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of Theology and Contemporary Application

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# Evangelical Review of Theology

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# Introduction: Nice Surprises

I often wish that prominent Christian leaders all over the world wanted to write for the *Evangelical Review of Theology*. The ‘big names’ in the evangelical world—either widely renowned scholars or megapastors—don’t send us any articles.

But we do receive world-class contributions from World Evangelical Alliance ‘insiders’ such as Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher, senior theological advisor Thomas K. Johnson, and public engagement director Johannes Reimer. (Reimer’s timely examination of Ukrainian and Russian evangelicals and a Johnson essay on Schirrmacher’s work appear in this issue.) Dennis Petri, who heads the International Institute for Religious Freedom, and Andrew Messmer, a prolific scholar who just produced our first-ever Spanish-language issue, also consider ERT a desirable place to publish regularly, for which I am grateful.

In addition, wonderful submissions sometimes come from unexpected places. Often, the authors are young scholars, or even Christians from other professions, who need extra editing support. But when they welcome suggestions for improvement and work hard on revisions, sometimes the final product surpasses expectations—and I feel as if my editing efforts are actually benefitting the Christian world.

This issue highlights two such success stories. The first is young scholar Bosco Bangura’s captivating article on the interaction between charismatic Christian churches and indigenous beliefs about dreams and witchcraft in Sierra Leone, west Africa. Bosco sent us a conference paper he had delivered, and we suggested how he could reorganize it for publication. He followed our ideas with great care, and the resulting article should be valuable to Christians all over the world who deal with the challenge of whether and how to accommodate local traditions.

Bryan Christman, though he has a seminary degree, is a professional landscaper, not a professional scholar. But he has read C. S. Lewis and Kierkegaard extensively and knows their work very well. In fact, his first draft was way over my head. I offered a common piece of advice: ‘Pretend you’re writing for an interested but uninformed reader.’ I think the final version is both highly readable and highly applicable in post-Christian cultures where we struggle to get people interested in religion at all.

This issue reprints two of the best articles (by Scott Cunningham and Ajith Fernando) from a new WEA book published in honor of Manfred Kohl, an incredibly transformative and widely loved leader in global theological education. You can find the whole book at <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462kohl>.

Andy Messmer’s article comparing the Gospels of Mark and John helped me understand more fully why John’s Gospel is so different from the Synoptics. Esa Autero’s informative review article, featuring a new book on Asian theology, reflects the amazing global knowledge of this Finnish-born scholar now teaching in the US.

I’m especially excited about the first issue of the *Revista Evangélica de Teología*, available for download at the ERT website.

Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

# Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian Evangelicals

Johannes Reimer

*As war rages in Ukraine, hostility also divides evangelical Christians in neighbouring countries. This article analyses the situation and calls for a reaffirmation of Christian mission over against forms of nationalism that can undermine our Christian allegiance.*

‘We are like Jews and Germans in 1939, all at once’, a leading evangelical pastor in Belarus said recently. They are like Jews because they are persecuted and hated, but also like Germans because others reject them as persecutors and offenders.

This image accurately describes the feelings of the vast majority of Russian and Belarusian evangelicals amidst the war in Ukraine. The government persecutes them as soon as they speak out for peace and reconciliation with Ukrainians or describe the injustice, killings and destruction inflicted by the Russian army. Meanwhile, Ukrainian evangelicals and many in the West expect them to flood the streets with protests, regardless of the risks. If they stay quiet, they are depicted as pro-Putin, supporters of aggression and loyal to a dictator who seems have lost his human face.

‘This is the worst situation of all’, a prominent evangelical leader in Russia said. ‘The brothers mistrust us while the government treats us with persecution and imprisonment.’

Let us look at the situation our brothers and sisters on both sides are facing, try to understand their mindset, and support them in prayer as well as seeking to mediate on behalf of those who have been caught between a rock and a hard place.

## The evangelical church-state relationship in transition

Generally speaking, all evangelicals in post-Soviet Slavic countries have a common history and share similar roots and theological convictions.<sup>1</sup> Evangelical churches developed under the Russian Empire and, later, in the Soviet Union under conditions of complete exclusion from any political participation. The tiny experiment by some evangelical leaders, such as Ivan S. Prokhanov (1869–1935), to create an evangelical

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**Johannes Reimer** is director of the Department of Public Engagement of the World Evangelical Alliance. An Anabaptist theologian, Reimer grew up in the former Soviet Union and served time in a labour camp for his resistance to joining the Soviet army.

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<sup>1</sup> See an overview in Johannes Reimer, ‘Evangelische Freikirchen im postsowjetischen Raum’, in *Jahrbuch des Gustav-Adolf-Werks* 84 (2015), 92–107.

party in 1905 and then again in 1917 received little support even from fellow evangelicals. Under Soviet rule, all political activity by evangelicals was banned.

Interest in direct participation in society through relevant ministries and direct political action started to develop in both Ukraine and Russia only after Gorbachev's perestroika and especially got a boost from the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991–1992.

The evangelicals in Ukraine and Russia developed two basically different philosophies of political involvement after 1991. The tensions today also reflect these differences. The Ukrainians sought to overcome their isolation from political discourse in their country by joining various political parties, while Russians stressed the church's role in spiritual revival.

### *Ukrainian evangelicals join political parties*

The massive tensions between Russian and Ukrainian evangelicals started soon after Ukraine declared independence. The new political players in Ukraine found the Protestants to be an important player in building a new, pro-European democratic state. Literally all political parties invited evangelicals to join their party and engage in social transformation.

This unexpected development took the Ukrainian evangelical churches by surprise. No one seemed prepared for it. The vast majority of the churches were traditionally pacifist in orientation and non-conformist relative to the state, like all evangelicals across the former Soviet Union. But more and more, individuals accepted the invitation and soon Protestants started to take over influential positions in politics.

The Baptist Oleksandr V. Turchynov is an excellent example of an evangelical career in the murky waters of Ukrainian politics. He was elected to the Ukrainian parliament (the Rada) in 1998 and rose to become deputy prime minister (2007–2010), acting president (2014), president of the Rada (2014), and secretary of the National Security and Defense Council (2014–2019). Along the way, he became both famous and wealthy. His family owns numerous companies in Ukraine and other European countries.

*Christianity Today* reports that more than 500 Ukrainian evangelicals became involved in party politics at various levels. Their political positions vary, and most of them live in tension between the dirty reality of Ukrainian politics and their conservative beliefs. Often, the churches they belong to criticize their work. In general, however, most Ukrainian denominations have supported the move into politics, desiring a principled transformation of society towards fairly conservative values. One expression of this acceptance is the foundation of the so-called Conservative Movement around the politician Pavel Unguryan, who sees the high acceptance of Protestant politicians in the general population as a chance for a principled transformation of Ukrainian society.<sup>2</sup> Protestants, who constitute only 1.8% of the Ukrainian population,<sup>3</sup> indeed enjoy trust in society. They are generally

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2 Jayson Casper, 'Divided They Stand: Evangelicals Split Up in Politics to Keep Ukraine Conservative', *Christianity Today*, 10 May 2021, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr1>.

3 Razumkov Center, 'Derzhava i Tserkva v Ukrayini-2019' (State and Church in Ukraine in 2019), 2019, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr2>.

less corrupt than other political participants and exhibit selfless concern for their communities.

This welcoming of Protestants in national politics also explains the distinct pro-Ukrainian sentiments of Protestants in eastern Ukraine, which has traditionally leaned towards Russia.<sup>4</sup> This posture in turn has fostered tensions between Ukrainian and Russian evangelicals since the annexation of Crimea and the war for independence in the Ukrainian provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk.

By becoming engaged in the political sector, Ukrainian evangelicals were also caught up in a new form of nationalism. Soon after obtaining independence, Ukraine began to pursue a pro-European agenda while also working towards the creation of a national Ukrainian identity—a difficult task since Ukraine is a multiethnic society. A decision to declare Ukrainian the only national language created growing tension amongst minority groups such as Russians in the eastern part of the country or Hungarians in the west. There were suggestions to restructure Ukraine as a federal republic following the Swiss model, but the parliament rejected this option, pushing a national pro-Ukrainian agenda. Even after some of the Russian-speaking areas in the Donbas separated and a war against the separatists began, the agenda remained unchanged. As a result, the relationship with neighbouring Russia became unbearably tense. The Russian government started to support the separatists in the Donbas and annexed Crimea in 2014. Without any doubt, this was against all international law and was rightly condemned by the international community.

#### *Towards a Protestant idea of state and society in Russia*

This growing political involvement ignited a movement among both Russian and Ukrainian Protestants towards ending the so-called Byzantine concept of the state, under which the Orthodox Church and the Russian Empire shaped society for centuries. The Soviet era only replaced the church by the Communist Party, keeping the general framework of undemocratic rule in place.

The idea of an evangelical *sobor* (council), working towards a unified Protestant church and a Protestant political paradigm, was born and a number of conferences were held in both Moscow and Kiev.<sup>5</sup>

At the first evangelical *sobor* on 16–21 May 2010 near Moscow, the role of the evangelical church in society was prominently on the agenda.<sup>6</sup> Uniting the evangelicals behind a socially relevant missionary vision for Russia would, the speakers proposed, end the marginalization of Protestants in the country and open up new ways to participate in social transformation.<sup>7</sup> The *sobor* formulated five theses for action:

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4 Paul A. Coble, 'Protestants—One of the Most Pro-Ukrainian Groups in the Donbas', *Euromaidan Press*, 25 March 2016, <https://worlddeia.org/yourls/ert462jr3>.

5 See an overview in Johannes Reimer, 'Einheitsbestrebungen in Russland. Zur Idee und Praxis des Evangelischen Sobor 2010', *Theologisches Gespräch* 37, no. 2 (2013): 55–71.

6 *K strategii razvitiia evangel'skogo dvizhenia. Materialy pervogo evangel'skogo sobora. Predsobornye i postsobornye tezisy. Filosofsko-religioznaya tetrad' N.r 001* (Moscow, 2010), 9.

