means of the myth contained in his fiction. His other novels do much more of the same.[45] Lewis did not need 'to choose between rational and imaginative presentations of Christianity'.[46] His stories contain as much deep Christian thinking as his more theological monographs.

Conclusion

C. S. Lewis' fiction captured the hearts of numerous generations by placing the Christian myth in stories that piqued their imaginations, thus giving them a chance to take seriously the claims of a Christian worldview. If Lewis was so able, through myth, to bring the Christian worldview before the senses of those who had closed their eyes and ears to mere propositional exposition, how much more should modern Christian theologians and philosophers consider packaging the myth in imaginative fiction for the present generation. Holly Ordway explains the importance of this strategy:

> When people lack imaginative engagement with the Faith—which may include a deficit of real meaning for the words and ideas that we use, or a failure to see that these ideas are important or interesting—their belief (or potential belief) is not so much destroyed as starved. Rational argument helps to remove the stones and choking weeds from the field we seek to cultivate, but without imagination the soil is dry and hard and the seeds are easily scorched or blown away. Culturally, we are, as it were, in drought conditions for the sowing of the Word.[47]

The proliferation of entertainment choices that feed opposing worldviews through their own myths—disseminated through the media of television, movies, video games and social media—will obscure the Christian worldview if the myth that became fact is not brought before them in a similar fashion. Some have attempted to follow Lewis' footsteps. One prominent example is Ted Dekker with his *Circle* series (along with its related material), which captures the myth through stunning worlds, strong characters and imaginative storylines. However, many more need to rise to the occasion if the Christian worldview will reach this generation that responds to the visual and emotional. This in no way is a call to eschew objective, propositional truth; rather, it is a call to consider additional means of communicating those truths. The intellect and the imagination are not enemies or opposites, but partners working towards the same goal of proclaiming an incarnate Christ.

45 *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) depicts the unseen spiritual world as demons plot to prevent people from embracing or living out a Christian worldview. In *Till We Have Faces* (1956), Lewis retells the story of Cupid and Psyche, drawing out the themes of true beauty and sacrificial love. The Christian worldview is a common thread throughout.

46 Ward, 'How Lewis Lit the Way', 38.

47 Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 14–15.

ERT (2023) 47:1, 53–61

The Gospel in Three Dimensions

Richard L. Smith

This study of 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 reveals that the passage presents the Christian life in simple three-point fashion, in terms of repentance, service to God and others, and our ultimate eschatological hope. These three points can be linked to God's work on three levels—personal, corporate (within the body of Christ), and cosmic, respectively.

These days we can purchase books on many subjects like *Computers for Seniors for Dummies*[1] and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Islam*.[2] (I have a volume entitled *Philosophy Made Simple*,[3] which is an oxymoron for sure.) Indeed, sometimes it is helpful to present a concept as simply as possible. For this reason, this article might be called 'The Gospel for Dummies' or maybe 'The Gospel Made Simple' (though not simplistic).

First Thessalonians 1:9–10 presents a three-point outline of the gospel. In these verses, we find out how to become a Christian and how to remain one. Three terms are particularly significant: 'turn' (repentance), 'serve' (service, discipleship), and 'wait' (hope and sanctification). Understanding these words in context, along with their theological significance, provides a basic framework for understanding the gospel. In this passage, Paul also provides a summary of his evangelistic preaching in three dimensions: the personal (individual), church (corporate), and cosmic (eschatological).

Immediate context

First Thessalonians 1:4–10:

> (4) For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,
> (5) because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.
> (6) And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

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1 Faithe Wempen, *Computers for Seniors for Dummies*, 6th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2022).

2 Yahiya Emerick, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Islam*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alpha, 2004).

3 Richard H. Popkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

> (7) so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.
> (8) For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.
> (9) For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,
> (10) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Notice first the focus on imitation (vv. 5b and 6). Like Paul, the Thessalonians experienced the gospel in word and power (v. 5). As with the apostle, their conversion produced both suffering and joy (v. 6). Second, because of these commonalities, the new converts served as 'examples' or 'patterns' (*topoi*) for others.[4] Verses 9–10 indicate that their turning, serving and waiting replicated the conduct and understanding of the entire church. The new converts discovered service in terms of how to think and behave with reference to Jesus Christ.

Third, several creedal assumptions emerge from verses 9–10. Turning from idols to God presumes an understanding of religion in concert with the Old Testament (1 Cor 10:18–20; 2 Cor 6:16). The Thessalonians learned that their new faith and practice occurred within a vicious spiritual environment (Eph 2:1–3). In addition, their conversion presumed an understanding of the resurrection, the Trinity, justification and final judgement. Furthermore, waiting became a spiritual discipline since sanctification and glorification were not immediate (Rom 8:30). Their new faith was not utopian but eschatological, extending from eternity past to eternal heaven. Conceptually, they received a triangular jigsaw puzzle, as it were. The three corners were 'turn', 'serve' and 'wait'. The sides and interior would be filled in through discipleship in the local church.

This passage as a gospel summary

First Thessalonians 1:9–10 provides a thematic gateway to the New Testament's understanding of the gospel and an excellent outline of Paul's message.[5] He wrote about the Thessalonians, 'You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.' Beginning with the second half of verse 9, the passage consists of a subject, three main verbs and five explanatory clauses. Structurally, the text may be illustrated in this way in the English Standard Version:

You:	turned	to God	from idols
	(to) serve	the living and true God	
	(to) wait	for His Son from heaven	
		whom he raised from the dead	
		Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come	

4 The same linkage of imitation and example/pattern is found in Philippians 3:17 and 2 Thessalonians 3:9. (All Bible citations are from the ESV, unless otherwise indicated.)

5 For a recent discussion of this issue, see Antonio Pitta, 'A Peg to Hang 1 Thessalonians On? Nature and Function of 1 Thess 1:9–10', *Biblica* 101 (2020): 87–106.

The passage may also be displayed in a poetic format that refers to the past, present and future:

Past	you turned to God from idols
Present	to serve the living and true God
Future	to wait for his Son from heaven,
	whom he raised from the dead,
	Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

'You'

The subject of the sentence, 'you', refers primarily to former pagan Thessalonians. Within the context of the verse, we may identify the subjects as idolaters upon whom the wrath of God was abiding. Testimony from the two Thessalonian letters reveals the previous mindset and lifestyle of these converts. They had been persecutors of Christians (1 Thess 2:14), sexually immoral and impure (4:3, 5, 7). They were enslaved in spiritual darkness (5:5–6), for they did 'not know God and [did] not obey the gospel' (2 Thess 1:8). They were 'evil and wicked men', lacking faith (3:2). This report is verified by Paul's depiction of the hostile environment the new believers faced as repentant idolaters: 'You received the word in much affliction' (1 Thess 1:6; 3:3; 2 Thess 1:4, 6) and 'much conflict' (2:2). Like Paul, they 'suffered the same things from [their] own countrymen' (2:14; 2 Thess 1:5).

'Turned'

The first verb, 'turned', carries a moral, intellectual and religious sense. It points to a change in understanding, belief and spiritual orientation. Scholars classify the verb within the semantic domain that includes 'repent' and 'born again'.[6] In other words, to turn indicates repentance and conversion. This nuance is clearly indicated in verse 9 using the twin prepositional phrases following 'you turned'—'to God' and 'from idols'.

Why turn? The answer is suggested in the text using the two infinitives, 'to serve' and 'to wait'. Since infinitives can indicate purpose, as if to say 'in order to', the action of the passage may be paraphrased as follows: 'You turned [repented or converted] *in order to* serve God and to wait for his Son who rescues us from the wrath to come.'[7] In other words, they turned from dead and false imposters to embrace the true and active Christ, and they anticipated his promised return. Those who did not repent and did not serve the Son or wait for his deliverance remained without 'hope and without God in the world' (Eph 2:12). In short, to secure the blessing of deliverance from God's eschatological wrath, the Thessalonians had to forsake idolatry.

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6 Walter Bauer describes the meaning as 'a change of mind … especially a change in the sinner's relation with God', in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 301. Johannes P. Lowe and Eugene A. Nida place the term within the subset 'change in one's belief' in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains,* vol. 1, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 373. A similar use appears in Galatians 4:9 with the sense of turning away: 'But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back (*epistrephō*) again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?'

7 This is the case especially when following verbs of motion, such as 'turn', according to Joseph Smith and Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963), 381.

'Idols'

Notice the twin adjectives attached to the noun 'God'—'living' and 'true'. The adjective 'true' combines the aspects of real, dependable and genuine versus the illusory, unfaithful and false nature of idols. The adjective 'living' indicates both 'alive' and 'active' as opposed to idols, which are dead and impotent. Paul and the New Testament more broadly share the Old Testament understanding of idols as lifeless, useless, empty, false, shameful, wicked and harmful depictions of deity.[8]

Consider these citations from the Old Testament regarding the vanity of idols: 'gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell' (Deut 4:28) and 'a god that cannot save' (Is 45:20b). Jeremiah 10:5 says, 'Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.' Nevertheless, idols are also spiritually destructive because of the demonic powers behind them (Mt 12:28; 1 Cor 10:20). In the words of Psalm 115:8, 'Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.'

Further, the Bible declares that perpetual conflict exists between God and all would-be divine imitators. Paul wrote, 'What agreement has the temple of God with idols?' (2 Cor 6:16). Jesus described this tension in clear terms with respect to 'mammon' (i.e. money; Mt 6:24). The following thematic depiction of this verse reveals the antithetical and antagonistic dimensions of idolatry:

> No one can serve two masters.
> Either the one he hates
> and the other he loves,
> or the one he is devoted to
> and the other he despises.
> You cannot serve God and Mammon.[9]

Notice the various parallels and contrasts. The first and last sentences are indicative. Jesus states a simple fact that should be obvious to all: just as we cannot serve two human masters, we cannot worship two divine lords. The impossibility of dual servitude is self-evident, for it is impossible to serve both God and mammon (idols). The subject 'no one' reveals the universal nature of the dilemma and includes everyone in the impossibility. It implies that every person must serve one or the other, but not both. There is no neutral ground to which one can flee concerning idolatry.

The vocabulary of the other phrases further demonstrates this fact. 'To serve' in this context means 'to be a slave'. Slaves were very much aware of belonging to another. Such a relationship demanded absolute dependence, total commitment and exclusivity. By virtue of their position, 'masters' were the undisputed and final authority in the lives of their slaves. To 'serve God', therefore, implies a full, loving commitment to God. Likewise, 'to hate' was equally absolute and totalitarian. Hatred

8 Regarding the Old Testament roots of 'living', see for instance Deut 5:26; Josh 3:10; Ps 42:2; and for 'true', Ex 34:6; 2 Chr 15:3. Perhaps the most direct parallel for both terms is found in Jeremiah 10:10, 'But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King.'

9 K. E. Bailey, *Poets and Peasants and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 112.

indicates an aversion or hostility to a person. 'Devoted to' and 'despise' indicated irreconcilable opposites. 'Devoted to' meant 'to cling to', 'to join', or idiomatically 'to glue oneself to' and 'to become one with'. 'Despise' indicated a feeling of scorn and contempt, whereby one considered another worthless. Thus, to love and serve mammon (idols) meant hatred of God and, conversely, to love and serve God meant hatred of mammon.

Indeed, as this passage indicates, repentance from idolatry is central to the gospel. Idols come in all shapes and sizes for various individuals and groups. At a microcosmic level, idolatry manifests itself in the form of God-substitutes: relationships, goals, activities and lifestyles that demand our attention, affection, time and money apart from God and his law. Individually, idol worship involves the construction of one's identity and lifestyle independent of God as misplaced imitation (imaging Satan rather than God). In fact, at its root, idolatry is the sin of self-deification, aspiring to be 'like God' (Gen 3:5). At the macroscopic level, false gods and gospels appear in the form of alternative religions, worldviews and ideologies.[10] For all these reasons, Paul summarized the three-dimensional gospel in terms of repentance from false gods, destructive communities and alternative religions.

'Serve'

The second verb, 'serve', can be defined as 'loving service', 'to serve the demands of another', 'to be under the control of some influence' and 'to be a slave'.[11] As we saw in our examination of Matthew 6:24 above, Jesus declared that service to God means 'enslavement', which implies absolute dependence, total commitment and exclusivity.

The slaves of Christ, however, are also 'servants of one another'. Christians are instructed, 'Through love serve one another' (Gal 5:13). Paul (Rom 12:7) and Peter taught that God gives spiritual gifts to the church for service: 'As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace' (1 Pet 4:10). Phoebe was called a 'servant of the church' (Rom 16:1) and Epaphras was affirmed as 'our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf' (Col 1:7). Likewise, Paul boasted that Timothy manifested his 'proven worth' because he 'served with me in the gospel' (Phil 2:22).