7 *K strategii*, 10.



1. Russian history has been enlightened by the spirit of the Gospel and by the Russian people's longing for God and for what is godly.<sup>8</sup> This spirit has been again and again conflated with the spirit of Byzantium, misleading the Russian society into believing in some special divine destiny as 'the third Rome' and repeatedly leading to politically totalitarian regimes.<sup>9</sup> Byzantinism in Russian society, the sobor concluded, must be overcome.<sup>10</sup> This would be possible only if Russian society followed the evangelical spirit in a nationwide revival.
2. The evangelical movement has always been a 'prophetic voice among its own people'.<sup>11</sup> The movement seeks to shape social life in Russia not according to the Byzantine model, but rather by the power of the gospel. Neither the Byzantine tradition of the Middle Ages nor Western models of today present an alternative for the future of Russia. The evangelical movement orients itself towards the biblical idea of God's kingdom.<sup>12</sup> This, however, presupposes a spiritual revival and reorientation of the whole Russian nation.<sup>13</sup>
3. The evangelical movement pleads for unity amidst confessional plurality among evangelicals. Such unity is seen as a crucial presupposition for the church to function effectively in society amidst the various challenges of postmodernism.<sup>14</sup> Revival presupposes the unity of Christians working hand in hand for social transformation through evangelism.
4. The evangelical movement must develop a culture of democratic discourse. Only when such a culture of creative discussion and dialog is established can transformative goals be reached.<sup>15</sup> The sobor pleads for an end to quarrels and never-ending splits among evangelicals.
5. The evangelical movement must see evangelicals in the light of a common priesthood, the *Sobornost* or ecclesial gathering of all believers. Only where fellow believers are seen as brothers and sisters in Christ can a spirit of unity be achieved.<sup>16</sup>

The findings of the sobor have been transported to all corners of Russia. At their core, they plead for church unity and for the church to become missional by turning towards society as salt and light. The sobor does not discuss any partisan involvement by Christians, but it does not exclude such activity either. The main emphasis is on the church's role as God's instrument of revival.

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8 *Materialy pervogo evangel'skogo sobora Rossii* (Moscow, 2010), 19.

9 *Materialy pervogo*, 21.

10 *K strategii*, 17.

11 *K strategii*, 19.

12 *K strategii*, 21.

13 *Materialy pervogo*, 23.

14 *K strategii*, 22.

15 *K strategii*, 28–29.

16 *K strategii*, 30–31.

## Two paradigms in conflict

It is easy to see where Ukrainian and Russian evangelicals diverged. Both came from a totalitarian past and a Byzantine conception of society. While the Ukrainians accepted the invitation of political parties to join them in improving their nation through engaging in political discourse, the Russian evangelicals stressed overcoming their Byzantine past. Very few Russians entered political parties and their influence on state politics is minimal, in sharp contrast to Ukrainian evangelicals' immense influence within nearly all political movements and parties. Indeed, the democratization process in Ukraine owed much to the role of Protestants in society.

The conflict arose after Russia's annexation of Crimea, which occurred when Turchynov was acting president of Ukraine. He encouraged military actions against the invaders. He is still called the 'bloody pastor'<sup>17</sup> for his command to attack Russian forces in the eastern provinces of Ukraine.

The conflict quickly developed into a full-size political and spiritual struggle, with evangelicals in Ukraine and Russia on opposite sides. While Ukrainians strongly supported their political leaders, demanding that Russia leave all Ukrainian territory, Russian evangelicals kept quiet, demanding more prayer and spiritual maturity from their brothers. Some even supported the actions of their government, pointing to the 'lawless' nature of the 2014 Maidan revolution in Kyiv. The American Mark Elliott, who visited Russia during this time, reported that the congress of the Evangelical-Christian Baptist Churches praised Putin for his attitude towards Ukraine:

Addressing Putin they said: 'We express to you sincere appreciation for your labor in the post of president. ... We reaffirm our principled loyalty with respect to state authority, based on the unchanged words of the Bible, "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom 13:1, ASV).' The evangelical congress also directly challenged the legitimacy of Ukraine's Maidan Revolution and the February 2014 overthrow of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich.<sup>18</sup>

In turn, Ukrainians faulted the Russians for being pro-Putin, politically blind and fearful to stand up for the truth. Meanwhile, some Russians accused Protestants involved in party politics of entering into an agreement with demons.<sup>19</sup> Quickly, other issues such as the European liberal agenda flooded the agenda. But the main stumbling block was the combination of evangelical support for Putin's politics in Russia and the aggressive support by Ukrainian evangelicals of pro-European and even pro-NATO politics.

There were attempts to reconcile the conflicting brothers. Soon after the annexation of Crimea, the two Baptist unions met in Kyiv. On 9–11 April 2014, delegations of evangelicals from Russia and Ukraine met in Jerusalem. The

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17 Gordonua.com, 'Turchynov: I Used To Be Called a Pastor Because I Am a Protestant and I Preach in the Church', 12 April 2018, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr4>.

18 Mark Elliott, 'Why Russia's Evangelicals Thank God for Putin', *Christianity Today*, January 2015, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr5>.

19 Vladislav Bachinin, 'Dogovor s demonom gosudarstvennosti. Sdelka veka', *Mirt*, 4 February 2015, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr6>.

consultation was very controversial, and no joint position was formulated. The Russian Pentecostal bishop Eduard Grabovenko, a Ukrainian by birth, reported after returning home:

Last week the leaders of Christian denominations of Ukraine and Russia met in Jerusalem. Pain, grief, resentment. We talked, exchanged opinions, heard things that contradict what we are told. I will not tell you everything, but I will say that I returned with a heavy heart, because it was not an easy meeting. We tried to smooth the situation, but there is a lot of trouble, a lot of grief. For a day and a half we prayed for unity, peace, the blessing of our countries; we asked for forgiveness from each other, but pain was felt in the hearts of the leaders.<sup>20</sup>

Another ecumenical meeting was conducted in Oslo on 9–11 September 2014, organized by the Norwegian Bible Society, to address the military conflict in eastern Ukraine directly. A number of non-evangelical representatives attended the conference. The participants published a joint statement:

We are deeply sorrowful and we pray for all who have suffered as the result of the conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, both among civilians and military personnel. We call on all believers to continue to pray for peace in Ukraine and, as much as possible, to cooperate in establishing peace. Even though we may have both common views and differences of opinion regarding the causes, events and consequences of today's crisis, we aim through dialogue to achieve mutual understanding, realizing that our goal is to witness to the truth and to promote the achievement of peace. We welcome and support the efforts of both of our countries and the international community directed toward termination of the bloodshed and establishment of peace in Ukraine according to principles of international relationships.<sup>21</sup>

Besides this very friendly statement of mutual responsibility to pursue peace between the two countries, no general disagreements on Christian political involvement were discussed. The two major meetings in Jerusalem and Oslo did not lead to any deeper reconciliation of opinions about proper church-state relations or political engagement.

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, cities have been under attack, with people dying daily. The situation seems totally out of control. But there are signs of hope in inter-evangelical relationships. Evangelicals in Ukraine, Russia and other nations of the former USSR have appealed to President Putin to stop the war.<sup>22</sup> The Russian Evangelical Alliance published an open letter of the Ukrainian Church Council to President Putin, with a similar message,<sup>23</sup> and the General Secretary of the Russian Evangelical Alliance supported

20 Eduard Grabovenko, *Iskrene o sokrovennom Ukraina I Rossia*. 15.04.2014. *Novosti RC CHVE*.

21 Religious Information Service of Ukraine, 'Spiritual Leaders of Ukraine and Russia in Association Call to Stop Violence in Donbas', 12 September 2014, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr7>.

22 'Appeal of the Baptist Church to the President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin', 1 March 2022, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr8>.

23 'Appeal of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations to the President of the Russian Federation', 23 February 2022, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462jr9>.

this appeal in his own open letter to the President.<sup>24</sup> Hundreds of evangelical pastors in Russia expressed solidarity with Ukraine. Will these actions lead to a renewed and reconciled relationship? I hope so.

### **A way to reconciliation**

Reconciliation requires a common understanding of what caused the conflict. As Jesus said, 'You will recognize the truth and the truth will set you free' (Jn 8:32). The conflicts between Russian and Ukrainian Christians arise from different perspectives on the church's role in transforming society.

Both groups have sought to overcome the Byzantine paradigm of church-state relations, but in different ways. While Ukrainians have followed a secular, European democratic paradigm of engaging with political parties and transforming them from within, the Russian believers prefer pursuing a general revival in the country, encouraged by a church's activity as salt and light in society. The first way embraces political engagement; the second concentrates on evangelism and socially relevant mission. Both may be important, but a collision between the two approaches can create antagonisms that lead to hatred and separation. I hope there is time to bridge the perspectives and create a joint platform for social action to overcome war.

### **Ukraine's evangelicals: caught between politics and mission**

I have no interest in justifying Putin's madness in attacking Ukraine. However, I would encourage Ukrainians to think about the future, even while Russia is trying to destroy it.

I am not a political scientist but a missiologist. My task is to interpret history in the light of God's mission in the world. In this mission, the church is called to convey the Gospel of God's kingdom to all nations on earth (Mt 28:19–20).

This focus may seem misplaced right now. Who can think about mission in the midst of a war? Yes, in a war, survival is of utmost importance. But for Christians, there is never any issue more central than God's mission in the world, for he is the Lord and the history of mankind is in his hands. This is no different for Ukraine and the Ukrainian church than for anyone else. The church's destiny must be marked by mission, or else it will have no destiny at all.

I grew up in the former Soviet Union. My family lost their home four times. Both of my grandfathers were killed by the Soviets. I myself spent years in a Soviet labour camp. Now I live in Germany, but I can't say where my home is. I certainly join in the lament of the millions of Ukrainians fleeing their country after Putin's army has bombed their homes and killed their dear ones. And yet, wars are not forever, and the Ukrainian church will remain. What will its task be? How will it work through this horrible time period in its history?