'Wait'

The third verb, 'wait', means to remain in a state of expectancy concerning a future event—to 'await', 'wait for', or 'wait until'. Depending on the context, the verb may be nuanced as 'sustained expectation',[12] 'suffering expectation' or even 'groaning expectation' (Rom 8:19). Clearly, the term implies an eschatological significance. The

10 The forms can be explicitly religious (Islam, New Age, Hinduism), ideologically secular (communism, National Socialism, Imperial Japan, North Korean Juche), or implicitly religious (consumerism, sports fanaticism, self-fulfilment, romantic love, gender).

11 Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 205.

12 G. G. Findlay, cited by Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 54.

context of verse 10 makes this obvious, since we 'wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.'

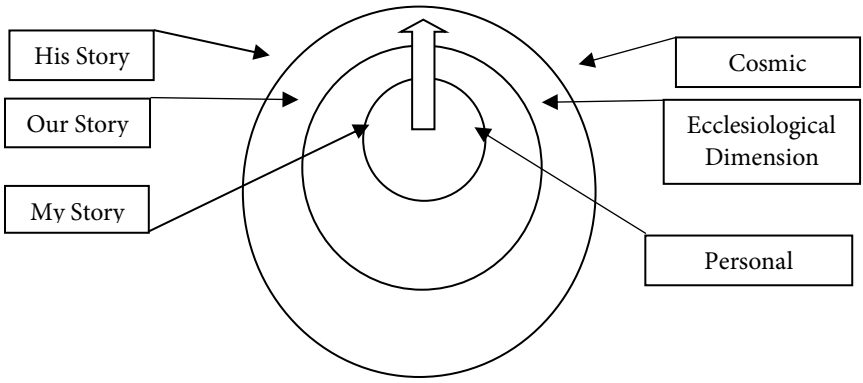
It is insightful to ponder the various aspects of our eschatological waiting within the broader New Testament. Not only deliverance from future divine wrath, but the believer's future expectation includes 'resurrection' (Acts 24:15), 'adoption as sons' (Rom 8:23), the 'Spirit of righteousness' (Gal 5:5), 'Jesus Christ to be revealed' (1 Cor 1:7), 'eternal life' (Jude 1:21), 'citizenship in heaven' (Phil 3:20), 'the kingdom' (Mk 15:43) and 'Christ to bring salvation' (Heb 9:28). We are awaiting Jesus Christ, 'until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet' (Heb 10:13). We are 'looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet 3:13). Furthermore, the New Testament associates our waiting with 'hope' for the 'resurrection of the dead' (Acts 23:6), 'glory of God' (Rom 5:2), 'riches of his glorious inheritance' (Eph 1:8), 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col 1:27), a 'crown' (1 Thess 2:19), 'the living God' (1 Tim 4:10), 'eternal life' (Tit 1:2), and 'grace' (1 Pet 1:13).

The gospel in three dimensions

First Thessalonians 1:9–10 implies, as well, three dimensions of the gospel:

1. Personal and individual: You (personally) turn, serve and wait.
2. Corporate and ecclesiological: You (as the church) serve God and others.
3. Cosmic and eschatological: You (together) await the 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'.

These ideas can also be demonstrated pictorially:



Our personal and individual salvation (my story) is crucial, basic and glorious. But the gospel is not just about us. Our personal redemption from sin and Satan is necessary and magnificent. And our individual reconciliation with God and others is restorative and precious. But these blessings are not the end of the story, for we are not redeemed for our sake alone. In fact, our individual stories are defined by the church, the redeemed community of God (our story). We do not serve and worship God in isolation or autonomy. Our identities and destinies are determined by God's mission in the world through the body of Christ. Most importantly, our redemptive stories and the story of the church's mission are ultimately defined by the eternal and cosmic, Trinitarian mission of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (his story).

In terms of the passage from 1 Thessalonians 1, serving is the fruit of repentance in three dimensions. On the personal level, service means being a disciple, follower or worshipper of Jesus Christ. Within the ecclesiological dimension, serving means, simply, loving one another. In the words of Galatians 5:13, as quoted above, Christians 'through love serve one another'. On the cosmic level, we serve the true and living God, the gospel, as well as God's mission in the world. For this reason, Paul identified himself variously as a 'servant of God' (Tit 1:1), 'servant of Christ Jesus' (Rom 1:1), 'servant of this gospel' (Gal 3:7; Col 1:23), and 'servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God' (Col 1:25).

Similarly, Titus 2:11–14 summarizes the three dimensions of the gospel (personal, ecclesiological and eschatological) with reference to the mission of God:

> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age [personal], waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ [cosmic], who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works [church].

The converts in Thessalonica had turned ('renounced ungodliness'), served ('zealous for good works'), and waited ('for our blessed hope'). This meant transformation in three realms:

Personal: Repentance from a pagan lifestyle: hedonism, immorality and idolatry
Church: Repentance from a cultural identity based on participation in pagan communities (spiritual and civic), as well as from economic dependence upon patronage and guilds
Cosmic: Repentance from pagan worldviews (*Pax Romana*, for example) and false religiosities (polytheism)

The three-dimensional gospel, therefore, can be summarized with reference to this passage but also with reference to the broader biblical worldview. In the beginning, because of his great love and glory, God created a physical environment in which to tabernacle with the crown of creation, mankind. Humanity's great reward and goal is the presence of God himself. Ever since the entrance of sin, all that God does is redemptive and re-creative, designed to make us holy so that we can dwell with him forever in a holy environment. The incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ accomplish this plan, because Jesus finishes the work that Adam and Israel failed to do. The project manager, so to speak, is the Holy Spirit, who will bring about the 'renewal of all things' (Mt 19:28) in a 'new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells', to use the words of 2 Peter 3:13. In short, God is in the process of populating his church, and one day he will dwell with us forever in his kingdom, his new tabernacle, the entire earth and the renewed creation—to his glory and our everlasting blessing.

Alternative gospels

Within the spiritual environment dominated by sin and Satan (Eph 2:1–3), however, the antithesis of the three gospel dimensions (personal, church, cosmic) is mani-

fested as an idolatrous trinity of false gods, substitute communities, and alternative gospels:[13]

Antithesis of 'my story': It's all about me—self-deification, autonomy, and personal fulfilment

Antithesis of 'our story': It's all about my family, race, clan, gang, team, social class or nation

Antithesis of 'his story': It's all about my religion, myth, worldview, utopia, or ideology

The recipients of Paul's letter in Thessalonica had been redeemed from this idolatrous trinity. According to Colossians 1:13–14, 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.' On the ecclesiological level, they became members of the body of Christ, the church, whose task is to communicate the good news throughout the earth. In this way, they participated in God's mission of re-creation through the redeemed community. For according to Ephesians 3:10, God's plan is fulfilled because 'through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.' On the cosmic level, the Thessalonians discovered that 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come' (2 Cor 5:17). They were incorporated into God's redemptive plan, his 'new creation', which began in Genesis and which will be fulfilled in Revelation. In the 'new heaven and new earth' (Rev 21:1), they will receive an 'eternal inheritance' (Heb 9:15) and a new 'citizenship' (Phil 3:20) in a new, God-centred civilization (Revelation 21–22).

Conclusion

The Thessalonians discovered the three-dimensional gospel in this passage. The terms 'turn', 'serve' and 'wait' were shorthand for Paul's evangelistic preaching. His readers learned how to think and live by applying his message. They embraced their roles in God's redemptive drama. They discovered where they came from, where they were and where they were going, according to the biblical worldview. They became active participants in God's redemptive plan.

'Turn' implied a crowded and competitive context which was inherently polemical, since repentance entails a holistic change of affiliation. 'Serve' indicated personal realignment with something far bigger than personal destiny or well-being, as converts became members of the *ekklēsia*, called out from other worldviews and called for or before the Lord to fulfil his agenda on earth. 'Wait' implied an 'already–not yet' dynamic, an eschatological trajectory that would climax in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13).

Thus, even though our personal salvation is glorious, the gospel is not just about us individually. We do not serve and worship God in isolation. Our gospel is not homocentric, for we are not redeemed for our sake alone. In fact, our individual stories are defined by the church and our destinies are determined by God's mission

13 For an insightful discussion about self-idolatry and identity in modernity, see Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God in an Inhuman World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021).

in the world through the body of Christ. And the church's mission is ultimately defined by the eternal mission of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

First Thessalonians 1:9–10 tells us how to become a Christian—by turning from idolatry to the living and true God. It tells us that the Christian life is all about service to God and others. The disciples of Jesus Christ also wait and pray with the aspiration, 'May your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Mt 6:10, GNT).

The Christian gospel is simple, but it is not simplistic. It is more than a remedy for personal sin and broken relationships. It is not a formula for a successful life or prosperity. Rather, the gospel is a manifesto for a new, eschatological civilization. It is about a new Eden, paradise restored and the everlasting tabernacle of God on earth. The gospel concerns the ancient promise of God fulfilled: 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God' (Rev 21:3).

ERT (2023) 47:1, 62–87

Towards a Theology of Race and Ethnicity

Prabo Mihindukulasuriya

Contemporary confrontations on ethnic identity, racial justice, and the challenges of life in multicultural societies make it imperative for Christians to examine how Scripture teaches us to view race and ethnicity. This article identifies fundamental theological orientations that can help us live faithfully as disciples of Christ amidst the conflicting winds of polarization, ethno-religious nationalism, systemic racism, and hyper-sensitive political correctness.

Here we are, in the third decade of the 21st century, utterly perplexed by the polarization of public opinion across the world between multiculturalism and xenophobia, political correctness and racism, globalization and a clash of civilizations. Does ethnicity mean anything beyond a cultural construction? Does it contribute something essential to our personal and collective identities? What is its place in human rights and civic duties? What role should it play in a nation's politics and distribution of public goods? These are just some of the issues that are being debated, sometimes flaring into violent conflict, in every part of the world. Therefore, Christian communities everywhere must refresh our theological understandings of this complex and emotive issue.

A paradox of our time: ethnicity between political correctness and racism

On one hand, the 20th century witnessed unprecedented improvements in interracial relations in many societies. The horrors of the Holocaust forced the postwar world to reckon with the consequences not only of antisemitism but of racism as a whole. Decolonization forced the postcolonial world to face up to the oppressive ideological power of race theories, orientalism and paternalism. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognized that 'the inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.' Its Article 2 specifically affirmed, 'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.'

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The Civil Rights movement in the US (1954–1968) compelled the dismantling of racial segregation and enactment of laws against racial discrimination. Decades of internal resistance and international sanctions against the white-minority government of South Africa eventually abolished the system of apartheid in 1991. A few countries such as India, Singapore, Brazil, Canada and New Zealand adopted some form of bi- or multi-culturalism/lingualism as their national policy for social integration. In more recent years, some countries have experimented with programmes for 'affirmative action', 'scheduled castes' and the codification of 'political correctness' to remedy historical imbalances and discrimination against specific ethnic groups, among other categories of discriminated persons. In many Western liberal democratic societies, there is a perception that belonging to a visible ethnic minority (among other historically victimized groups) now elevates them to an especially entitled class of persons with privileges and protections (e.g. laws against racial slurs and stereotyping) not available to persons of the majority-race community.

Yet, on the other hand, towards the end of the 20th century, we also witnessed shocking race-related atrocities or refusals to acknowledge them. During the Holocaust era (1933–1945), the German Nazi regime persecuted and systematically murdered over six million Jews, almost two million ethnic Poles, and 220,000 Roma, among others. The Turkish government barely acknowledges the earlier Armenian Genocide (1914–1923) which took between 600,000 and 1.5 million lives. In the 1970s and 1980s, ethnic riots were perpetrated by indirect state support or inaction against Tamils in Sri Lanka and Sikhs in India. After eradicating the Tamil Tiger rebels in its civil war (1983–2009), Sinhala ethno-nationalism has become more belligerent in Sri Lanka, not lessened. 'Ethnic cleansing' was practised during the Bosnia War (1992–1995) between Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims. Between 500,000 and one million ethnic Tutsi, Twa and moderate Hutus were killed in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

In the 21st century, we saw how easily ethnic hatred could be ignited even in such liberal and cosmopolitan cities as New York following 9/11. We have seen pogroms against Rohingya immigrants in Myanmar and the forced 're-education' camps for Uighurs in Xinjiang, China. The swings to economic nationalism in the US and UK are not always overtly motivated by racism, but they do make new immigrants and refugees feel unwelcome and insecure. More overtly, the upsurge of white supremacist and fascist movements in the US and Europe which openly propagate antisemitism and xenophobia is alarming. In a heartbreaking irony, Ethiopian Jews are crying out against discriminatory treatment at the hands of European Jews in Israel regarding allocations of employment and housing. Decades of complaints by the African-American community in the US against discriminatory treatment by the police flared up in weeks of rioting across the US and similar statue-toppling demonstrations in other countries after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 in Minneapolis was captured on video and seen around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has predictably exposed many local and global disparities, including racial prejudices. Congested living conditions, subsistence daily-wage employment and lack of internet access suddenly forced migrant workers (from different regions in the same country, or from different countries) to struggle

for survival while dealing with aggravated xenophobic mistreatment as whole cities became hostile to groups rumoured to be 'super-spreaders' of the virus.[1]

In this paradoxical and perplexing global situation, the missional church needs to refresh its worldview perspective on ethnicity. This paper endeavours to offer a framework of theological affirmations about ethnicity which emerge from a biblical worldview of humankind as part of God's creation and mission.

Definitions

To reflect theologically on the issues of race and ethnicity, we may begin by paying attention to how sociologists have tried to understand these complex terms.

Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann define a race as 'a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent'.[2] They point out that 'systematic physiological differences among many human groups are obvious' with 'skin colour [being] only one example.'[3] However, 'deciding which of these physiological differences should serve as racial markers is a complicated process.' For example, 'blood types, hair textures, skin colors, and body forms vary, sometimes dramatically, not only between populations we often think of as racially distinct, but within as well. In fact, the extent of genetic variations among individuals within supposed racial groups typically exceeds the variation between the groups.'

'Despite the lack of a biological basis for the conception of distinct human races', Cornell and Hartmann state that 'race still wields monumental power as a social category. In many societies, the idea of biologically distinct races remains a fixture in the popular mind, a basis of social action, a foundation of government policy, and often a justification for distinctive treatment of one group by another.'[4]

German sociologist Max Weber defined ethnic groups as 'those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration. … It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.'[5] In similar terms, Richard A. Schermerhorn described an ethnic group as 'a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood'.[6] He identified the following among such 'symbolic elements': kinship patterns, geographical concentration, religious affiliation, language and physical differences.

To be clear, the reference to race and ethnicity as 'social constructs' does not mean that they are arbitrary sociological categories, false or contrived, with no basis

1 'List of Incidents of Xenophobia and Racism Related to the 2019–20 Coronavirus Pandemic', https://worldea.org/yourls/47104.

2 Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2007), 25.

3 Cornell and Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race*, 23.

4 Cornell and Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race*, 24.

5 Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 389.

6 Richard A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 12.

in genetic lived experience, which therefore can be dismissed as unworthy of theological reflection. In fact, it is precisely because these are socially invested and relationally experienced human realities that they invite close attention from a scriptural point of view.

Theological affirmations

Creation perspective

Every ethnic community has an 'origin story' about who their ancestors were and where they came from, how they overcame adversities and adversaries, how they created a distinct way of life and what they achieved, and why it is important to safeguard those memories (including grievances against other ethnic groups), kinship bonds and heritages and pass them on to the next generation. Some elements of these collective 'memories' (transmitted by oral, written and artifactual traditions) can be historically verified to some extent, but others cannot. They are simply believed, often selectively and coloured by ideology.

The proto-historical and archetypal 'origin story' of Genesis 1–11 acts as a metanarrative in which all other local narratives (including ethnic ones) are nested. It sets important worldview parameters which control, challenge or elevate the claims of local narratives.[7]

Our common God-related humanity precedes our ethnicity.

The Genesis creation narrative makes two foundational affirmations about our humanity. First, all human beings are created in God's image and likeness and therefore have the capacity to relate to him and represent his rule on earth (Gen 1:26–27). Second, all human beings, in their successive generations, are to increase in population and spread across the continents to exercise their equally God-mandated responsibility to govern the earth (Gen 1:28). These two theological truths precede, and are reaffirmed in, the diversification of humankind into ethno-national groups in the flood narrative.

The biblical conviction that all human beings are equally endowed with 'rational souls' and are equally entitled and demonstrably able to possess and rule their lands led Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) to defend the rights of Amerindians against arguments justifying their conquest and enslavement. This justification relied on the Aristotelian idea that some races were 'natural slaves' who were inherently incapable of using their lands productively and governing their communities justly and peacefully, and therefore they needed more superior nations to subdue and govern them, for their own good, as a moral imperative.[8] Unfortunately, it took even de las Casas some time to comprehend the full implications of the Bible's teaching that all human beings bore the 'image of God'. He, among others, proposed the importation of African slaves into the Caribbean as an alternative to the enslavement of native

7 John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015); Walton and Tremper Longman III, *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018).

8 Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apologetic History of the Indies*, https://worldea.org/yourls/47105.

Amerindians, which led to the growth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Later in his life, Las Casas bitterly regretted his part in promoting this crime against humanity.[9]

Our ethnicity and ethnic diversity are part of God's original purpose for humankind, not a result of the 'the curse of Babel'.

Although the proto-historical flood narrative (Gen 6–9) comes after the fall (Gen 3–4), God's original intentions are reaffirmed in his commands to Noah and his descendants. All human beings bear God's image and are descended from one family, Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth (9:6, 18), and they are to migrate across the earth and populate it (v. 7). The genealogy of Noah's descendants in the 'Table of Nations' (Gen 10) introduces the major Old Testament theme of 'the nations' or 'the peoples' (Heb. *ha-ggōwyim*, which occurs 561 times in the OT).[10] The narrator's refrain about the separation of people by their families and languages highlights the ethno-linguistic diversity and geographic diffusion of the nations (Gen 10:5, 20, 31, 32).

Therefore, the entire human family, in all its ethnic diversity, is placed under the covenant and blessings of preservation and providence God declared to Noah (Gen 8:21–9:17).

That God intended ethno-linguistic diversity within the human family as part of his created order is also confirmed by the biblical narrator's choice to place the 'Table of Nations' (Gen 10) before the Tower of Babel narrative (Gen 11), which is when the dispersion of nations actually takes place. It is precisely because a rebellious humanity conspired to amass around one civilizational centre and refused to spread across the earth as God had originally commanded that he 'confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth' (v. 9). Vinoth Ramachandra explains:

> So, while human beings share a common species nature as homo sapiens, common conditions of existence, shared life experiences, needs, wants and so on, they also conceptualize and respond to these in quite different ways. Their identity is a product of a dialectical interplay between the universal and the particular, between what they all share and what is culturally specific. Even the universally shared features do not impinge on human consciousness 'raw'; they are mediated through linguistic cultural symbols and acquire different meanings in different cultures.[11]

Apart from linguistic and cultural differences, the Bible matter-of-factly refers to physical characteristics such as skin colour as a distinguishing racial marker without attaching the slightest notion of superiority or inferiority. As in Isaiah's description of Black African Cushites as 'a people tall and smooth' (18:2), Jeremiah's

9 Lawrence Clayton, 'Bartolomé de las Casas and the African Slave Trade', *History Compass* 7 (2009): 1526–41.

10 Richard Bauckham proposes that the 70 nations named in the 'Table of Nations' constitute a 'representative geography' symbolic of all nations on earth, where the farthest regions known to the pre-exilic Israelites (such as Sheba and Cush) represent nations which lived beyond the horizon of their limited geographic knowledge. Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 63–65.

11 Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 134–35.

rhetorical question, 'Can the Ethiopian [Heb. *Kūšī*, Cushite] change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' (13:23) attributes no value judgement to the skin colour of members of this Black African empire who came into contact with Israelite society under different historical circumstances.[12] Although ostensibly noted as 'other' (or, more neutrally, 'another'), 'blackness' as a racial phenotype is nowhere associated in the Bible with sin and moral inferiority. In fact, when God punishes Miriam for her jealous resentment against Moses for marrying a Cushite wife (Num 12:1), he makes her (with apparently intentional irony) 'leprous … (as) snow' (cf. Ex 4:6 and 2 Kgs 5:27), a simile for whiteness (Isa 1:18; Ps 51:9; Dan 7:9)![13]

On the related issue of the unfair preference for fairer skin over darker skin complexion that is widely prevalent in traditional African and Asian cultures, although biblical writers refer to the 'blackening' or darkening of one's skin as an undesirable outcome of suffering forced exposure to the sun (e.g. Job 30:30; Jer 8:21; Lam 5:10), the point that 'black is beautiful' is powerfully made by the Beloved in the Song of Solomon:

> I am black but lovely,
> O daughters of Jerusalem,
> Like the tents of Kedar,
> Like the curtains of Solomon.
> Do not stare at me because I am swarthy, for the sun has burned me.
> My mother's sons were angry with me;
> They made me caretaker of the vineyards. (Song 1:5–6)

God has worked in the ethnic histories of all nations, not just Israel's, so that all may seek him.

The uniqueness of God's relationship with Israel is that He chose to work in its history *for the sake of* the other nations. God's sovereign intervention in the histories of all nations is explicitly stated, in fact, as a warning against Israel's tendency to pridefully remember its 'exceptionalism' while forgetting the purpose for which they had been chosen: '"Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?" declares the Lord. "Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?"' (Amos 9:7).

In Lystra, Paul argued that although the Creator had 'permitted all the nations to go their own ways; yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness' (Acts 14:16–17). God's common grace to all nations has remained a constant indicator to their sense of the numinous, even though they have failed to recognize him. In Athens, Paul made a similar appeal to the city's famed forum of philosophers. He asserted the creational truth of humankind's common origins: 'He made also *of one blood* every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth.' The Aborigines Protection Society founded by Christian humanitarians in 1837 took their Latin motto '*Ab Uno Sanguine*' from this text. They opposed the theory of polygenesis (that different races evolved separately) which made even

12 Rodney Steven Sadler Jr., *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

13 For a discussion of this episode, see Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin?* 32–40.

Charles Darwin dread that 'the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races throughout the world.'[14] The Athenians were well-known for their belief that they were superior to other city-states because their ancestors had literally sprung up from the very soil of their native Attica. Paul was probably aware of this notion and was challenging it.[15] He added furthermore that God had since then sovereignly superintended over the histories of every nation: 'having ordained times before appointed, and the bounds of their dwellings' (Acts 17:26 YLT). Paul then made the startling theological connection that God involved himself in this way so 'that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us', as in fact some of their own philosopher-poets had falteringly done (v. 27).

Theologically, therefore, God entrusts us with our ethno-cultural 'groundedness' or particularity to enable us to create ideational 'resources' to seek him, until he reveals himself to every culture, incarnated as he chose to be in one of them.

Fall perspective

The narrative of the fall (Gen 3-4) teaches us that the whole human family and all its ethnic branches have been affected by sin. As Andrew Walls put it, 'Humanity was vile everywhere, not only in Ceylon.'[16] As with every other aspect of our humanness, sin distorts the way we think and behave in relation to our own ethnicity and that of others.

Theologically, our fallenness is a consequence of our human desire to create a moral order ('the knowledge of good and evil', Gen 3:16–17) apart from God's order. Ethnocentrism, the attempt to view the world from the vantage point of one's own ethnic group and to impose that worldview on everyone else, is certainly part of that overreaching 'will to power'.

At the most basic level (as with the difference of male and female in Gen 3:16b), the diversity or difference which God desired for good has now become a cause for division, fear and struggle for dominance. In the sphere of ethnic relations, sinfulness is commonly manifested by feelings of superiority or inferiority in relation to the 'other', which results in various forms of essentializing or stereotyping (that every person from one ethnic community necessarily shares one or more common traits), followed by shaming, discrimination and various degrees of exclusion.

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14 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, part 1, in *The Works of Charles Darwin*, edited by Paul H. Barrett and R. B. Freeman, vol. 21 (London: Routledge, 2016), 162.

15 Josine H. Blok, 'Gentrifying Genealogy: On the Genesis of the Athenian Autochthony Myth', in *Antike Mythen: Medien, Transformationen und Konstruktionen,* edited by Ueli Dill and Christine Walde Page (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 251–74.

16 Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 66. Walls was alluding, of course, to Rev. Reginold Heber's missionary hymn 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains' (1892), with the stanza 'What though the spicy breezes / Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle; / Though every prospect pleases, / And only man is vile: / In vain with lavish kindness / The gifts of God are strown; / The heathen in his blindness / Bows down to wood and stone.'

The sin of ethnic competitiveness and strife is, sadly, real.

The Bible gives us a realistic view of human sinfulness. We do not do anyone any favours by pretending that competitiveness does not exist in multiethnic societies, where such benefits such as state or NGO funding for education, housing or livelihood development, or opportunities for wealth creation such as government contracts and access to markets are allocated on the basis of ethnicity.

God wanted the Israelites to be economically self-sufficient and respected among their neighbouring nations. He promised that, conditional upon their covenant faithfulness, 'you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. The Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath' (Deut 28:12–13). But he warned that if they disobeyed him, 'The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail' (28:43–44). The spectre of ethnic minorities finding insidious ways to dominate the majority community in different ways is a perennial theme of ethnonationalist alarmism. The reason why God warns the Israelites of the real possibility of this undesirable scenario is not to rouse the Israelites to xenophobia, but to alert them to the commonsensical truth that covenant faithfulness (which included fair treatment of the alien) is the only safeguard against interethnic competitiveness and strife.