#### *A sending country par excellence*

The Ukrainian evangelical church has been the most mission-minded church in the former USSR, perhaps rivalled by the Moldavian church. Thousands of missionaries

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24 'Address of the REA Secretary General to V. Putin', 23 February 2022, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462jr10>.

from Ukrainian churches flooded the vast territories of Russia and Central Asia shortly after the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Soon Ukrainian missionaries were in north India, Nepal, Vietnam and Africa. I have never seen such an exciting mission spirit, especially from a church just emerging from 70 years of severe persecution under Soviet rule.

Mission, evangelism and church planting in Ukraine and abroad dominated the day-to-day conversation in many churches. I vividly remember a conversation with a pastor of an independent Baptist church in Irpin, near Kyiv, who called the missionary movement spreading through the Ukrainian churches an ‘historic chance for our churches’, concluding that ‘mission is our destiny.’

Some of these Ukrainian missionaries went to the extreme north of Russia. One day, I asked one of them whether they missed their home in Ukraine. He replied, ‘Our home, brother, is the mission field and beyond that—heaven. We have left Ukraine. Sure, that is the place where we were born and raised and people there speak our mother’s tongue. We love that place. But as Christians, we follow Jesus, who did not know where to lay down his head. And we follow the apostle Paul, who aimed towards the heavenly home, knowing that his citizenship was in heaven’ (Phil 3:20).

Some of the Ukrainian missionaries compared themselves to Abraham, whom God commissioned to leave his home and go to a place the Lord would show him. ‘Abraham was promised to be blessed and become a blessing to many nations’ (Gen 12:1–3), they said. ‘And we are blessed too by fulfilling his Great Commission.’

There is no question that Ukrainians on the mission field, whether in countries of the former Soviet Union or further abroad, were and are a blessing. You can find them in the leadership of large denominations, such as Eduard Grabovenko, the lead bishop of the Russian Pentecostal Church, and many others.

After the Russian annexation of Crimea and the onset of pro-Russian separatism in the Ukrainian provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk, the traditionally good relationships between Ukrainian and Russian sister churches, as well as their joint missionary work, came under scrutiny. Ukrainian missionaries who worked and lived in Russia were accused of having become pro-Russian. ‘Your home is Ukraine’, Ukrainian leaders demanded; ‘come home and defend your country that is under attack.’ To the best of my knowledge, only a few did. They still lived with a missionary paradigm in their heart that home is where your mission field is and heaven is your actual citizenship.

*‘All honor to Ukraine’ or is there more?*

Ukrainian Christians are now torn between a missional agenda on behalf of the kingdom of God (while not denying their loyalty to their country of origin) and a patriotic national agenda. The question is to whom all glory must be given: the national state of Ukraine or God who works far beyond any state and nation. How will they decide?

The war with Russia makes the issue harder. Seeing the unprecedented brutality of the aggressor, Christians have joined the armed forces and fought against those sinners whom they were missionizing just years before. Killing the enemy is for them no longer a sin.

This seemed impossible only few years before. Ukrainian Christians rejected military service. Many of them went to prison for their attitude. Now, a church with strong pacifist convictions has been turned into an active agent of war. Is this a just war? Yes, many evangelical leaders say, and attempts to engage Ukrainians in conversation on the issue are quickly put aside as irrelevant and even dangerous. 'In the current situation, we need more weapons and not Bibles', a good friend of mine told me just days ago. I understand the immediate need, but I fear that the political agenda has taken over his and his church's vision.

It is right for a Christian to be a patriot and work for the glory of one's nation, but it is dangerous to lose sight of God's glory while doing so. Some Ukrainians, it seems, follow the path of other Christians who seem to be guided by a similar excitement for nationalism—white American evangelicals and some Russians, for example. This attitude does not ultimately advance God's kingdom. The glory of one's nation is often just a fleeting thing. May our good Lord protect both Russia and Ukraine from this kind of nationalism.

### Back to the mission agenda

Millions of Ukrainians have left their country. Among these refugees are many evangelical Christians. Their homes and homeland destroyed, they hope to find security and comfort elsewhere. 'May this become my new home', a recently arrived refugee in my German hometown tells me.

I do hope he and his compatriots may find a way to settle in Germany. As German Christians, we will do everything possible to assist them. But even more than that, I wish the Ukrainian Christians who have escaped Putin's hellish assault on their country would find their way back to the missionary agenda of God. Only there will they find rest for their wounded hearts. Only there will they be enabled to overcome hatred and become reconcilers. Only there will they understand that our war is never against flesh and blood, but rather against demonic powers (Eph 6:12). Offering sinners a home at the cross of Jesus, they will find home themselves. They are on the mission field, regardless of where this field may be.

Does this mean the church must abandon all political involvement and concentrate on evangelism only? Of course not! The *missio Dei* is always also a *missio politica*. The church is God's salt and light in and for the society (Mt 5:13–16), his chosen people, called out of the world to accept responsibility for the world (Mt 16:18). The church will never leave the world, since Jesus has sent the church into the world. The world is its mission field.<sup>25</sup>

What, then, is the church's political involvement, practically speaking? Surely not party politics. It is called to proclaim God's kingdom and to work to transform people into disciples of Christ (Mt 28:19–20). This excludes hating the enemy, in favour of loving them as Jesus did. And surely this includes community building—but not under the banner of ideological programs, be they Western or Eastern, but under the banner of God's kingdom. The world does not set the agenda for evangelical political involvement, but God in his revelation does! The church is sent as Jesus was sent (Jn

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25 See more on this point in Johannes Reimer, *Missio Politica: The Mission of Church and Politics* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2017).

20:21). His mission was to reconcile the broken world with God (2 Cor 5:18), a mission of peace to those near and those far off (Eph 2:17). The church has no other mission. It has been entrusted with the word of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–19).

I am impressed by some of the Ukrainian churches whose people have decided to stay in Ukraine in the midst of the war. Vasyl Ostryi, pastor of the Irpin Grace Church and professor at Kyiv Theological Seminary, writes:

While the church may not fight like the nation, we still believe we have a role to play in this struggle. We will shelter the weak, serve the suffering, and mend the broken. And as we do, we offer the unshakable hope of Christ and his gospel. While we may feel helpless in the face of such a crisis, we can pray like Esther. Ukraine is not God's covenant people, but like Israel, our hope is that the Lord will remove the danger as he did for his ancient people. And as we stay, we pray the church in Ukraine will faithfully trust the Lord and serve our neighbors.<sup>26</sup>

Ostryi and his church perform miracles day by day, offering their neighbours shelter, first aid, a hand of friendship, counselling and spiritual support. Some of them regain hope, find peace in God and join hands with the church. And no, they do not take up arms; their most important weapon is still prayer and the Bible as the foundation for all their mission and action. They are building community in the midst of crisis—the Jesus way! This might cost them all their lives, but did Jesus ever promise us anything else? Their testimony has been a great encouragement for me and my people.

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26 Vasyl Ostryi, 'To Stay and Serve: Why We Didn't Flee Ukraine', The Gospel Coalition, 24 February 2022, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462jr11>.

# Temne Dream Culture and Charismatic Churches in Sierra Leone: Probing the Limits of Contextualization

Joseph Bosco Bangura

*Many emphasize that Christian ministries in Africa need to engage meaningfully with Africans' sensitivity to the spirit world. But that engagement also presents risks of syncretism or departing from biblical truth. This case study, full of historical detail and biblical insight, examines how some Charismatic ministries in Sierra Leone are accommodating traditional views of dreams, along with the resulting opportunities and pitfalls.*

The Temne people, the largest ethnic group in Sierra Leone, have an intricate view of dreams, expressed in various proverbs such as the common saying that 'not everyone who bids you goodnight and goes to bed actually goes to sleep.' Such sayings highlight the Temne's intense suspicions regarding the nocturnal activities of people who appear to be asleep. In their estimation, rather than going to sleep, as expressed in the bidding '*ma di-reo*' (I wish you a good sleep), some people mysteriously leave their bodies at night to perpetrate mischief. These activities are believed to result in serious misfortunes for innocent victims.<sup>1</sup> For the Temne, dreams (*ma-ren*) are the revelatory window by which people track, expose and deal with these obnoxious activities. Thus, their dreams forewarn them of potential threats set to happen in the affairs of human life in the inhabited world.<sup>2</sup>

Although dream traditions pervade Temne cultural life, many people raised with these beliefs have converted to Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, despite the availability of

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1 Harry Sawyerr and John Parratt, *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 11; Prince Sorie Conteh, *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa: Interreligious Encounters and Dialogue* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), 48.

2 James Littlejohn, 'The Temne House', in *Myth and Cosmos: Readings in Mythology and Symbolism*, ed. John Middleton (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1989), 331–47.

3 Harry Sawyerr, 'Traditions in Transit', in *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. John S. Pobee (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 85–96.



anthropological studies on the subject,<sup>4</sup> Protestant and evangelical churches in Sierra Leone have not produced serious theologizing to guide their missionary and discipling engagement with Temne dream cultures.

In contrast to the limited attention accorded to dreams by other churches, the newer Charismatic churches have taken Temne dream cultures seriously and provided pastoral responses that appear to be convergent with the needs of converts. For this reason, when Temne Charismatic converts dream, they turn to their leaders (their bishops, prophets and apostles), who interpret the dreams and prescribe remedial measures to ameliorate the potentially dangerous situation revealed in the dream. Sometimes, these charismatic ‘men (or women) of God’ have also experienced dreams of their own after returning from prayer retreats. Those dreams and revelations are promptly shared with congregants, with the aim of inspiring faith and perseverance, warning of lurking danger and assuring the faithful that their prayers have been answered and will lead to material prosperity and healing, among other blessings.

Although this integration is understandable because it tries to address anxieties arising from Temne dream cultures, it nevertheless elicits liminal tensions about the limits of Charismatic contextualization. In particular, it raises questions about how to incorporate Temne dream cosmologies into Christian theology without watering down the essential contents of the Christian gospel. As Christianity continues to encounter existing traditional cosmologies such as Temne beliefs about dreams, Christians are challenged not only to recognize the reality of the spirit world but to biblically engage non-Christian supernatural worldviews that influence people’s profession of faith. In doing so, the church must guard against potential pitfalls and excesses that arise if uncritical models of contextualization are employed.

This essay draws from my personal experience as a Temne, Charismatic and cleric with extensive experience of Temne culture. While growing up in Makeni, the largest Temne city in northern Sierra Leone, I was troubled by the sight of Temne Charismatics reverting back to tradition to make sense of their recurring dreams. This unease was compounded when I began pastoral ministry at the National Pentecostal Mission and taught missiology at The Evangelical College of Theology in Sierra Leone. Back then, because I had not received adequate theological training concerning dream cultures, I struggled to assist my parishioners whose dreams were presenting worrisome issues for them. This question kept coming up during my doctoral fieldwork,<sup>5</sup> and again later while I was assessing Charismatic responses to the Ebola outbreak.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I examine the encounter between Temne dream cosmologies and Charismatic churches, as a case study of the limits of the indigenous

4 Rosalind Shaw, ‘Dreams as Accomplishment: Power, the Individual and Temne Divination’, in *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*, ed. M. C. Jedrej and Rosalind Shaw (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 36–54.

5 Joseph Bosco Bangura, *The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone 1980–2010: A Missio-historical Analysis in View of African Culture, Prosperity Gospel and Power Theology* (PhD dissertation, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit and Vrije University Amsterdam, 2013).

6 Joseph Bosco Bangura, ‘Hope in the Midst of Death: Charismatic Spirituality, Healing Evangelists and the Ebola Crises in Sierra Leone’, *Missionalia: South African Journal of Missiology* 44, no. 1 (2016): 2–18.

contextualization of Christianity. After a brief overview of Temne dream cosmology, I account for the emergence of Charismatic movements in Sierra Leone and reflect on how the movement's supernatural worldviews and beliefs inform its approaches to Temne dream cultures. The final section offers a biblical analysis of dreams and applies that analysis to a constructive critique of the biblical depth and cultural sensitivity of Charismatic engagement with dreams.

### Temne dream cosmology

The Temne people make up about 30 percent of Sierra Leone's population of seven million.<sup>7</sup> Known for its early embrace of Islam, Temne culture oscillates between Muslim beliefs and traditional cosmologies.<sup>8</sup> Temne culture is handed down through rites of passage and initiation ceremonies performed at puberty in secret societies, known as *poro* (for boys) and *bundo* (for girls).

Temne cosmology generally distinguishes between four worlds, and what happens in each one has a direct impact on the others. These include the *no-ru*, or the visible world inhabited by human beings; the *ro-soki*, inhabited by spirits; the *ro-kerfi*, inhabited by the ancestors; and the *ro-seron*, inhabited by witches.<sup>9</sup> Although the four worlds affect each other, they are separated by a certain kind of darkness. Only a small percentage of people, known as *an-soki* (those with four eyes), some of whom may exercise revered functions such as diviners, hunters or blacksmiths, possess the ability to penetrate and transcend this darkness with their special spiritual vision.<sup>10</sup> People with four eyes are often suspected of being witches, and their secretive activities are traceable by others through dreams (*me-re*).

Temne tradition holds that through dreams, the darkness that separates the four worlds is mediated and human beings who inhabit the visible *no-ru* can take steps to either protect, defend or heal themselves against the fractious infiltration of powerful spiritual powers from the three invisible yet real worlds. According to Temne cosmology, dreams are not just a video replay of those events that transpired at daylight in the *no-ru*, and dreaming (*kê wɔrɛp*) is not an amusement park which one enters while asleep to escape the daily burdens of the inhabited world. Rather, dreams speak of real activities carried out in one of the four worlds but the impact of which transcends that world. If people fail to take appropriate measures to prevent the frightening details revealed in dreams, the normal course of events in the inhabited world will be substantially altered. Therefore, when retelling dreams, the Temne pay careful attention to the tiniest of details, to ascertain any interlocking threads that may connect dreams to angry ancestors, nature spirits or witchcraft.

Three issues in Temne dream cosmology are worthy of particular note. First, the Temne consider dreams to be the medium of communication with their ancestors.

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7 Joseph J. Bangura, *The Temne of Sierra Leone: African Agency in the Making of a British Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 26–27.

8 David E. Skinner, 'Mande Settlements and the Development of Islamic Institutions in Sierra Leone', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 11, no. 1 (1978): 32–62; L. Proudfoot, 'Mosque-building and Tribal Separation in Freetown East', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 29, no. 4 (1959): 405–16.

9 Shaw, 'Dreams as Accomplishment', 37.

10 Shaw, 'Dreams as Accomplishment', 37.

They take pride in their ancestors (*An-baki* or ‘older ones’) because they are the rock from which the present generation is hewn and remain responsible for people’s protection and fertility on earth.<sup>11</sup> Because death does not end life, ancestors often pay regular visits to surviving relatives through dreams to deliver instructions, monitor community progress and ensure that clan traditions are maintained. On such visits, they also select surviving siblings or relatives to whom supernatural powers and knowledge are transmitted, so that others can carry on crafts the ancestors once had.<sup>12</sup> Although ancestors spatially reside in their graves, as spirit beings they often follow their children wherever they go.<sup>13</sup> Thus, messages communicated by ancestors carry an extreme sense of urgency and demand immediate action, which is often discerned for surviving relatives by diviners and other sacred specialists.

Second, the Temne believe that dreams can be used to initiate new conscripts into witchcraft. This is not surprising because beliefs about witchcraft are prevalent across Sierra Leone.<sup>14</sup> Witches (*an-sherr*) are always out to recruit new members who can continue perpetuating mischief in society.<sup>15</sup> Witches are believed to be close relatives who lure the spirits (*an-yina*) of recruits at night, primarily through dreams. Young children are particularly at risk because they can easily be enticed into the trade through offers of delicious and meaty food. When they consume this food, young conscripts’ eyes are opened to the dreaded world of witchcraft. Possessing what is known as ‘four eyes’ (two visible natural eyes and another set of invisible supernatural eyes), new initiates can mysteriously leave their bodies at night to engage in such practices as stealing crops, plaguing or killing cattle, or causing harm to anyone who is perceived as a political, social or personal threat.<sup>16</sup>

Third, through dreams, people can discover the methods used by ‘evil people’ (*An fem ah les*) to cause harm. Among the Temne, signs of material prosperity can attract petty jealousy and rivalry from peers. Economic and material prosperity provokes suspicion that peers may have contracted unknown supernatural powers which, if unchecked, may harm the community. Therefore, it is common to manipulate spiritual powers to outclass rivals and opponents. In this way, dreams point to the ‘power encounter’ (*an forse*) that occurs when the services of diviners and witches are contracted to eradicate political opponents or romantic rivals.<sup>17</sup> If the dreamer or someone closely related to them was subdued in the dream, the implication is that their exercise of power over arch-rivals in politics or jobs or among co-wives has been aborted by the superior spiritual power of the opponent.

11 Shaw, ‘Dreams as Accomplishment’, 38.

12 Prince Sorie Conteh, *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa: Interreligious Encounters and Dialogue* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), 37–39; Abdul K. Turay, ‘Temne Supernatural Terminology’, *Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion* 8, no. 2 (1967): 41–60.

13 *Source Book for Four Sierra Leone Languages* (Freetown: National Curriculum Development Centre, 1993), 204–5.

14 Sawyerr and Parratt, *The Practice of Presence*, 11–13; R. T. Parsons, *Religion in an African Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 53–54.

15 Rosalind Shaw, ‘The Production of Witchcraft/Witchcraft as Production: Memory, Modernity, and the Slave Trade in Sierra Leone’, *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 4 (1997): 856–57.

16 Conteh, *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa*, 47–48.

17 Conteh, *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa*, 48.

Such dreams call for appropriate actions to prevent the situation revealed in the dream from taking place in real life. As warning signs, dreams provide access points to those powerful spiritual truths located outside the inhabited world.<sup>18</sup>

### Charismatics in Sierra Leone

Charismatic churches owe much of their existence to the revival and church renewal efforts initiated by evangelical para-church organizations. These activities were later bolstered when Charismatic developments that originated in other countries were introduced to Sierra Leone. Though some of these para-church organizations started working in Sierra Leone only in the early 1970s, others have had a much longer history of missionary involvement in the church scene.

For instance, in 1967, the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone launched the New Life for All evangelistic campaign. Led by a popular Temne evangelist, Joseph Sedu Mans, New Life toured throughout Sierra Leone, preaching salvation in Christ and inviting young people to embrace its born-again message. New Life's evangelistic efforts received a significant boost when Bill Roberts, a British evangelical missionary, was sent to revive the Scripture Union of Sierra Leone (SUSL) and to work with pupils at primary and secondary schools. New Life and SUSL organized national youth camps which attracted scores of young people throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. As a youth, I attended some of them.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1980s, however, Sierra Leone's political and socio-economic fortunes cascaded into disrepair and then into a decade-long civil war. Meanwhile, many students who had been converted at secondary schools were admitted to various degree programs at Fourah Bay College. The Sierra Leone Fellowship of Evangelical Students (SLEFES) was established in 1982 to follow up on their spiritual development and seek new converts. SLEFES operated prayer and Bible study fellowships at all the constituent campuses of the university.

In the 1990s, Sierra Leone entered another horrendous period of rebel insurrection that lasted until 2002. At this time, international agents came to establish Charismatic churches and ministries in the war-torn country. The Freetown Bible Training Centre (FBTC), founded by American Charismatic evangelist Ross Tatro in 1990, offered a program of rapid discipleship training that resulted in the formation of Charismatic churches across the country. Shortly thereafter, and despite the raging atrocities brought by the rebel war, FBTC became so popular that even members of mainline Protestant and evangelical denominations enrolled and went on to found 'independent Bible believing churches'.<sup>20</sup> In 1992, Youth with a Mission (YWAM) collaborated with Mercy Ships to distribute relief supplies and engage in community development work. These efforts facilitated evangelism and supported the establishment of an even wider array of Charismatic churches. Although these moves aimed to bring revival among mainline Christian denominations, they soon led to the formation of many new Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Two less widely known Charismatic churches whose leaders

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18 Shaw, 'Dreams as Accomplishment', 42.