As Ramachandra observes, 'When a majority community defines itself as a nation and claims the culture of ownership of the state, it provokes its minorities to define themselves too as nations. Minority ethnic nationalism is often a defensive reaction against majority nationalism.'[17] Missionaries have sometimes exploited these rivalries and further embittered existing jealousies. The discriminatory educational and ordination policies of the White Fathers in Rwanda and Burundi in favour of the Tutsi minority, whom they identified as 'natural leaders' whose facial and physical features were supposed to resemble Europeans more closely, gradually led to majority Hutu resentment, culminating in a bloodbath.[18] Today's Christian NGOs must be careful not to follow the disastrous policies of their missionary forebears by favouring one ethnic community over others. Except in situations where particular ethnic communities have been targeted for economic deprivation, it is advisable to assist disadvantaged communities based on common economic needs that cut across ethnic lines.

We are all susceptible to racial biases, prejudices, insensitivities and resentments.

Most people would probably not think of themselves as ethnocentric and racist. However, the effect of our fallenness is so insidious that even though we reject these wrong attitudes on a cognitive level, we may yet have deep-seated biases and blind spots on an affective level that, when they surface, may even shock us. What Paul confessed about our innate sinfulness in general terms applies to our ethnic consciousness too: 'For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate' (Rom 7:15).

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17 Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, 142.

18 Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58–81.

Much of the white Evangelical pushback, not just against 'critical race theory', 'wokeness' and 'cancel culture' but also against embracing social justice as an integral part of Christian mission, is based on the unwillingness of a significant proportion of US Evangelicals to recognize that sin can be systemic and structural as much as it is personal. They also manifest a blindness to the realities that individualism and capitalism are ideologies as tainted by human fallenness as communalism and socialism are.[19] Furthermore, like many secular philosophical constructs, Marxian theories of power and conflict can be useful analytical tools for Christians to uncover hidden evils in society although the solutions which they offer may fall far short of the transformation that can only come from Christ.[20]

One could find numerous instances of casual prejudice in the biblical narratives. Naomi presumed that, like Orpah, Ruth would return to her Moabite kinfolk and their beliefs. She said, 'Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law' (Ruth 1:15). But Ruth's decision showed that she was not simply hardwired by ethnic loyalties: 'Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God' (v. 16c). Similarly, David presupposed that Ittai the Gittite (i.e. from Gath, the same Philistine hometown as Goliath), being a recent immigrant, would choose safety over supporting David: 'You are a foreigner and also an exile; return to your own place. You came only yesterday' (2 Sam 15:19–20). But Ittai's response was unexpected: 'As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be' (v. 21).

Jesus reverses this process by eliciting counterintuitive responses from his Gentile interlocutors to demonstrate to his Jewish audience that the former are exemplarily qualified for inclusion in God's kingdom because of their faith in him, whereas the latter lag behind. On the often-misunderstood dialogue of Jesus with the Syrophoenician woman (Mk 7:24–30), Dick France observed:

> The whole encounter builds up to the totally positive conclusion of verses 29 to 30, while the preceding dialogue serves to underline the radical nature of this new stage in Jesus's ministry into which he has allowed himself to be 'persuaded' by the woman's realism and wit. He appears like a wise teacher who allows, and indeed incites, his pupil to mount a victorious argument against the foil of his own reluctance. He functions as what in a different context might be called a 'devil's advocate', and is not 'disappointed' to be defeated in argument. As a result the reader is left more vividly aware of the reality of the problem of Jew-

19 For examples of the pushback, see Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021); Jon Harris, *Christianity and Social Justice: Religions in Conflict* (Ann Arbor, MI: Reformation Zion Publishing, 2021); Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2020).
20 See, for example, David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019); Vinoth Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018); Tony Campolo, *Partly Right: Learning from the Critics of Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008).

gentile relations, and of the importance of the step Jesus here takes to overcome it.[21]

It is sometimes possible that we could have prejudices against *our own* ethno-cultural group. Jesus was painfully aware that he was not accorded the honour he was due by some of his fellow Galileans because 'A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household' (Mk 6:4). When invited to follow 'Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph', Nathanael retorted, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' (Jn 1:45–46). This unfiltered skepticism revealed Nathanael's own low esteem of a fellow Galilean since Nathanael himself is later identified as 'Nathanael of Cana in Galilee' (21:2). We could unconsciously internalize culturally imposed social stratifications which make us accept the 'inferiority' of our ethno-cultural group, even to the extent of then seeking to 'ennoble' our culturally imposed ranking by creating speculative genealogies and alternative historiographies that claim a 'superior' origin. Although we are not sure precisely what he meant, we could still take a general warning from Paul about 'godless myths' (1 Tim 4:7) and to 'avoid foolish controversies and genealogies … for they are unprofitable and worthless' (Titus 3:9).

Particular habits of thought and behaviour could be shared across an ethnic group, and some of these may be sinful.

There are instances in the Bible where particular moral characteristics are attributed to a group of people. Paul quoted the Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 6th century BC) to chastise his Cretan readers: 'One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons"' (Tit 1:12). Paul added, 'This testimony is true. For this reason, reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth' (1:13). He also vented his frustration against the Galatians with the collective rebuke, 'You foolish Galatians!' (Gal 3:1). Luke even contrasted the collective disposition of one Jewish community with another when he commented about the Jews in Berea, 'Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica' (Acts 17:11).

Is it theologically acceptable to speak about characteristic virtues and vices that are specific to ethnic groups, without stereotyping and essentializing them?

First, like the Cretans, every ethnic community may acknowledge that there are indeed moral weaknesses to which they are particularly prone. This emic self-awareness is commonly reflected in their folk wisdom and humour.[22]

Second, as Paul reflexively does, the writers of Scripture (virtually all Jewish) were profoundly self-critical about the 'national sins' of their own ethnic community (e.g. Romans 2:17–25).

Third, although groups of people are described stereotypically, there is never an instance when an individual is singled out as having a certain characteristic *because* he or she belongs to a particular ethno-cultural group. These are important guidelines which help us to speak sensitively yet honestly about sins which may have

21 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 296.

22 E.g. Leon Rappoport, 'Prejudice, Pride, and Play in Ethnic Comedy', in *Punchlines: the Case for Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Humor* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2005), 31–44.

become embedded in the attitudes, ideologies and practices we have inherited through our ethnicity.

Historical sins of exploitation and oppression have complicated our memories and how we perceive 'others'.

The so-called 'curse of Ham' (Gen 9:25) was the most commonly cited biblical prooftext to justify the enslavement and exploitation of black Africans in Christian societies in Europe and America. However, as David Goldenberg's painstaking research has shown, this text was never applied to black Africans in early Jewish or Christian interpretation, most probably because Noah's curse was directed at Ham's son Canaan, and not even at his descendants. The application of the 'curse' to black Africans originated with Qur'anic interpreters in 7th-century Arabia 'when the Black became strongly identified with the slave class in the Near East, after the Islamic conquest of Africa'.[23] The misuse of this text in Christian societies first appears in the 15th century, when Portugal muscled its way into the African slave trade. Thereafter, 'as the Black slave trade moved to England and then America, the Curse of Ham moved with it.'[24] We need to be critically self-aware of the ambient historical conditions and ideological climate we live in, which often affects our ability to relate justly to the ethnic 'other'.

The attitudes of the ancient Israelites towards their neighbouring nations were shaped by their historical experiences of hostility or kindness, which made indelible impressions on their ethnic memory for generations. For example, the Israelites were to treat Edomites and Egyptians with kindness and gradual inclusion. 'You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not detest an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The sons of the third generation who are born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord' (Deut 23:6–7; cf. 1 Sam 15:6). In contrast, Moabites and Ammonites were to be treated with hostility and perpetual exclusion: 'No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam … to curse you' (Deut 23:3–6). These variations demonstrate that God wanted the Israelites to take their historical experiences seriously and formulate realistic policies based on them. The purpose was not to protect their nation's ethnic homogeneity, but to remain faithful to the Lord's covenant calling to holiness, justice and righteousness in the midst of the other nations.

On occasion, it was also necessary to contest the historical factuality of some ethnic 'memories'. When the king of Ammon stated his claim to the territory between the Arnon and Jabbok Rivers, demanding that Israel return it to his people, Jephthah accurately recounted the history of how Israel had come to possess it, including the fact that Israel had won it in a battle against Sihon king of the Amorites, who had already captured it from the Ammonites, and that Israel had since occupied that land for three hundred years, during which period the

23 David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 170.

24 Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham*, 175.

Ammonites had never attempted to reclaim it (Judg 11:12–28). Where reliable sources are available for credible examination of historical claims, it is important to do so even though the results may not produce amicable resolution or satisfactory redress in every instance. At best, finite human justice can only anticipate the perfect justice of God.

Redemption perspective

God announced his redemptive intervention in human history with explicit reference to 'all the families of the earth' in his call to Abram and Sarai to be the progenitors of that unique nation through whom he would bless all other nations (Gen 12:1–3). As Waldemar Janzen and Chris Wright have helpfully shown, God's distinct covenant instructions for Israel's communal life (including those pertaining to ethnic relations) act paradigmatically to inform us of our contemporary theological-ethical perspectives and responsibilities.[25] What God teaches Israel about its own ethnic identity and ethnic relations is therefore paradigmatically applicable to Christian practice.

As the climax and fulfilment of Israel's mission, the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus inaugurated God's transforming rule on earth. He creates a new global community obedient to God's kingship in every area of life, including our ethnic identities and practices. We learn to understand our ethnicity under the lordship of Christ and to submit all its resources to his service and glory.

Human community (including nationhood) is made possible by love of God and neighbour, not merely ethnic kinship.

Even in God's election of Israel as the nation uniquely chosen to move his 'salvation history' forward, God showed that redemption was based on covenant purity, not ethnic purity. The mass of ex-slaves whom Moses led out of Egypt were constituted 'among all the peoples' as God's unique 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex 19:5–6) by entering into covenant with God. Their covenant nationhood was not based on common ethnicity and endogamous kinship alone. God wanted them to include not only the descendants of Jacob but also 'the alien who is within your camps' when he 'establish[ed them] … as His people' (Deut 29:10–13). One of Simeon's sons was from a Canaanite wife (Gen 46:10) as were three of Judah's (38:2–5). The half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were descended from Joseph and his Egyptian wife (Gen 41:45, 50; 46:20). There were Israelites who were half-Egyptian (cf. Lev 24:10). A sizeable number are also described as a 'mixed multitude' (Ex 12:38; Num 11:4), presumably made up of former slaves of other ethnicities. Moses himself married a black African 'Cushite woman' (Num 12:11).[26] In the genealogies and censuses of the Pentateuch, the descendants of these non-Israelite peoples are never identified as 'outsiders'. In Israel's subsequent history too, covenant faith-

25 Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), 62–74, 183–86, 197–98, 320–21.

26 J. Daniel Hays writes that Cush 'is used regularly to refer to the area south of Egypt, and above the cataracts on the Nile, where a Black African civilization flourished for over two thousand years. Thus it is quite clear that Moses marries a Black African woman.' Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 71.

fulness to the Lord mattered more for inclusion within Israelite society than ethnic origin. Rahab and her Canaanite family (Josh 6:25) and Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4:10) are classic examples. The Kenites, who were the descendants of Jethro (Judg 1:16; 1 Chron 2:54), were gradually absorbed into the tribe of Judah.[27] Endogamous ethnic purity was required of Israel for the purpose of preserving covenant faithfulness (Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3–4). If that qualification was met, as we shall see, provision was made to absorb foreigners into the Israelite covenant community.

After the initial campaigns under Joshua when the Israelites established firm footholds throughout Canaan, most of the Canaanite nations were not dispossessed or annihilated. They were allowed to coexist in the land, albeit as a less-than-ideal 'ground reality' fraught with complications. God judged the Israelites for their syncretistic worship of Canaanite deities alongside him (Judg 2:11–20), but he determined that he 'will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk in it as their fathers did, or not. So the Lord allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua' (2:21–23). Unfortunately, the Israelites did not respond to this demographic challenge by reforming themselves as God desired. Instead, they resorted to periodically enslaving those non-Israelite populations among them (Judg 1:21, 27–36).

This too was regulated within covenant law. As instructed in Leviticus 25:44–46, the Israelites were repeatedly commanded to bestow equal treatment on non-Israelites pressed into forced labour in matters of justice and participation in worship (e.g. Lev 16:29; 17:8–15; 22:18–19; 25:6; Num 9:14; 15:14–16; 15:29–30).

Anticipating the reality that immigrants from other nations would seek refuge in Israel due to various reasons, Moses gave them the command to welcome them, and the historical rationale for it: 'When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God' (Lev 19:33–34).

In Israel's covenant law, resident aliens were singled out only for the bestowal of extra rights, not lesser. Their sustenance (along with that of widows and orphans) was prioritized as a matter of special attention for Israelite social righteousness (e.g. Deut 24:17–21; 26:13). Moreover, when the Lord put people 'in their place', the native-born Israelites were reminded that *they*, in fact, were immigrants and refugees on his land. 'The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with me' (Lev 25:23).

After the exile, returning Israelites were commanded not to drive out foreigners who had settled in the land as before. 'You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel' (Ezek 47:21–23). If God commanded his chosen people to be inclusive in this way, breaking with former categories of belonging and introducing new understandings of nationhood, how much more the other nations! This shows that

27 James T. Sparks, *The Chronicler's Genealogies: Towards an Understanding of 1 Chronicles 1–9* (Leiden: Brill and Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 224–27.

ethnic communities need not be locked into the patterns of the past, and that we can transcend 'primordial' ethnic histories with new paradigms of relationships.

By his incarnation, Jesus affirms the particularity of human racial and ethnic identity.

The incarnation of the Son, the second person of the eternal Trinity, as a first-century Galilean Jew is the greatest affirmation of God's good gift of our race-bound and encultured humanness. Jesus could authentically represent all of humankind before the Father because he became a member of one of its ethnic families. Jesus was conscious of his Israelite-Judahite identity and its significance for his messianic mission (e.g. Mt 10:5-6; 15:24; Jn 4:22). His Jewishness was also an integral part of the apostolic proclamation about his messiahship (e.g. Jn 1:11; Acts 2:22; Rom 1:3; 15:8; Gal 4:4–5).

There are many instances when Jesus can be seen behaving 'appropriately' within his Middle Eastern ethno-cultural milieu, even after the resurrection! One outstanding example occurs when, having arrived at Emmaus with his travelling companions, 'he acted as though he were going farther' (Lk 24:28). To a Westerner, this would appear to be somewhat dishonest behaviour. But as Kenneth Bailey explains:

> In the Middle East the unexpected invitation must be refused. The refusal is all the more required if the guest is of lower social rank than the host. … In Luke 24:28–29 we have, culturally speaking, the same scene. This time Jesus receives the unexpected invitation. As a courteous Oriental he 'made as though he would go further'. The two men, again in true Middle Eastern fashion, 'compel him' to stay. He is not forced against his will. Rather, they know he *must* refuse for the first fifteen minutes of discussion as a matter of honour. In order to convince him that they really *do* want him to stay … they gently drag him into the house.[28]

Such examples and the many wisdom sayings of Jesus (e.g. Mt 13:57; Lk 14:8–11, 28–29) also validate our cultural intelligence in becoming mindful about relating healthily to people from 'high-context' and 'low-context' cultures. While the anthropological avoidance–pursuit pairs of 'honour–shame', 'guilt–innocence' and 'fear–power' provide a useful general matrix for understanding why people from a particular culture tend to give more weight to some moral values while overriding others, it is important to remember that individuals from all cultures constantly operate within a matrix of all three axes.[29]

And yet, as deeply as Jesus identified with his Jewishness, he was, for that very reason, prophetically self-critical of the ethnocentric complacencies and hypocrisies of his compatriots (e.g. Mt 5:43–6:6; 23:1–39; Jn 8:37–59). As a consequence, he was himself excluded and victimized by the mainstream ethno-religious 'guardians' of his own people (e.g. Jn 9:22; 16:2).

Jesus therefore teaches and models for his disciples in every generation and culture how we ought to think about our own ethnic identity and how we ought to

28 Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 108.

29 For a discussion, see Darrell Whiteman, 'Shame/Honor, Guilt/Innocence, Fear/Power: A Missiological Response to Simon Cozens and Geoff Beech', *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 4 (2018): 348–56.

relate to our own ethnic community, as well as people of other ethnic communities. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37) epitomizes this teaching. Jesus implicitly changes his interlocutor's question, 'Who is my neighbour?' to 'How can I be a neighbour?' with the counter-intuitive twist of making a Samaritan the hero of the story. In other words, Jesus demonstrates that once we are in right relationship with God, we will learn to critically affirm our own ethnicity and act with counter-cultural love for the 'other' as one's own ethnic kin, doing both out of radical loyalty to God's just and merciful kingship. This ideal was well understood in the early church. It is poignantly expressed in the second-century *Letter to Diognetus*:

> For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. … They are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.[30]

Christ's redemptive work covers all of human activity and necessitates integral mission in the sphere of fallen human ethnicity.

Richard Mouw points out:

> The 'world', the cosmos, which Jesus came to save was bigger than the world he originally created. Not only did this world contain many more people than had populated the original Garden, but it was filled with the languages, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organizations, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values. … And these items were and are touched by human rebellion. They comprise sinful culture. But they do belong to the fullness of the cosmos for which Christ died; 'for God sent the Son into the cosmos, not to condemn the cosmos, but that the cosmos might be saved through him' (Jn 3:17).
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> Already in his earthly ministry Jesus showed something of his power as the Lord over all nature and culture. … He most certainly challenged existing habits,

30 *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, 5, https://worldea.org/yourls/47106.

> ideas, customs, and values. And in both subtle and obvious ways he confronted the existing patterns of commerce, politics, and ethnicity.[31]

Just as the gift of the Son in the particularity of a first-century Jewish male in the Incarnation was the greatest affirmation of God's good creation of our gendered and encultured humanness, by the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God affirmed the value of all vernacular languages as adequate media for communicating his revealed and saving truths to all cultures. Healing the 'curse' of Babel when people were confused and divided because they could not understand each other, Pentecost brought comprehension and unity precisely because now 'devout men from [the Jewish diaspora scattered among] every nation under heaven … came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing [the Spirit-baptized disciples] speak in his own language' (Acts 2:5–6).[32]

Paul clearly instructed his converts about the value of vernacular languages in the witness of the local church even above the (ab)use of unintelligible tongues-speaking. 'So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me' (1 Cor 14:9–11). Unlike all other ancient 'world religions', Christianity alone enables its local faith communities of every language and ethnicity to conduct its rites entirely in the vernacular of that community, including the reading or recitation of the sacred Scriptures, the celebration of the eucharist, preaching, and the offering of worship and prayers.

Andrew Walls has convincingly demonstrated how the 'translation principle' learned from the Incarnation and Pentecost makes Christianity not only a truly global movement, but a movement of 'polycentric globalization' from its very origin.[33] Therefore, as Lamin Sanneh has argued, contrary to the postcolonial myth of Christianity as a 'destroyer of indigenous cultures', the cross-cultural transmission of Christianity, especially in its Protestant tradition, has often resulted in the preservation and flourishing of local vernacular languages, leading to wider revivals of indigenous cultures.[34] These in turn have resulted in directly or indirectly stimulating movements for literacy and education, publishing of newspapers and literature, social reform and political emancipation.

Jesus' sufferings included antisemitism and, by extension, all forms of racism and ethnic violence.

The atrocious history of Jewish sufferings at the hands of Christians (and worse, that Christians were motivated in that hatred because of the crucifixion of Jesus)

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31 Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 112–13.

32 This insight was recognized by many early Christian exegetes such as Cyril of Jerusalem (*Lecture* 17.17), Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oration* 41), and Augustine of Hippo (*Commentary on the Psalms,* LV.10*)*.

33 Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 26–42.

34 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 122–228.

demonstrates that the perils of 'zeal without knowledge' (Rom 10:3) have more heinous repercussions when Christians violate their own admonitions. Christian antisemitism is all the more Christ-denying because, ironically, antisemitism was a factor in his crucifixion.

When Pilate had Jesus flogged and 'handed Him over' to his soldiers for crucifixion, they 'took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around Him' for a mock coronation (Mt 27:27–31; Mk 15:16–20; Lk 22:63–65; Jn 19:1–15). Since no Roman legions were stationed in Judea at the time, these soldiers were almost certainly the Samaritan and Syrian auxiliaries referred to by the historian Josephus.[35] Before the Roman occupation, the Samaritan and Syrian populations in surrounding areas had suffered losses and humiliations at the hands of Jewish rulers of the Hasmonean dynasty.[36] After the Roman takeover, they bitterly resented being placed under the rule of even the half-Jewish Herodian kings who tried to conciliate them. Their choice to strip Jesus naked and humiliate him with a mock coronation, taunting him with the chant 'Hail, King of the Jews!' has obvious anti-Jewish overtones. The soldiers used Jesus as a scapegoat to vent their hatred of the Jews for the past humiliations their ancestors had suffered under Jewish kings.

Jesus not only spoke to Samaritans, he even stayed with them in their village when invited (Jn 4:3–30, 39–42). When another Samaritan village refused him hospitality because he was Jewish, he rebuked his disciples for even suggesting they call on God to punish them (Lk 9:54–56). The fact that Jesus was a very different kind of Jew and a very different kind of king was entirely lost on the Samaritan and Syrian soldiers. Jesus silently bore their ethnic hatred, breaking the cycle of violence reaching back centuries into the past and centuries into the future, until he judges the nations and brings them peace.

Authentic Christian discipleship must include obedience to Christ in the area of our ethnic perceptions and relationships.

Our restored relationship with God and growing discipleship in Christ transforms our ethnicity in two ways. First, we receive a new identity in Christ that becomes more central to who we are than any other source of identity, including our ethnic identities. Before, our ethnicity (and other such identity markers) gave us our primary sense of identity (who we are), belonging (whose we are) and purpose in life (why we are). Now, we receive our primary sense of identity, belonging and destiny in our relationship with the triune God. Paul explains this new reality by emphasizing that there is now neither Jew nor Greek in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

35 For references and discussion, see Christopher B. Zeichmann, 'Military Forces in Judaea 6–130 CE: The Status Quaestionis and Relevance for New Testament Studies', *Currents in Biblical Research* 17, no. 1 (2018): 86–120.

36 See for example Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 172–73; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan* (323 BCE–117 CE) (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), 244–58.

Some early church fathers defined this new sense of belonging by calling Christians a 'third race'.[37] This term certainly underscored the organic unity of the church as a human community that consciously seeks to relate as a spiritual family of brothers and sisters, the children of one Father, which transcends the differences between the ethno-racial groupings we come from. Peter reminded both Jewish and Gentile Christians that in Jesus, God had again reconstituted for himself 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession' just as he had at Sinai (1 Pet 2:9). In fact, Peter goes on, 'for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God' (v. 10, alluding to Hos 2:23).

However, this does not mean that Christian initiation obliterates the ethnicity that a disciple has been born with, in the same way that it does not obliterate his or her continuing to be a male or female, or (in New Testament times) a slave or free-born citizen. Rather, ethnicity simply ceases to matter as a factor that determines a person's value in the kingdom of God, because in it each person's value has been equally bestowed by grace in Christ and in the Spirit. In the second century, Justin Martyr testified how 'we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live [lit. would not use the same hearth or fire] with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies.'[38]

Second, while Christian discipleship does not obliterate one's ethnic identity, it also does not require the substitution of one ethnicity for another. This was Paul's major argument with the Judaizers. He consistently argued that in Christ, Gentiles could enter into full membership in God's kingdom *as Gentiles* without renouncing their previous ethnicity and formally becoming proselytes in the Jewish community, which essentially meant adopting Jewish ethnicity (belonging by observing Jewish laws and customs). Paul insisted that a disciple should remain in the ethnicity they were 'as the Lord has assigned (Gk. *merizō*, bestowed in the process of dividing up) to each one, as God has called (Gk. *kaleō*) each' (1 Cor 7:17). 'Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God' (7:18–19). Instead, 'Each man must remain in that condition (Gk. *klēsis*, called status) in which he was called (Gk. *kaleō*)' (7:20). Therefore, Paul chastised as 'so foolish' the misguided Gentile Galatians (who were ethnic Celts) who were adopting Jewish circumcision, dietary norms and calendrical celebrations in a misguided attempt to further secure their inclusion in the people of God (Gal. 3:1; 4:10). He condemned the same tendency among Gentile Christians in Colossae, who were ethnic Phrygians (Col 2:16).

However, Paul did insist that an 'intra-identity' conversion ought to take place. That is, Gentile Christians could not simply continue living according to their accustomed worldview and lifestyle inherited by their ethnicity (among other factors) where these contravened their new worldview and lifestyle, now radically re-ordered around Christ. Jesus challenged his disciples to rethink their old group

37 For references and a helpful discussion, see D. K. Buell, 'Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition', *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 4 (2001): 449–52.

38 Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.14.

loyalties and kinship ties. 'For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?' (Mt 5:46–47; see also 20:23–26). Christian discipleship introduces a tension that compels the believer to ask, 'What does it mean for me to think, speak and act *as a member of my ethnic group* who is accountable to Christ above all other legacies, authorities and interests?'