19 Bangura, *Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone*, 30–40.

20 Joseph Bosco Bangura, *Pentecostalism in Sierra Leone: Contextual Theologies, Theological Education and Public Engagements* (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2020), 8–9.

have appropriated Temne dream cosmologies are of particular relevance to this essay.

The first is Life of Light Ministries, founded by Priscilla Lefevre. Growing up in Sierra Leone in the late 1970s, Lefevre wanted to join the Sierra Leone police to advocate for women who had experienced unbearable forms of domestic violence. Her vision was fulfilled and she married a fellow police officer, but the marriage ended in divorce, leaving her with the responsibility of raising four children.

By the 1980s, Sierra Leone's socioeconomic woes were already spiralling out of control and police officers seldom received their salaries on time. When they did, it was hardly enough to pay for a few days' food. Divorced and almost destitute, Lefevre began to receive dreams calling her into a better vocation, but she could not understand what the dreams meant. Troubled, she began to attend Police Christian Fellowship meetings, where she became a Christian and received her call to ministry.

Explaining the story of her conversion and call, Lefevre describes seeing herself in a courtroom prosecuting a case on behalf of an abused woman. But rather than issuing a ruling on their case, the judge told her that she was calling Lefevre to a better job. Her interpretation was clear: 'I felt that it was the Lord who was calling me from being a mender of broken homes (police officer in the family support unit of the Sierra Leone Police), to be a mender of broken souls (a pastor to the many battered women in society). I see my present ministry as a far higher calling than what I was involved in during my early working career.'<sup>21</sup> This call would subsequently be clarified by several recurring dreams in which she saw herself either talking to huge crowds of people gathered at public places or mediating disputes among aggrieved parties. Such events correspond to other accounts of dreams cited by African religious leaders to validate the authority on which their ministries are based.<sup>22</sup>

Although she continued participating in events organized by the Police Christian Fellowship, Lefevre quit her job as a police officer and stopped attending the fellowship regularly. Subsequently, she started a prayer fellowship that advocates for women who have gone through terrible divorces or other personal tragedies. The ministry became constituted as a church in 1992 when it started meeting on Sundays. It now has two churches situated in the Allen Town and Goderich suburbs of Freetown, where growing communities of Temne migrants to Freetown have settled. The main focus of Lefevre's ministry is to engage in 'aggressive warfare prayer and deliverance, so that the destinies of church members that have been stolen through demonic dreams will be restored'.<sup>23</sup>

Another notable example is Peter Bangura's Gate of Revival Pentecostal Church, founded in 2000. (Peter Bangura and I are not related to each other.) Situated in Waterloo, a bustling commercial settlement 15 miles east of Freetown, the church is well known for its emphasis on interpreting dreams, visions and prophecies. Waterloo is home to a large community of Temne traders, who migrated to this seaside fishing area to engage in business and commercial activities.

21 Priscilla Lefevre (founder and general overseer, Life of Light Ministries), interviews with author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 19 December 2011 and 10 April 2014.

22 Simon Charsley, 'Dreams in African Churches', in *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*, ed. M. C. Jedrej and Rosalind Shaw (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 160.

23 Lefevre, interview, 19 December 2011.

Like many of his Temne contemporaries, Bangura did not come to Waterloo to start a church, but for business reasons. He started as a repairer of broken radio and cassette players before moving into pastoral ministry. Developing his ministry along the lines of his gift of interpreting dreams, visions and revelations, the church quickly attracted many Temne people who not only perceive him as one of their kinsmen but identify with his emphasis on the role of dreams.

At Gate of Revival Pentecostal Church, members are urged to engage regularly in sessions of prayer and fasting lasting 7, 21 or 40 days. These sessions are usually accompanied by a season when the faithful are said to receive dreams about various social and spiritual issues. Any dreams they receive are immediately reported to the pastor, who interprets them. The pastor himself not only has dreams of his own but also claims to receive visions and revelations for specific people within and outside his church so that clarity could be restored to their troubled situations. Much like the incubation acts associated with prophetic dreams among civilizations of the ancient Near East and Israel,<sup>24</sup> Bangura claims to receive dreams after participating in fasting, ritual purification and seclusion in the church or after returning from his regular prayer trips to nearby mountains. He believes that by denying his body food, water and other pleasures, he is creating an atmosphere suitable for God to speak to him. The visions and revelations received while in seclusion are shared with the church and are sometimes written down in prayer manuals and sold to church members and the public.<sup>25</sup>

### Charismatic worldviews on dreams

Both Lefevre and Bangura recognize dreams as God's primary medium of speaking directly to them as prophets, commissioning them for pastoral ministry and giving instructions that address the needs of the flock under their care.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, using the two Charismatic churches listed above and based on my insider understanding of both Temne culture and Charismatic churches, I will explore the recurring themes Charismatics have adopted to respond to the pastoral content of dreams in Sierra Leone.

First, Charismatics believe that witchcraft is usually perpetrated by close family members, especially those who are jealous of and would want to hinder the social progress and economic standing of siblings. Charismatics believe that witches can gain access to victims by using personal items such as under-clothing, fingernail cuttings or pubic hair. Consequently, these items must be carefully disposed of to prevent their use as witchcraft contact points. A witch who has access to these items can manipulate victims by causing unexplainable sickness, imposing bad luck that prevents girls from finding good husbands or makes them barren if they do find one. Others believe that it can cause promotion delays for public officials or failure in public examinations. Dreams are the window that reveal these activities. Hence, Charismatic church services are often interspersed with segments in which

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24 Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, trans. Jill M. Munro (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 21.

25 Peter Bangura, 'Warfare Prayer Manual', Gate of Revival Pentecostal Church, Waterloo, Sierra Leone, 2010.

26 Charsley, 'Dreams in African Churches', 160–64.

congregants are called upon to share their dreams and receive prayer to subdue the deadly spiritual forces revealed in them. Claiming support from a somewhat popular Bible verse, 'Thou shall not suffer a witch to live' (Ex 22:18, KJV), Charismatics frequently pray for the complete annihilation of witches, even if they are family members.<sup>27</sup> Charismatic church members are urged to break any known covenants they have struck with persons known for involvement in witchcraft.<sup>28</sup>

Second, Charismatics believe that ancestral curses can negatively affect human progress and well-being. Because of their desire for successful lives, many ancestors were lured into covenants with evil spirits and demonic forces.<sup>29</sup> Although the clients may have enjoyed material wealth and prosperity, their children pay the price in the form of untimely, mysterious death or malady. That covenant becomes a curse that negatively affects successive generations.

The example of Francess Kamanda<sup>30</sup> illustrates how ancestral curses are perceived as operating. In December 2009, Francess lost her father, who was just 43 years old. This death devastated Francess, who was at a critical stage in her university education. Her grieving continued through February 2011, when Francess and her mother accepted Jesus Christ and started attending Gate of Revival Pentecostal Church. After praying with this family for some time, Bangura had a dream that revealed to him that Francess' father had died due to an ancestral curse. According to the revelation, male children born in Francess' paternal family could not live beyond age 45. Males who attain that age would fall sick and develop complications leading to their death. This situation could be amended only through engaging in seven days of prayer backed up with 'dry fasting' (abstaining completely from food and water). After this exercise, each member of the family must be consecrated with olive oil, so that the curse can be broken and the family cleansed from its contaminating effects. For Francess and her family, the pastor's revelation and prayer confirmed their suspicion that spiritual causes lay behind the father's untimely death.

A third area where Charismatic appropriation of dreams could be related to Temne culture is the role that evil people are thought to perform in the community. Charismatics, like their Temne counterparts, believe that dreams reveal activities that belong to the world of darkness. This dark world includes terrifying signs that become visible in the inhabited world only through dreams and visions. But the signs themselves disappear from the naked eye with the coming of daylight (see Ps 73:20).<sup>31</sup> According to Charismatics, some people are not at peace with the success of their contemporaries.

Charismatics argue that if Joseph's repeated dreams increased his brothers' animosity towards him and triggered their plotting to kill him (Gen 37) and if both Joseph and the Magi were warned in a dream about the homicidal persecution King Herod was about to launch against infant males who threatened his throne (Mt 2:13–

27 Jonathan A. Cole, *The Devil, Demons and Deliverance* (Freetown, Sierra Leone: New Life Ministries International Publications, 1999).

28 Bangura, 'Warfare Prayer Manual', 1–2.

29 James Edward Davies, *The Church and the Secret Society Syndrome in Sierra Leone* (Freetown: TECT, 2009), 45.

30 Francess Kamanda, interviews with author, 4 December 2010, 19 December 2011 and 10 April 2014.

31 Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives*, 102.

18), certainly dreams are to be taken seriously. Taking the Joseph story further (Gen 40 and 41), Charismatic churches such as Gate of Revival Pentecostal Church and Life of Light Ministries believe God has given contemporary Charismatic prophets (such as the founders of these churches and their spouses) the power to interpret dreams. From their reading of Deuteronomy 29:29 and Proverbs 25:2, Charismatics argue that in the same way as secret things belong to God, so also God has given them the responsibility to investigate secret matters. But those things that God reveals through dreams and visions belong to Charismatics and their generation forever. Therefore, they say, visions, revelations and dreams given to or interpreted by Charismatic leaders should not be treated with contempt (1 Thess 5:20). Such prophetic declarations have the power to impact the destiny of church members.