Conversion to Christ requires a fresh redefinition of the self, including one's ethnic self, in relation to the person and teaching of Christ. Therefore, many exhortations in the epistles contrasted 'former' patterns of thought and behaviour with 'new' Christ-centred norms (1 Cor 12:2; Eph 4:17–24; 1 Pet 4:3). It took great courage and humility for the apostles themselves to be transformed into this new counter-cultural mode of socializing across ethnic boundaries. Paul found it necessary to confront Peter's inconsistent behaviour in this regard, 'for prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision' (Gal 2:12). Paul saw this as 'hypocrisy' (v. 13) and as fundamentally 'not straightforward about the truth of the gospel' (v. 14). Jesus had made it impossible for his disciples to claim, 'I am a Jew first and a Christian second' (or, indeed, 'I am [any other identity marker] first and a Christian second') without betraying Him.

While it is to be expected that ethnic tensions will arise within heterogenous Christian communities, the redemptive difference is in the way such tensions are resolved.

After the initial phase of spontaneous economic sharing in the Jerusalem church, which was seen as a sign of their unity, the daily distribution of food for dependent widows became an administrative task that opened up some tensions. 'A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food' (Acts 6:1). The apostles acted decisively and fairly by asking the congregation to 'select from among you' a team of administrators for the task (v. 3). By their Hellenized names, it could be assumed that they were all chosen from the Greek-speaking community, including a Syrian proselyte (v. 5).

As Darrell Bock comments, 'The disciples do not fragment along ethnic lines or suggest that separate communities be formed along ethnic lines. Rather they are committed to working together … a powerful testimony is created when different groups can be seen as working together in a world often divided along ethnic lines.'[39] Also, 'since the problem involves Hellenists, Hellenists are given responsibility to solve it.' This could happen only because there was trust between the two groups. The majority Aramaic-speaking apostles trusted the minority Greek-speaking administrators to manage the allocated resources faithfully. The minority Greek-speaking community also trusted the majority community that this was not some tactic to exclude them from the wider community or abdicate responsibility for them.

39 Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 261.

Although language differences make it practically necessary to organize separate church services, events and activities within the larger multi-ethnic church community, the practice of organizing distinct congregations as homogeneous ethnic enclaves is counter-productive to Christian witness. Such 'ethnic churches' give higher priority to cultural identity (usually clustered around a few dominant families belonging to a particular caste, clan or region in their country of cultural origin) than to learning a difficult but vital aspect of Christian discipleship, which is to love and serve those who are different from ourselves but are inextricably bound to us through our adoption by the same Father, redemption by the same Son, and sanctification by the same Holy Spirit.

Recent research shows that the reason why black churches have continued to exist long after segregation laws were abolished is that black Christians have not felt the freedom to 'be black' as members of traditional white Christian congregations.[40] The ecclesial and liturgical structures of local churches are culturally shaped in ways that are 'normal' to one dominant race or class of believers, who may not even realize how others may find these practices exclusionary. So-called 'colour-blindness' is a well-intentioned but misguided notion, as it turns a blind eye to historic wrongs which have continuing consequences. It also ignores the 'good' differences that make ethnic communities diverse and which they cherish for their distinctiveness. Raising racial awareness and awakening consciousness of systemic biases (commonly called 'wokeness') are not another form of racism against the perceived dominant cultural group, as some white Evangelical critics allege. Labelling such conscientizing efforts as 'liberal', 'Marxist', and 'anti-Christian' misses the point entirely. As Jemar Tisby explains:

> What is missing from these criticisms is the Christian concept of love. Love for neighbor requires critiquing and dismantling unjust systems of racial oppression. It is one matter to acknowledge that all people are made equal and have inherent dignity in their very being. It is another matter to identify the ways the image of God is defaced in groups of people through systems and policies and to work against those injustices. The emphasis here is on life together in a nation under laws and policies. If Christians claim to be concerned for their neighbors, then they must also be concerned about the structures and systems that enable or inhibit their neighbors' flourishing.[41]

It takes love to discern the difference between moral relativism and cultural relativity. So much of our racial prejudices are moral judgements that fail to distinguish between the two. When there is a general unwillingness to accept that gender, social class, race, ethnicity and other embodied experiences significantly shape our perspectives, or that such dissimilarities in perception merit serious consideration and changes in prevailing conditions, then any discussion of 'difference' is misconstrued as an assault on 'truth' and resisted.

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40 Besheer Mohamed, 'Most Black Protestants Say Denominational Affiliation Is Less Important Than Inspiring Sermons', *Pew Research Center*, 29 April 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/47107.

41 Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 197.

Consummation perspective

The eschatological vision of God bringing all of human history to a conclusion and his 'salvation history' to completion has significant implications for our theology of ethnicity. This consummation of the biblical metanarrative is described in Revelation as the angelic announcement, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he will reign forever and ever' (Rev 11:15). The eternal reign of Christ over the nations will include judgement, reward and a new beginning. These eschatological themes not only embrace humanity as a whole; they make particular reference to humanity as we stand as nations with our political, socio-economic and ethno-cultural histories laid bare before God's perfect scrutiny and justice.

In Christ, God will fulfil his purpose for a redeemed humanity in all its ethnic diversity.

The results of the fulness and diversity that God originally intended for humanity are displayed in the ultimate in-gathering of the saints. Already in the Old Testament, the prophets had long anticipated the homecoming of the nations into God's presence together with Israel's remnant (e.g. Zech 8:20–23; Isa 56:1–8). Isaiah envisioned the day when God would bring the Israelites' old and powerful adversaries Egypt and Assyria into a covenant relationship with him, declaring, 'In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance"' (Isa 19:24–25). In the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7, the sovereign Lord of history bestows upon the ascended Messiah (who represents 'the people, the saints of the Most High') the 'dominion, glory, and kingship, so that every people, nation, and language should serve Him' (Dan 7:14, 27).

Throughout the book of Revelation, John uses the phrase 'every tribe and tongue and people and nation' to express how the experiences of suffering and hope are comprehensively experienced by the whole of humanity on earth.[42] Surprisingly, John describes the triumphant saints in heaven in this same way: 'After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb"' (Rev 7:9–10).

Although one might otherwise have assumed that distinguishable ethno-cultural features would not be evident among the saints in their glorified resurrection bodies, John is careful to describe the saints in heaven as they were on earth. The ethno-cultural diversity of the heavenly multitude 'from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues' evidently redounds as much to God's glory as the unity of their praise. The glimpse of the heavenly court as a congregation of multi-ethnic wor-

42 This is how they are described when referred to as the ones purchased by the blood of the Lamb (5:9); as the subjects of John's prophecy (10:11); as witnesses to the martyrdom and desecration of the faithful (11:9); as targets of the persecution by the beast (13:7); as those who must hear the gospel proclamation (14:6), and as those under subjection to Babylon's exploitation (17:15).

shipers encourages us to explore and cultivate ethnodoxology (the liturgical equivalent of ethnomusicology) in anticipation of our worship in heaven.

God will judge the nations, including for their ethno-political sins.

In the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7, God permits but does not endorse human empires because they all fall short of his righteousness and justice, descending instead to oppression and arrogance and incurring God's judgement (7:7, 19, 23, 25). Divine judgement of the nations is a frequent theme in the prophetic oracles, often including references to arrogance and oppression arising from confidence in their own military might, economic resources and cultural attainments. For example, Isaiah 2:4 looks forward to the day when God will arbitrate fairly and finally in seemingly interminable disputes between nations (often linked to ethnic animosities), bringing an end to cycles of violence and wasteful military expenditure:

> And He will judge between the nations,
> And will render decisions for many peoples;
> And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.
> Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
> And never again will they learn war.

This oracle also refers to examples of nations becoming prideful of their economic resources which, now as then, become bound up with ethno-nationalist ideology. The 'cedars of Lebanon', 'oaks of Bashan' (2:13) and 'ships of Tarshish' (2:16) were mainstays of those nations' economies, but these had evidently become idolized in their cultures to the extent that, in the reckoning of Israelite prophets, they prevented these nations from gratefully acknowledging God as the true source of their resources and skills.

In the New Testament, the apostles encountered similar cultural arrogance in cities that prided themselves on their ethno-cultural heritage. In Philippi (a city founded by Roman army veterans), a group of citizens was angered by their economic loss when Paul delivered the slave girl they were exploiting (Acts 16:19), but they attributed their resistance to the apostles' preaching to ethno-religious differences, charging, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans' (16:20–21). Similarly, the Ephesian silversmiths were incensed by the threat of losing their profitable trade in making idols (Acts 19:23–27), but they framed their accusation against the apostles as a matter of defending their civic pride, expressed in the chant 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' (vv. 28, 34). Paul warned the Athenians against their ethno-centric idolatries because God 'has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness' (Acts 17:29–31).

God sanctifies and receives the best achievements of human culture into his New Jerusalem, for eternity.

John skilfully weaves together earlier strands of OT apocalypses (e.g. Isa 2; 60; 65:17–25; 66:15–24; Ezek 40–48; Zech 2:1–13) to present a vision of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21–22) as the holy city of the new creation, which comes 'down out of heaven from God' (21:1, 10). It is arguably the Bible's most extensive description of the eternal dwelling place of God and his redeemed humanity.

As in Isaiah 60, John observes not only that 'the nations will walk by its light' but that 'the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it' (Rev 22:24) and 'they will bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it' (v. 26). This is in apparent contrast to the previous status quo when 'Babylon the Great' dominated the nations with her commercial and cultural power as much as her military might.[43] In the old fallen order, 'all the nations [had] drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth [had] committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth [had] become rich by the wealth of her sensuality' (18:3; also v. 9), and 'all the nations were deceived by [her] sorcery' (v. 23). Formerly all the finest products mined, cultivated, bred and crafted by distant ethno-cultural groups from as far away as Britain, East Africa, Sri Lanka, China and Central Asia had flowed into 'Babylon' along the overland and maritime trade routes (18:12–13).

Apart from the trade in 'slaves and human lives' (lit. bodies and souls of humans, v. 13) which is condemned (1 Tim 1:10), the other merchandise named in these verses consists of legitimate articles of trade. To these must be added human artistic skills and creativity, as well as useful technology, that John finds are no longer enjoyed in Babylon: 'And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer' (Rev 18:22)

In Isaiah 60, God transforms those resources which the nations had previously used to harm the Israelites and to disregard God into objects of worship and instruments of service to him and his people. As Mouw summarizes:

> Isaiah is very explicit about this new purpose, noting what function each creature and item now perform. Ephah's camels now 'proclaim the praise of the Lord' (v. 6). Nebaioth's rams 'shall minister to you' as acceptable sacrifices on the Lord's altars (v. 7). The ships of Tarshish bring precious metals 'for the name of the Lord your God' (v. 9). And the costly lumber from Lebanon will 'beautify the place of my sanctuary' (v. 13). Each of the items mentioned is now to be put to the service of God and his people.[44]

John obviously had the same idea about the purpose for which God was now receiving the 'the glory and the honour of the nations' into his new Jerusalem. The best cultural creations of the nations produced in the long course of civilizational history would not be obliterated, consigning the magnificent creativity and artistry of thousands of talented ethno-cultural artisans and craftspeople to oblivion. God would sanctify them for noble use and give them an eternal home in the new Jerusalem.

Therefore, however tainted they were in their (ab)use in the fallen order of the old cosmos, as Mouw legitimately speculates, God will transform the best of human ingenuity, including its ethno-cultural heritages, for his glory. 'The earth—including the American military and French art and Chinese medicine and Nigerian

43 A cryptonym for imperial Rome as a typological symbol for all corrupted centres of human civilization. See David A. deSilva, *Unholy Alliances: Heeding Revelation's Warning* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 21–34.

44 Mouw, *When the Kings*, 23.

agriculture—belongs to the Lord. And he will reclaim all of these things, harnessing them for service in the City.'[45]

Concluding personal reflections

To conclude, I offer three practical principles arising from reflecting on my own experiences as a Christian South Asian living and working in different cultural contexts.

Being ethnic and cosmopolitan at the same time

Growing up in Colombo, Sri Lanka, I became increasingly conscious of my privileged English-speaking, middle-class background. I often felt I could barely identify with the vast majority of Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking Sri Lankans because I was so 'Westernized'. When I left to study for a master's degree in Canada, at age 24, I was very confident that my fluency in English and exposure to North American pop culture (through books, magazines, music, movies and TV shows) had prepared me sufficiently to transition seamlessly into my new cosmopolitan social world. No doubt, I was able to adapt quite easily to the relationships and routines circumscribed by my circumstances. But very quickly I realized how Sri Lankan I was. My fellow students and teachers saw me as the young Sri Lankan man who had come into their midst who 'spoke English really well'. But within a few weeks, I was seeking out Sri Lankan and other South Asian students on the university campus where my seminary was located. I craved my spicy 'soul food' and missed the clichéd humour based on social stereotypes and elite school rivalries, along with the more serious arguments about the ongoing civil war, politics, sports and religion.

This is apparently a very common experience. As globalized and cosmopolitan as we may be, our ethno-cultural formations do matter. As Vinoth Ramachandra writes, our ethno-cultural communities are important because they give us 'a sense of rootedness, existential stability, the feeling of belonging to an enduring community of ancient origins and ease of interpersonal communication'.[46] But we need to be cosmopolitan also, as he goes on to state:

> The lack of crosscultural interaction means that such homogenous societies are not places where we can expect the flourishing of such intellectual and moral virtues as tolerance, intellectual curiosity, self-criticism, moral imagination or empathy with those who are different from us. 'It is the creator's will', writes Oliver O'Donovan, 'not only that human beings should live in communities and cultural homes, but that from their homes they should be able to engage peaceably with those of other communities.'[47]

Any multicultural collective (be it a church community, seminary, organization, neighbourhood or nation) that provides the space and climate for its members to be both ethnic and cosmopolitan would likely create a community of secure individuals who flourish in their interactions with one another.

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45 Mouw, *When the Kings*, 39.
46 Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, 132.
47 Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, 144.

Postcolonial resentment

Postcolonial resentment against Western economic and institutional power arises from being conscious that such dominance was acquired by exploitatively extracting the resources of colonized peoples. I feel it every time I am compelled to write a funding proposal to a Western donor agency or interact with partners in the Global North who evaluate our local ministries through the indices of unreached people groups, persecution or poverty. It hurts to be conscious of the disparities between the surfeit of resources enjoyed by Christians in the Global North (think, for example, of the seemingly infinite variety of Bibles packaged and branded for every imaginable theological and demographic niche in the North American Christian 'market') and the frustrating limitations that must be constantly overcome to build basic resources for Christian communities in the Global South (such as paying seminary teachers a living wage so that they can have sufficient leisure for family, study and writing, rather than being compelled to work additional hours in church or other organizations doing ministry which lay volunteers can be trained for). Unsolicited funding is often offered for the translation of books or entire training programmes designed for North American, Korean or South Indian churches and then exported elsewhere. Many of these megachurch pastors or ministry organizations then commend themselves as the trend-setters in world missions because of their control over how resources are deployed around the world.

The mixed emotions of resentment (for being dependent) and gratitude (for being empowered to carry out local tasks) are umbilically linked with the memory of colonialism. Missionary paternalism and tutelage were arguably well-intentioned, but they handicapped the natural agency and confidence of local leaders who needed to learn for themselves how to envision, engage and share in the work of mission in the contexts they understand best.

Integrity always

I learn from my interactions with family (my wife is Dutch-Canadian with a large extended family), friends and coworkers that whatever ethno-cultural space we occupy across the honour–shame, guilt–innocence and fear–power matrices, people want to be respected for their intrinsic worth, appreciated for their efforts, told the truth gently and treated fairly. I have also learned that whatever their ethno-cultural background (or any other formative factor), when people are under pressure, their real level of moral integrity and spiritual maturity comes out. We are all very dependent on the Holy Spirit to be honest before God and each other, especially when our reputations and advancement are at stake. Ethnicity helps us very little here.

Similar dynamics apply to cross-cultural organizational partnerships too. Norms and expectations concerning honesty, accuracy and transparency about financial dealings and reporting must be discussed in advance with explicit reference to the socio-cultural contexts in which leaders of a local partner organization make decisions, resolve conflicts and determine whether a programme has been successful, as well as how that assessment is reported. Great wisdom and sensitivity are required when there are reasonable indications that ethical norms have been violated. How such situations may arise, how they will be investigated, and what consequences will follow must also be openly discussed and agreed in advance.

These will prevent, to some extent, those convenient deflections of 'cultural misunderstanding' (e.g. 'In our culture we don't name and shame') and defensive counter-accusations of 'ethno-centric prejudices' (e.g. 'You can't impose your Western values on us') which can sour cross-cultural relations between organizations as much as between individuals.

The Bible's historical-theological narrative of God's interactions with Israel and the nations provides a wealth of worldview insights for developing a Christian self-understanding of our racially and ethnically embodied identities and relationships. Wherever we find ourselves in the helpful but flawed binaries and intersectionalities that seek to understand the power dynamics of race and ethnicity, ultimately the incarnate Galilean Jew from Roman-occupied Palestine and the transformation he brings will be the source of our real 'wokeness', reconciliation and liberation.

ERT (2023) 47:1, 88–96

Book Reviews

Markus Höfner (ed.), *Theo-Politics? Conversing with Barth in Western and Asian Contexts*

Christine Kooi, *Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500–1620*

Frances Luttikhuisen, *Constantino de la Fuente (San Clemente, 1502—Seville, 1560). From acclaimed cathedral preacher to condemned 'Lutheran' heretic*

Ian J. Vaillancourt, *The Dawning of Redemption: The Story of the Pentateuch and the Hope of the Gospel*

Steven M. Bryan, *Cultural Identity and the Purposes of God: A Biblical Theology of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race*

Dean Flemming, *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God's Mission*

Theo-Politics? Conversing with Barth in Western and Asian Contexts
Markus Höfner, editor

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022
Hb., xi + 500 pp., index

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

Markus Höfner has blessed the church by assembling 24 scholars to discuss the 'two most dangerous things in this world: religion and politics' (289) with Karl Barth as an interlocutor. Barth is known for his strong commitment and resounding 'No' concerning general revelation as a source of knowledge of God. Thus, it is easy to conclude that his theological domain focused only on the church. Interestingly, 'In one of his most famous political statements, Karl Barth announced in 1938 that every Czech soldier who would fight and suffer in a battle against Germany would do so for the church of Jesus Christ' (201). The book argues that Barth's theology is a valuable resource for political theology in both Western and Asian contexts.

The book contains 25 short chapters, mostly 12 pages each (excluding the notes at the end of each essay), which are grouped into four sections. The interaction with Barth's work does not lead to a monolithic approach by the contributors. The first part deals with the complex relationship between Christianity and culture, particularly in Western contexts and mainland China. In this section, readers learn about the relationship between Christianity and the Chinese government, the state of Christianity in that country, and how Barth is viewed by some Chinese

theologians such as Wu Leichuan, Wu Yaozong and Wang Mingdao. Reasons why Barth has something to say to East Asians include his Christocentric theology, social engagement, and experiences during the two world wars. Chinese readers dealing with state power, poverty and national identity can learn something from Barth's struggle with his flock in Safenwil concerning poverty, oppression, injustice and other social issues.

The second part discusses political power from a theological perspective. It contains intricate intersections of politics and theology, Christian interpretation of the law, and other topics. Three essays in this section place Barth and Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) in dialogue concerning the legitimacy of rule, sovereignty, democracy and religion. Barth is known as the mastermind of the *Barmen Declaration*, and Schmitt is acknowledged as the German scholar who introduced the term 'political theology' in his book by that name in 1922. In the contrast between these two thinkers, readers will encounter Barth's view of 'lordless' power.

The third part focuses on Christian praxis and the church, implying that the very existence of Christians has a political dimension. In doing theo-politics, one cannot escape the issue of the relationship between church and state. Barth reminds his readers that Christians must function as a political body called the church. Thus, the church must be trained to keep a critical distance from the state while proclaiming the gospel—a hope that pronounces the coming of God's kingdom. For the church to remain the church, it must remind the state of its responsibility to guarantee peace and freedom for humanity. If the state's program prevents Christians from living peacefully, the church needs to speak out (301, 306–7).

For Barth, the church and the state have one Lord, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the state has two primary theological tasks. First, it is commissioned by God as a human institution to represent Jesus' lordship as a source of earthly rule outside the church. Therefore, the state should protect all its citizens and allow them to hear the gospel. Second, Barth believes that the state may become 'demonic' when it abandons its calling by promoting injustice, disorder and subjugation. Concerning its relationship with the state, the church's first task is to pray for the government. Refusing to pray for the state means forsaking its calling not merely to Christians but to all people. We are also responsible for undertaking direct political actions, which can include advocating for the poor, wisely selecting people to hold civil authority, and working for social justice (259–62).

The final part of the book tackles Christian engagement in society (most chapters in this part concentrate on Hong Kong). An Asian theologian, Pan Chiu Lai, asserts that patriotic Chinese Christians need to have transnational compassion. In other words, they must nurture love not only for their own people but for all people, which is fuelled by an ecumenical vision.

Not all contributors in this volume are theologians or Barthians. The book's strength lies not only in the authors' various perspectives but also in the attempt to use Barth as a conversation partner in addressing political issues in the West and Asia. However, the subtitle is also its Achilles' heel. First, Asian contexts contain considerable cultural diversity encompassing five geographic subregions (Central, East, South, Southeast and Western Asia), but the volume tackles only some political issues in East Asia (i.e. China, Hong Kong and Taiwan). Second, some chapters do

not discuss much of Barth's view or work in the realm of political theology. Nonetheless, the book is an excellent resource encouraging Asians to learn from Barth and to move beyond him as they face their own particular socio-political issues.

Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500–1620
Christine Kooi

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022
Pb., 196 pp., bibliog., Index

Reviewed by Andrew Messmer, Academic Dean, Seville Theological Seminary and Associated Professor, Facultad Internacional de Teología IBSTE; Affiliated Researcher, Evangelical Theological Faculty

After decades of teaching and publishing on the topic, Christine Kooi has gathered her expertise into an accessible and comprehensive introduction to the Reformation in the Netherlands. After an introduction in which Kooi reviews past research and notes some of the notable features of the Low Countries Reformation, she summarizes the various contexts—geographical, historical, political, social, religious—of the movement. In doing so, she helpfully lays the groundwork for the rest of the book and reveals many cracks already present in the Low Countries before the Reformation which will lead to definitive schism afterward.

In chapter 2, aptly entitled 'Inchoate Reformation', Kooi summarizes the first stage of reformation (1520s–1530s) and argues that while it was the result of many factors, it may best be viewed as a fusion between Erasmian humanism and German and Swiss theologies. Chapter 3 traces the development of the three major Christian traditions from the 1540s to the early 1560s: Anabaptist, Reformed and Roman Catholic. Those interested in theology per se will be left wanting more, as Kooi does not delve deeply into the different emerging theological traditions, key documents and protagonists.

Chapter 4 marks the turn from theology to war and recounts the battles and skirmishes from 1566 (the 'Wonder year') to the 1580s. Kooi helps the reader see just how uncertain and volatile this period was, with borders constantly being redrawn between Reformed and Roman Catholic lands. The last chapter, 'Schism', recounts the definitive peace established in the Low Countries by the decision to create two separate states: a northern Protestant state (the Netherlands) and a southern Roman Catholic one (roughly Belgium and Luxembourg). The redrawing of political lines was a unique consequence of this Reformation, and Kooi admirably brings out this theme, not only in this final chapter but throughout the book as a whole.

Kooi accomplishes her goal of providing an accessible and comprehensive introduction to the Reformation in the Netherlands, summarizing and synthesizing over half a century of scholarly secondary material. She has read broadly in secondary literature in English, German, Dutch and French, though she incorporates relatively less primary literature written in Latin. Were a second edition

to be published, she could enhance the value of her work by interacting more with primary source material.

Those interested in the story of the Reformation in the Netherlands will find Kooi's book a solid introduction to the topic, and professors will find it a good resource for their students. Those of Reformed, Roman Catholic and Anabaptist traditions will find themselves fairly represented throughout the work, as Kooi is more descriptive than prescriptive throughout. For those interested in theology per se, this book will need to be supplemented with another resource, as it is thin in discussing key theological developments and documents.

Constantino de la Fuente (San Clemente, 1502—Seville, 1560). From acclaimed cathedral preacher to condemned 'Lutheran' heretic

Frances Luttikhuizen

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022
Hb., 286 pp., index

Reviewed by Andrew Messmer (see previous review for description)

Frances Luttikhuizen offers the English-speaking world one of the best academic studies of one of Spain's most influential 16th-century reformers, Constantino de la Fuente. The focus is on reconstructing his biography, but the work also summarizes his theology and published works.

Chapter 1 briefly reviews works published on Constantino, from *Arts of the Holy Spanish Inquisition* (1567) onward. Chapter 2 comprises the major contribution of the book, which is a biographical sketch of Constantino's life. Luttikhuizen has worked through the major publications relating to the various phases and aspects of Constantino's life, and despite such extensive research, the biography is quite readable. Chapter 3 catalogues Constantino's works and describes their editions and subsequent reception.

In chapter 4, Luttikhuizen attempts to summarize Constantino's theology. This is arguably the most debatable part of the work. She argues that the terms 'evangelicalism' and 'Nicodemism' aptly summarize his theology, and that while he accepted many criticisms that Protestants launched at the Roman Catholic Church, he did not want to leave it but rather to reform it from within. My primary suspicion concerns the term 'Nicodemism': while it may have formed part of Constantino's life, it does not seem to be an appropriate category to use in evaluating his theology, but rather is more suitable as a sociological description. Chapter 5 offers a 20-page bibliography of works related to Constantino.