### Biblical analysis and critique

Although Charismatic churches claim to base their teaching about dreams on the Bible, what does the biblical witness actually say about dreams? In the Pentateuch, the patriarchs were especially noted for their dreams. For instance, Yahweh spoke to Abraham while he was sleeping (Gen 15:12); appeared to Isaac and Jacob at night (Gen 26:24; 28:12–15); and spoke to Jacob in a dream (Gen 28:16). Joseph both had dreams and later changed roles from dreamer to interpreter of dreams (Gen 40:8, 12–13, 18–19; 41:25–36). Joseph's ability to interpret dreams was given to him by the same God who initially gave the dream (Gen 40:8; 41:16).<sup>32</sup>

Dreams were also a prominent feature of the priestly and prophetic vocations (1 Sam 9:9). Kings usually consulted priests and prophets to determine by divination the will of God regarding specific issues with religious, ritualistic and political consequences for the nation. King Saul, distressed that God had not spoken to him either by dreams, Urim or prophecy, consulted a medium, the witch of Endor. The process of divination, which resulted in the appearance of the dead spirit of Samuel the prophet, eventually led to Saul's demise (1 Sam 28:6, 15). The Old Testament firmly rejects consulting the dead through mediums (Lev 19:31; 20:6; Deut 18:10; Isa 8:19). People were also expressly prohibited from listening to false prophets (Jer 14:14; 23:16; 27:9; Ezek 21:29). Overall, the evidence from the Hebrew Scriptures suggests that many divine messages were received in dreams.<sup>33</sup>

In the New Testament, dreams offered predictions and warnings of future events. For instance, in Matthew 2:12–13, 22–23 and Luke 2:39, dreams warned the Magi and Joseph that King Herod would seek to kill all infant males in the vicinity of Bethlehem. The persons who received those dreams were urged to alter their travel plans and return to their places of origin by another route to save the life of the infant Christ. Pilate, while presiding over the trial of Jesus, received a message-dream from his wife, warning against having anything to do with Jesus (Matt 27:19). Pilate, however, chose to ignore his wife's warning. Peter both spoke of and had his own

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32 Hanna Tervanotko, 'Speaking in Dreams: The Figure of Miriam and Prophecy', in *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 150.

33 Francis Flannery-Dailey, *Dreams, Scribes, and Priests: Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 38–56.



dreams and visions (Acts 2:17; 10:1–48). The apostle Paul also had experiences that would probably count as dreams and/or visions. Faced with a serious threat to his life at Corinth, Paul was explicitly encouraged about his safety and the need to be bold in proclaiming the gospel message (Acts 18:1–17). On his journey to Rome, Paul and his companions were shipwrecked. At night, an angel of God appeared to him to assure him and the other sailors about their safety despite the bad weather. He was to continue his journey and proclaim the gospel in Rome (Acts 27:23). Moreover, Paul refers to ‘visions and revelations’ (presumably his own) in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4.

Charismatics take their surrounding culture seriously and want to distance themselves from and counteract traditional African cultural practices, yet how they do so raises questions about their approach to contextualization. On the positive side, their engagement with Temne dream culture and their willingness to interpret dreams have authenticated their leadership among followers. Both the Temne people and Charismatic ministries regard dreams as warning about evil events scheduled to occur in the inhabited world (*no-ru*).<sup>34</sup> They then claim spiritual foresight and power to interpret the dreams and forestall the bad omens revealed. They argue that their interpretations provide a path to wholesome experience of the good life, which evil spirits and witchcraft want to destroy. This convergence makes clear that there are existing questions in Temne culture that were either ignored or not adequately addressed by earlier Christian missionary engagements with this cultural context. One could argue that the Charismatic ability to connect biblical content to Temne traditions appears to be helping Temne converts to solve daily problems in the inhabited world. Making use of traditional dream cosmologies in this way supports the strong belief among Charismatics that God does break into the activities of humanity to forewarn, redeem and rescue people blighted by witchery.<sup>35</sup>

However, the Charismatics’ use of dreams is rather eclectic and betrays an apparent neglect of the precise function of dreams in the Bible, making the biblical basis on which the interpretation of dreams is premised somewhat questionable. Clearly, the Charismatic appropriation of dreams must acknowledge the Bible’s explicit warnings against dreams peddled by false prophets (Deut 12:32–13:5; Jer 23:25–28; 27:9; Zech 10:2). As far as the Bible is concerned, particular interpretations of dreams could be completely wrong.<sup>36</sup> The lack of recognition of the interpreters’ fallibility raises some concern about the selective strategies deployed by Charismatic leaders when they use the biblical material. For instance, Bangura of Gate of Revival Pentecostal Church often argues that if his dreams or interpretations of dreams do not materialize, the problem must be attributed to the client’s sin and lack of faith, or to the continuing activities of evil spirits and demonic forces. This argument is

34 Shaw, ‘Dreams as Accomplishment’, 42.

35 Cephas Omenyo, ‘African Pentecostalism’, *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 146.

36 Carolyn J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 103–24; Robert R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 67–80; Hanna Tervanotko, ‘Speaking in Dreams: The Figure of Miriam and Prophecy’, in *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 151.

rather puzzling because the same biblical material they use to support such practices also warns against the activities of false prophets who erroneously arrogate to themselves visions and dreams that have not come from God (Deut 18:20; Jer 14:14; 1 Jn 4:1). Therefore, to appropriately respond to existing cultural beliefs such as dreams, Charismatics must develop approaches that are biblical, pastorally conscientious and relevant to the local cultural context.

A third contextualization issue concerns the role that fear of the unknown plays in the worldviews of both Temne culture and Charismatic churches. Inspired by its traditions, Temne cosmology argues that the inhabited world is on a dangerous collision course with extra-terrestrial agents such as spirits, ancestors and witches. In this morbid spiritual context, humanity's survival not only requires insulating oneself from the subversive activities of dangerous spiritual forces but often involves manipulating these spiritual forces to thwart actions emanating from those worlds. The failure to protect oneself produces fear about the impact that the activities of witches, evil spirits, demonic forces and aggrieved ancestors may inflict upon humanity in the inhabited world. Because other Christians have not properly confronted this worldview, the Temne are attracted to certain Charismatics who have made witchcraft, evil spirits and demonic forces a fundamental part of their doctrines.

Although accusations have been levied against Charismatics for reviving traditional religious cosmologies,<sup>37</sup> Charismatic churches' example may in fact be challenging the African church to re-engage in fresh ways with people's lived cosmologies, which continue to influence the lives of the faithful even after conversion.<sup>38</sup> Converts to Christianity have often come to the faith from a background that recognizes the skulking presence of witchcraft, evil spirits and demonic forces. The residues of tradition do not immediately disappear after conversion but, rather, prompt a quest for a more meaningful Christianity that addresses this frightening background. Because Charismatic churches have presented themselves as able to interpret dreams, many Christians continue to turn to the movement to help them deal with traditional cosmologies. Hence, this espousal of pneumatology that resonates with African spiritual realities has become its biggest selling point as well as a source of controversy.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

Even though Christianity has a long history in Sierra Leone,<sup>40</sup> the faith is challenged by the reappearance of unresolved cultural issues such as Temne dream cosmologies.

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37 Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), 83.

38 Clifton R. Clarke, Jr., *Pentecostalism: Insights from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 14.

39 Allan Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 13.

40 Gilbert Olson, *Church Growth in Sierra Leone: A Study of Church Growth in Africa's Oldest Protestant Mission Field* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969); Leslie E. T. Shyllon and G. S. Anthony, *Two Centuries of Christianity in an African Province of Freedom, Sierra Leone: A Case Study of European Influence and Culture in Church Development* (Freetown: Print Sundries and Stationers, 2008).

Calls for Christianity in Sierra Leone to aspire to become robustly biblical in its worldview are not helped by the uncritical models of contextualization that some churches have embraced. In such a context, if churches are to be relevant and spiritually effective, their theologizing must address traditional cosmologies in new and innovative ways while remaining faithful to the entire scriptural witness. As this essay has shown, the contextualization practices of some Charismatic churches in Sierra Leone, while effective in engaging with the Temne dream culture, are also problematic in some ways and even disingenuous relative to biblical Christianity. If the Christian evangelistic gains achieved in Sierra Leone are to be sustained, the churches will need to develop new approaches that are sensitive to and, when necessary, appropriately critical of cultural currents. Otherwise, such practices will result in a gnawing sense of foreboding which will undermine biblical Christianity and the theological health of the nation's churches.

# Lewis and Kierkegaard as Missionaries to Post- Christian Pagans

Bryan M. Christman

*C. S. Lewis and Søren Kierkegaard, despite their very different cultural circumstances and approaches to apologetics, shared notable similarities in their rhetorical and literary styles. This article unearths those similarities and suggests how we can follow their example in making the gospel relevant to post-Christian cultures.*

Although Søren Kierkegaard and C. S. Lewis defended the Christian faith in very different ways, they presented striking similar evangelistic pedagogies to their respective generations of post-Christian ‘pagans.’ Though they lived in different historical contexts, their arguments share four features: (1) Romanticist ‘longing’; (2) aesthetic ‘literary performance’; (3) ‘Socratic’ spirituality; and (4) a Christian-Platonist theology of eros. Both viewed these educational methods as useful in urging the *humanization* and *salvation* of post-Christian pagans. I believe they are still useful today.

In this paper, I first introduce Kierkegaard and Lewis as themselves post-Christian pagans who became Christians. I then describe the ‘dehumanization’ that was occurring in their respective post-Christian contexts. Third, I elucidate the four factors that structured their pedagogies. Finally, I consider how their pedagogies can be applied in today’s more overtly post-Christian situation, especially in the West.

## Kierkegaard and Lewis as Post-Christian pagans

The pedagogies of Kierkegaard and Lewis paralleled their own ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ from post-Christian pagans to Christians. Kierkegaard lived in ‘Golden Age’ Denmark from the early to the mid-1800s, a time when Christendom still appeared to be alive and well. But Kierkegaard knew that he and Christendom were essentially pagan in comparison to true Christianity. By Lewis’ time a hundred years later, much of Europe was consciously post-Christian. The pagan Lewis was not the odd anomaly that Kierkegaard was when he declared himself *not* a Christian in his final, polemical ‘attack on Christendom’.