The book also contains two appendices. The first is a list of confiscated books collected by the Inquisition in Seville, presumably in 1563. This list is only tangentially related to the book's topic, but it helpfully demonstrates the reality of underground Protestantism in Seville at the time of Constantino's ministry. The second appendix is Juan Sanchez-Naffziger's 2009 English translation of Constantino's *Beatus Vir*, a collection of six sermons he preached on Psalm 1. This appendix, which represents nearly half the length of the book, appears to have been

added because 'the core of [Constantino's] theology can be found in *Beatus Vir*, where he deals with the doctrines of sin and pardon, free grace, providence, predestination and the relationship between faith and works' (114–15). Other works might have been chosen instead, but *Beatus Vir* has the unique quality of bringing together many aspects of Constantino's life such as his preaching, piety, theology and discipleship.

This book will help the English-speaking world appreciate a major figure of the Spanish Reformation, and I imagine that it will remain the standard English work for years to come. Those interested in the Spanish Reformation, the Inquisition, or 16th-century Spanish history and politics would benefit from this work.

Two limitations should be noted. First, several typographical errors may prove distracting to careful readers (I found five over the space of about 10 pages), but thankfully they do not obfuscate the text's meaning. Second, apart from chapter 4, which is only 10 pages long, there is little in the way of theological analysis, and there is not much coverage of Constantino's impact on future generations, either Protestant and Roman Catholic. Perhaps this was the case due to publication restrictions, but I imagine most readers would like to have seen more of this material.

As the Spanish-speaking world would likely be even more interested in this work than English speakers, this book could very profitably be translated into Spanish and would be a most welcome addition.

The Dawning of Redemption: The Story of the Pentateuch and the Hope of the Gospel

Ian J. Vaillancourt

Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022
Pb., 224 pp., bibliog., indices

Reviewed by Kumiko Takeuchi, Fellow, Global Scholars

What does the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, have to do with the gospel in the New Testament? Such a question may offer Christians a lame excuse for not reading the whole Bible, claiming that 'we are no longer under the law but under grace'. Ian J. Vaillancourt not only dispels this misconception but opens a new avenue to engage with the Pentateuch.

This delightful and engaging book introduces the Pentateuch to readers who find it tedious and impossible to read it and get stuck in the middle. By the time they finish *The Dawning*, readers find that the Pentateuch indeed lays a foundation for the gospel in the New Testament.

Vaillancourt presents key stories in the Pentateuch which relate to the gospel message in a readable manner. He provides some basics at the beginning so that the target audience—mainly evangelical Christians—can be on the same page with him. Vaillancourt introduces the Pentateuch as Moses's book of redemption, connecting Moses with Jesus and pointing out Moses's prediction that God would raise up a prophet like him (Deut 18:15 vs. Acts 3:22; 7:37). This explanation occurs in the 'Looking Forward to Christ' section, followed by discussion questions. These two

features appear in the next nine chapters as well as he introduces other themes in the Pentateuch which relate to Jesus's life and work.

Although Vaillancourt touches on each book of the Pentateuch, he uses his space unevenly: 51 percent of the total text on Genesis, 27 percent on Exodus, just 3 percent on Leviticus, 9 percent on Numbers and 10 percent on Deuteronomy. He generally avoids explaining nitty-gritty details of the laws, the Tabernacle construction, and sacrifices prescribed and skips over repetition within the Pentateuch, realizing that not all five books carry the same weight in relation to the redemption message and that the less relevant portions will only bore the reader without serving his purpose. Instead, Vaillancourt selectively highlights main stories in each book of the Pentateuch to help readers capture a big picture, which relates to the coming of Christ in YHWH's redemptive plan.

The title and subtitle of each chapter effectively indicate where Vaillancourt wishes to lead his audience so that they may grasp how portions of the Pentateuch foreshadow the New Testament gospel of Jesus Christ. In chapter 1, Vaillancourt describes the 'Creation' story in Genesis 1 as the theater of redemption, which points to John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word', an echo of Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' Vaillancourt depicts the event in the garden of 'Eden' (Genesis 2–3) as the template for the need and promise of redemption, which forecasts Christ's death and a new and better Eden in chapter 2. 'Genealogy' in Genesis, as the lineage of redemption pointing to the family lineage of Jesus, is featured in chapter 3, followed by 'Covenant' as the guarantee of redemption, which prefigures the new covenant in Jesus's blood, in chapter 4. Vaillancourt describes 'Exodus' as redemption accomplished (chapter 5), '*Torah*' for living as the redeemed (chapter 6), and 'Tabernacle, Priesthood, and Sacrifice' as provisions for the redeemed (chapter 7). He characterizes Numbers as a story of 'Unbelief' (chapter 8) and ends with the 'Blessings and Curses' in Deuteronomy as warning the redeemed (chapter 9). Vaillancourt relates those stories in Exodus through Deuteronomy to Christ's redemptive work as the second exodus, the new law giver who fulfils the Law, the new temple, the great high priest and the ultimate sacrificial Lamb, as well as applying them to the Christian life.

In the 'Conclusion: Take Up and Read!' Vaillancourt encourages readers, 'Consider this book an invitation to … soak in the essential first act in the Bible's grand story of redemption' to better understand the gospel. Although he obviously cannot cover every aspect of the Pentateuch in slightly over 200 pages, Vaillancourt has done an admirable job of inviting anyone who is curious about these books of the Bible to learn what is in them. Highly readable, the book could be suitable as an outreach tool for a neighbourhood reading group in which both Christians and non-Christians participate.

Cultural Identity and the Purposes of God: A Biblical Theology of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race

Steven M. Bryan

Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022
Pb., 286 pp., discussion questions, indices

Reviewed by Jeffrey S. Krohn, Professor of Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology, Evangelical Theological College, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Most people lack a defined argument regarding the emergence of cultures. Many of them assume that 'culture' simply arises organically from one's environment, while others might blame our sinful tendencies towards separation and division. In this book, Steven Bryan offers a cogent and relevant defence of the divine initiative regarding cultures and peoples. In other words, cultural identities are not an outworking of sin's machinations, nor a result of accidental interactions with geographical contexts or environments, nor a consequence of human achievement fuelled by hubris and human potentiality. Rather, cultural identity is part of the purposes of God himself. Bryan served as a missionary for more than two decades in Ethiopia, holds a PhD from Cambridge University, and is currently Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

Bryan recognizes that cultural identity has become one of humanity's greatest sources of conflict and alienation. This was not meant to be, however, for Scripture gives us a very different perspective. Cultural identity is meant to be a source of blessing for all peoples and is central to the purposes of God. Bryan calls for unity but not uniformity, while affirming the reality of cultural diversity.

Early in the book, Bryan orients the reader regarding the nuances of 'culture' and distinguishes between nations, national identity, states, groups, culture and ethnicity. These categories are interrelated, as he spells out in the subsequent chapters, showing that the purposes of God relate to peoples and to the blessing of cultural identities.

To defend his argument, Bryan takes the reader on a thorough journey through the Scriptures. In Genesis, we witness the emergence of 'cultures' as part of the command to cultivate and fill the earth. The Flood results in a world of cultural diversity. The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 describes humanity filling the earth with culturally distinct peoples. Yet at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, diversity is ignored and 'extraordinary unity' (i.e. uniformity) is witnessed. Thankfully, the grim reality of Genesis 11 gives way to Genesis 12. The themes of blessing and reciprocity, carried out through the interactions between peoples, are introduced and appear numerous times in the remainder of the book. There are several other significant and supportive analyses: the sin of Ham and the curse of his son Canaan, the importance of a nation's 'land', and the purported 'genocide' of the Canaanites. This latter issue is defended as the destruction of a sinful national identity, as opposed to the annihilation of every individual.

After four chapters on the Old Testament, Bryan turns his exegetical focus to the New Testament. For many (Western) readers of Matthew, the genealogy at the beginning is bewildering at best and ignored at worst. Yet it contributes to Bryan's argument. There is a fascinating connection between 'Judah and his brothers' (Mt

1:2) and Jesus and *his* 'brothers' (Mt 28:9–10), related to the idea of Israel being a blessing to the nations. There is an interesting examination of two 'outsiders': the centurion of Matthew 8 and the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15. In Luke, we note the involvement of Jesus in God's oath to Abraham to be a blessing to all peoples. Bryan discusses the healed Samaritan (of leprosy) in Luke 17 as well as the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10, while also covering many chapters in John (4, 10, 14, 15, 17, and 21).

Bryan's study of Acts illustrates 'incorporation without assimilation', typified by his surprising but valid investigation of the ethnic implications of Paul's adventure on the island of Malta (Acts 28). In his analysis of Romans, Bryan highlights the important interplay between individuals and the groups to which those individuals belong. Amongst other insights from the book of Revelation, Bryan resolves the 'paradox' of the book: how it can describe the 'striking down' of the nations (19:15) while also portraying the 'glory and honor of the nations' (21:26).

Bryan's conclusions on the 'purposes of God' include a formation of a 'people of peoples' who are restored to a right relationship with God through the gospel. The cultural particularity of each people becomes a blessing for all. Bryan also enlivens the book with penetrating anecdotes from his years in Ethiopia. This book deserves to be studied deeply and discussed widely.

Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God's Mission
Dean Flemming

Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022
Pb., 245 pp., bibliog., indices

Reviewed by Michael Naylor, Professor of Bible, Columbia International University, Columbia, SC, USA

The book of Revelation is often viewed as mysterious and, in some cases, as largely irrelevant in today's context. Dean Flemming, professor of New Testament and missions at Mid-America Nazarene University, seeks to address these misconceptions by exploring what John's Apocalypse would say about God's mission in the world today. Overall, the book provides a compelling invitation to consider the mission of God and the role of the church within that mission, as articulated in Revelation.

The introduction and first chapter ('What Is Revelation Trying to Do?') present Flemming's interpretive methodology and his understanding of the mission of God. This mission involves God's work to 'bring salvation to all people and to restore the whole creation' (p. 6), and the people of God are invited to participate in that mission. The subsequent eight chapters are organized thematically and address the topics of the 'God of Mission', the 'Mission of the Slaughtered Lamb', the 'Mission of God's People', 'Mission as Witness', 'Mission and Judgment', 'Missional Worship', 'Missional Politics', and 'A New Jerusalem Mission'. The final chapter ('Reading Revelation Missiologically Today') explores implications for our contemporary context.

Although this volume engages leading voices both in the academic study of Revelation and in missiological readings of Scripture, the book as a whole is accessible to the non-specialist, and Flemming includes several discussion questions for each chapter. As he builds his case, he draws from details in the text and wider concerns in the context of the first-century world and demonstrates how John exhorted these early Christ-followers to live out their fidelity to the Lamb within their cultural context. Flemming also invites the reader to consider the relationship of Revelation to the wider storyline concerning Eden, the fall, Israel and God's redemptive purposes.

Along with analysing the text, Flemming offers reflections from his years of engagement in missionary education. He intersperses voices and examples from the global context and suggests various avenues of application. These areas include considering how Christians may bear witness (even in the face of suffering) and live in redemptive, Christ-worshipping communities; he also explores social justice, economics, political engagement (as it pertains to living in society), and creation care as aspects of living in light of the wider mission of God. Flemming demonstrates how these can function as a complement to, rather than a replacement of, gospel witness. He addresses such issues with care and invites the reader to reflect on his or her own broader engagement with the surrounding culture. In Flemming's assessment, the final vision of the new heavens and new earth defines the mission of the church at present.

Given his focus on present application for the church, Flemming does leave some unanswered questions, or perhaps confusion, in the reader's mind concerning *how* the final expression of the New Jerusalem is brought about. Does John offer competing visions (Rev 6–20 and Rev 21–22) of two different outcomes in human history, like alternative endings of a movie (pp. 199–202)? Is this final state brought about by the witness of the church? By God's direct intervention? Flemming desires, and understandably so, to lessen the severity of the images of judgement found in the book, and many readers will likely resonate with the discomfort he expresses on page 118. The reader is left with the impression that these images function largely as expressions of God's hatred of evil (see pp. 69, 120, 132), but it is unclear how this final aspect of the mission of God is accomplished in history.

Additionally, although I share Flemming's concern for challenging 'escapist' interpretations of Revelation (pp. 4–5), his description of dispensational interpretations as abandoning engagement in the mission of God (p. 4) is an unfortunate overgeneralization. Most dispensational interpreters I have encountered are firmly committed to the mission of God but would differ with Flemming as to how that final aspect of the mission is fulfilled.

These concerns aside, Flemming provides an accessible and engaging discussion of the mission of God in Revelation and offers a thoughtful, timely invitation to readers to reflect carefully on the book as they participate in the task of bearing witness to the Lamb in today's world.