Lewis was eventually ‘surprised by joy’—becoming ‘the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England’ and then perhaps the most well-known Christian

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apologist of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard's own struggle to embrace faith is less known but is embedded within all his writings. The struggle is revealed in a journal entry of 1838: 'If Christ is to come and take up his abode in me, it must happen according to the title of today's Gospel in the Almanac: Christ came in through locked doors.'<sup>2</sup> That long struggle culminated in a narrative of existentialist-style Christian conversion that may be unique to all time.

It might seem that Lewis' conversion-centred apologetics and the transformation-centred existentialism of Kierkegaard were mutually exclusive. But their different approaches were merely tactical responses within two different stages of Christendom. In Kierkegaard's time, the edifice still seemed to function and all of Denmark seemed to be simply Christian. By Lewis' time, the edifice of Christendom had largely collapsed and being 'simply Christian' was nearly impossible.

Therefore, Kierkegaard concentrated on the subjective life transformation that he found wholly lacking in 'Christian' Denmark. He clarified what it meant *existentially*—i.e. in one's manner of life—to be a Christian *subjectively*. But Lewis concentrated on the objective truth of Christianity that had fallen out of favour in Europe. He declared that Christianity was possible and that rational people could believe. Their different contexts called for different concentrations on the subjective and objective aspects of Christianity, although their pedagogies agreed that the objective truth of Christianity always calls for an appropriate subjective response.

### The dehumanizing historical contexts

Accompanying the rise and progress of Modernism came a diminishing of the nature of human beings that Lewis called *The Abolition of Man* in a 1947 book.<sup>3</sup> In 1847, Kierkegaard was already challenging the phenomenon of *abolition* as he discussed what humans should learn from the lilies and birds (Mt 6:25–34). What they taught was 'to be contented with being a human being ... how glorious it is to be a human being ... what blessed happiness is promised in being a human being'.<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard himself knew the existential dehumanization his generation was facing with regard to basic human existence. This 'abolition' is also evidenced in his books *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*, which focused on psychological and spiritual problems that the modern age had exacerbated rather than cured.

An alternate title of *The Abolition of Man* declared that the book had 'special reference to the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools'. Lewis thought that modern pedagogy was producing 'men without chests', persons with substantially reduced human qualities. The book's subtitle, 'How Education Develops Man's Sense of Morality', reveals Lewis' concern for reduction of 'moral education ... what our ancestors called Practical Reason' in relation to 'the Tao' of

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1 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1955), 228–29.

2 Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 5:118, #5313.

3 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: How Education Develops Man's Sense of Morality* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

4 Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), v.

basic, ‘universal’ human truth.<sup>5</sup> Modern education was not cultivating practical reason and was failing the ultimate purpose of education.

Kierkegaard wrote of a coming ‘total bankruptcy’ not just in spiritual terms, but even in the meaning of human moral language. His concerns seem to parallel Lewis’ comments on humanity’s fall from practical reason:

At the moment the greatest fear is of the total bankruptcy toward which all Europe seems to be moving and men forget the far greater danger, a seemingly unavoidable bankruptcy in an intellectual-spiritual sense, a confusion of language far more dangerous than that (typical) Babylonian confusion, than the confusion of dialects and national languages ... that is, a confusion in the languages themselves, a mutiny, the most dangerous of all, of the words themselves, which, wrenched out of man’s control, would despair, as it were, and crash in upon one another, and out of this chaos a person would snatch, as from a grab-bag, the handiest word to express his presumed thoughts. In vain do individual great men seek to mint new concepts and to set them in circulation—it is pointless.<sup>6</sup>

Kierkegaard viewed this bankruptcy as the loss of the very currency of words, or their value in meaningful exchange between human beings. He seemed to have foreseen an incoming post-modern tide of the loss of meaning that would flood the modern ‘age of reason’ and reduce its language to meaningless chatter.

What Kierkegaard saw as declining was what Confucius called ‘the Tao’, illustrations of which Lewis appended to *The Abolition of Man*. The Tao

is present in all its variations in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine; in Chinese and Indian philosophies; and in the Hebrew and Christian religions ... the way in which the universe is meant to function and the pattern to which all human activities should conform ... this is the doctrine of objective value.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the collapse of language was the result of the abandonment of objective value. How this negatively affected the capacity of humans to obtain practical reason through learning is described by Kierkegaard scholar Paul Tyson:

Kierkegaard is sociologically fascinated by the outlook he calls reflection. This is the Present Age’s propensity to very carefully examine, judge, know about, and master everything. Yet all the judgments and knowledge of this reflection are measured in terms of externalities and practicalities without any vital inner sense of value or ultimate purpose. Thus the double meaning of reflection here is that this age is very thoughtful, but it is only thoughtful about the *surface reflections* of things—inner meanings, higher purposes, and intrinsically valuable ends are entirely opaque to the present age.<sup>8</sup>

Man was ironically abolishing himself and all truly valuable knowledge through the pedagogy of ‘higher’ education. Kierkegaard and Lewis sought to respond to the

5 Gilbert Meilaender, *Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 198–99.

6 Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 5:78–79, #5181.

7 Wayne Martindale, Jerry Root and Linda Washington, *The Soul of C. S. Lewis* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 138.

8 Paul Tyson, *Kierkegaard’s Theological Sociology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 26.

'reflective age' by revealing the 'abolition of man' and offering their healing pedagogies.

## The four factors of the pedagogies of Kierkegaard and Lewis

### *Romanticist longing*

Longing permeated all the writings of Kierkegaard and Lewis, because they found the source and goal of their own longing in Christ, whom we could describe as the longing of God become flesh (Jn 1:14). Definitionally, longing is almost synonymous with desire and eros (love). But it is difficult to define precisely. It is perhaps more easily portrayed.

Kierkegaard portrays both divine and human longing in a communion discourse called 'A Hearty Longing' on Luke 22:15, 'I have heartily longed to eat this passover with you before I suffer.'<sup>9</sup> Regarding the Lord's longing towards us in communion, Kierkegaard writes:

Father in heaven, well we know that it is Thou that givest both to will and to do, that also longing when it leads us to renew the fellowship with our Savior and Redeemer is from thee. But when longing lays hold of us, oh, that we might lay hold of the longing; when it would carry us away, that we might also give ourselves up.<sup>10</sup>

Kierkegaard portrays longing in another quite different setting, although still as preparatory to confession for divine communion:

When the wanderer comes away from the much-travelled highway into places of quiet, then it seems to him ... as if something inexpressible thrusts itself forward from his innermost being, the unspeakable, for which indeed language has no vessel of expression. Even the longing is not the unspeakable itself. It is only a hastening after it. But what silence means, what the surroundings will say in this stillness, is just this unspeakable.<sup>11</sup>

Lewis writes of longing in the preface to the third edition of his first autobiography, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism*. Providing both portrayal and definition, he writes that longing is the experience that is central in this book ... a particular recurrent experience which dominated my childhood and adolescence ... the experience is common, commonly misunderstood, and of immense importance. ... The experience is one of intense longing. ... For this sweet desire cuts across our ordinary distinctions between wanting and having. To have it is, by definition, a want: to want it, we find, is to have it.<sup>12</sup>

9 Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses* (London: Oxford, 1940), 259.

10 Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 259.

11 Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing: Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession*, trans. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 48.

12 C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 5, 7, 8.

Of special importance to the pedagogies of Kierkegaard and Lewis is the fact that longing lies beneath any and all evangelistic endeavour. That is why it became a central theme in Lewis's apologetic *Pilgrim's Regress* and why Kierkegaard wrote:

The romantic actually arises from the two halves of one idea being kept apart by some intervening foreign element. When Adam was created, Adam's idea craved its supplement in Eve ... Eve comes, and the romantic is over, there is repose. — Man is created, the sinner; the circumstance craves its supplement, namely Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

Longing was a prominent factor in the historical movement known as Romanticism. Kierkegaard possibly provided the best short description of it as 'essentially flowing over all boundaries'.<sup>14</sup> Both Kierkegaard and Lewis were powerfully influenced by its spirit, although they settled into a chastened form that didn't deify longing itself. But both recognized the potential in Romanticism's boundary-overflowing longing. For that spirit in Kierkegaard and Lewis resisted containment, and they thought it could be cultivated to overflow Modernism's abolition of man. Therefore, Kierkegaard and Lewis carefully wove longing into their pedagogies, largely through their aesthetic writings.

### *Aesthetic literary performance*

The aesthetic qualities of the works of Kierkegaard and Lewis are widely recognized. Most pertinent to our thesis is the question of *why* aesthetic writing so pervaded their work.

For the sake of definition, aesthetic character and indirect communication are two sides of the coin of maieutic (or Socratic) communication. Maieutic means 'midwife' and signifies that the teacher uses *indirect* means of teaching to 'birth' the practice of *human* moral knowledge in the student. The teacher is not the subject of the teaching. But to Kierkegaard and Lewis, the goal of the maieutic method was preparatory for the *direct* means of the gospel in which the teacher is not only the *divine* 'subject' but is also to be followed by the learner who becomes a disciple. Kierkegaard writes of the limits of the former and the necessity of the latter:

Yet the communication of the essentially Christian must end finally in 'witnessing'. The maieutic cannot be the final form, because Christianly understood, the truth does not lie in the subject (as Socrates understood it), but in a revelation that must be proclaimed.<sup>15</sup>

Rae summarizes this approach by stating that 'the first epistemology proposes that the truth be accommodated to the learner; the second proposes that the learner be accommodated to the truth.'<sup>16</sup>

We can now begin to grasp why aesthetic craft was so important to Kierkegaard and Lewis. They employed it to accommodate truth to their learners, and to skilfully capture people's attention.

13 Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 3:766, #3801.

14 Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 3:765, #3796.

15 Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2:383, #1957.

16 Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 42.



Kierkegaard wrote a series of lectures with extensive notes and other thoughts on indirect and direct communication in his journal, although the lectures were never delivered or published. Here, I will string together three brief statements showing how he used indirect communication to challenge the facile security of simply knowing things intellectually and instead, as ‘midwife’, foster what he called capability, being changed by the truth and doing it:

The basic flaw of the age is this teaching which leaves a person’s inwardness completely secure. ... Men are preoccupied with the WHAT which is to be communicated. ... The communication is not in the direction of knowledge but of capability.<sup>17</sup>

Lewis had a similar rationale for using indirect communication, as displayed by the following powerful passage, which both reveals his own reasoning and also ‘indirectly’ provides flesh to the few bones of Kierkegaard’s maieutic method that reside in the short sentences I have just quoted. Lewis writes:

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. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of the stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.<sup>18</sup>

We can see how Lewis, while somewhat sceptical about typical forms of direct religious instruction, felt that his indirect storytelling method prepared the learner for a direct delivery of gospel truth by aesthetically cultivating the proper subjective response.

Another reason for their use of aesthetics was that their indirect writings were aesthetic literary *performances*. By ‘performances’ I mean *stagings* of reality which in and of themselves were not the reality itself. Carl Hughes has provided an in-depth study of Kierkegaard’s writings, demonstrating that ‘theatrical staged performance’ was the controlling metaphor of his whole authorship. He writes:

Throughout his authorship, Kierkegaard constructs a seemingly endless series of thought experiments and fairy tales. ... He does so both when he writes under pseudonyms such as Johannes Climacus and when he writes under his own name ... all of his stories, images, and personas seek to ‘stage’ divine love.<sup>19</sup>

One could easily substitute Lewis’ name and book titles for Kierkegaard’s in that statement, and it would remain accurate.

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17 Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 1: 265, #646; 272, #657; 307, #657.

18 C. S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 1937.

19 Carl S. Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 5.

The aesthetic literary performances of Kierkegaard and Lewis were well fitted to their pedagogies. Since divine love was the ultimate content of their aesthetic writings, their engaging style further cultivated the first factor described above, longing. Since their aesthetic writings took the form of indirect communication, they were consistent with the ‘Socratic’ spirituality described below. Finally, as staged ‘performances’, their works embodied the fourth factor I will discuss, their Christian-Platonist theology of eros.

### ‘Socratic’ spirituality

The term ‘Socratic spirituality’ was not used by Kierkegaard or Lewis, but C. Stephen Evans uses it to present Kierkegaard’s view of the non-Christian spiritual experience that is preparatory for Christian spirituality.<sup>20</sup> Evans clarifies Kierkegaard’s view of its relation to Christian spirituality:

Christianity assumes that the truth must be given to humans by God through the gift of faith that is made possible by God’s historical incarnation. However, even if this is so, is there anything humans can do to prepare themselves to receive this gift? It turns out that the answer is yes. If a person is even going to understand Christianity as an answer to the human dilemma, that person must have a degree of ethical and spiritual development. Most of *Postscript* describes this process of spiritual development, not as part of Christianity, or even as something that makes becoming a Christian inevitable or more likely, but as something that is a necessary precondition for becoming a Christian.<sup>21</sup>

In this section, I will develop a ‘taxonomy’ of post-Christian paganism and then consider Lewis and Kierkegaard’s Socratic/Christian prescription.

### A taxonomy of post-Christian paganism

Kierkegaard wrote, ‘One must begin with paganism.’<sup>22</sup> Nearly one hundred years later, Lewis wrote, ‘Let us make the younger generation good pagans and afterwards let us make them Christians.’<sup>23</sup> These comments hint at a similarity in their method. Kierkegaard further explained:

If one is to lift a whole generation, verily one must know it. Hence it is that these proclaimers of Christianity who begin straightway with orthodoxy have not much influence, and that only upon the few. For Christendom is very far behind. One must begin with paganism.<sup>24</sup>

Following is the fuller statement by Lewis that reveals what he ‘knew’ about his generation after Christendom had largely crumbled in Europe:

I feel that very grave dangers hang over us. This results from the apostasy of the great part of Europe from the Christian faith. Hence a worse state than the one

20 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality: Accountability as the Meaning of Human Existence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 63–111.

21 Evans, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality*, 64.

22 Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 6.

23 Paul S. Ford (ed.), *Yours Jack: Spiritual Direction from C. S. Lewis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 219.

24 Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 6.

we were in before we received the Faith. For no one returns from Christianity to the same state: the difference between a pagan and an apostate is the difference between an unmarried woman and an adulteress. For faith perfects nature but faith lost corrupts nature. Therefore many men of our time have lost not only the supernatural light but also the natural light which pagans possessed. ... For my part I believe we ought to work not only at spreading the Gospel (that certainly) but also at a certain preparation for the Gospel. It is necessary to recall many to the law of nature before we talk about God. ... I would almost dare to say 'First let us make the younger generation good pagans and afterwards let us make them Christians.' Therefore many men of our time have lost not only the supernatural light but also the natural light which pagans possessed. ... It is necessary to recall many to the law of nature before we talk about God. ... For Christ promises forgiveness of sins: but what is that to those who do not know the law of nature, do not know they have sinned? Who will take medicine unless he knows he is in the grip of disease? Moral relativity is the enemy we have to overcome before we tackle Atheism.<sup>25</sup>

Lewis treats the large-scale apostasy from Christian faith as a given and considers the implications. The following table of his statements and metaphors clarifies his taxonomy and justifies his claim that people must recall the law of nature and become 'good pagans'.

### A taxonomy of post-Christian paganism as stated by Lewis

Paganism	Christianity	Post-Christian Paganism
pre-Christian	Christian	post-Christian 'apostate'
unmarried woman	married woman	adulteress
natural light	supernatural light	loss of even natural light
nature	perfection of nature	corruption of nature
		<i>need: to recall the law of nature</i>
		<i>need: to become 'good pagans' as 'a certain preparation for the gospel'</i>

#### The Socratic prescription

Lewis' passage indicates the incremental steps by which he and Kierkegaard envisioned post-Christian pagans becoming 'good' pagans first and then realizing their need for the Christian gospel. Their way of recovery prescribed two doses: Socratic spirituality to be followed by Christian spirituality.

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25 Ford, *Yours Jack*, 219.

Although both philosophers hoped that their readers would end up as Christians, they saw the ‘natural’ step as itself good, as it would begin to reverse the intellectual-spiritual bankruptcy they perceived as invading human existence. Civilization can be only as good as its humanity, which was increasingly being ‘abolished’. In fact, Alister McGrath described *The Abolition of Man* as ‘prophetic’ because of its emphasis on education, on which ‘our lives—and functioning societies—rest.’<sup>26</sup>

The gospel, however, does not settle for a partial cure of humanity, so we must not concentrate on the Socratic remedy to the exclusion of the Christian one. Both are parts of the whole process of human salvation. The pattern resembles that of Christian parents who teach their infant children the natural laws of basic human existence before they attempt to teach them the gospel. Thus, Lewis wrote of ‘the natural light’ and ‘the law of nature’ as necessary ‘before we talk about God’. Lewis writes very briefly here, and we could easily mistake his method as centred on the recovery of knowledge per se. Rather, his method was to overcome ‘moral relativity’ by cultivating whole persons with spiritual capability.

Lewis appealed to humankind’s ‘shared imagination’ based on ‘the doctrine of the unchanging heart’ throughout his book *Mere Christianity*, which thus exhibited the Socratic method.<sup>27</sup> Lewis sought to cultivate the atrophied ‘spiritual’ organs of humanity because ‘the head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man.’<sup>28</sup>

Lewis’ ‘cerebral man’ seems to correspond to what Kierkegaard described as ‘reflective man’ who receives only ‘surface knowledge’. Of course, he did not mean that cerebral thought should be wholly absent. But unless the cerebral is vitally connected to the visceral ‘chest—the seat’, the person is left without ‘the practical reason’ which provides the faculty to grasp and relate to the highest good.

At this point we need to consider how Kierkegaard’s pedagogy ‘informs’ that of Lewis and qualifies both as humanization of the whole person. Kierkegaard’s book *The Concept of Anxiety* contains a section on ‘the anxiety of spiritlessness’.<sup>29</sup> He presents the category of *spirit* as essential to full human personhood. Kierkegaard describes humans as ‘a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united by a third. This third is spirit.’<sup>30</sup> This structure sounds very like Lewis’ own synthesis of man as ‘cerebral’ and ‘visceral’, linked by a third quality that he called ‘the chest—the seat ... Magnanimity—Sentiment.’ The loss of this third aspect of personhood prevents the humanization or formation of the person as a true self. Kierkegaard clarifies:

The life of Christian paganism ... is qualified ... *away from spirit*. ... Spiritlessness is the stagnation of spirit, and the caricature of ideality.

26 Alister McGrath, *If I Had Lunch with C. S. Lewis: Exploring the Ideas of C. S. Lewis on the Meaning of Life* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014), 136.

27 Jerry Root and Mark Neal, *The Surprising Imagination of C. S. Lewis: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 19.

28 Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 34.

29 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 93–96.

30 Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, 43.

Spiritlessness, therefore, is not dumb when it comes to repetition by rote, but it is dumb in the sense in which salt is said to be so. If the salt becomes dumb, with what shall it be salted? The lostness of spiritlessness, as well as its security, consists in its understanding nothing spiritually and comprehending nothing as a task, even if it is able to fumble after everything with its limp clamminess.<sup>31</sup>

The picture is reminiscent of several things we have already seen, starting with intellectual-spiritual bankruptcy and its resulting superficial, surface-reflective ‘knowledge’ and chatter. Its ‘saltless’ quality of uselessness hints at the need for the Socratic teacher who ‘communicates capability’. But this is no easy task, since corrupt spiritlessness finds perverse ‘security’ in its own lack of ‘comprehending ... a task’. Writing of that basic human task for post-Christian pagans, Jamie Ferreira explains:

The issue in the ‘postscript’ is the way in which Christianity has been misunderstood because people have ‘forgotten what it is to exist and what inwardness means’. As [Kierkegaard’s fictional character and pseudonymous ‘author’ of the work from which these quotations are taken] Climacus puts it: ‘I now resolved to go back as far as possible, so as not to arrive too soon at the religious mode of existence, to say nothing of the specifically Christian mode. ... If one had forgotten what it means to exist religiously, no doubt one had also forgotten what it means to exist humanly; and so this must be brought out.’ Climacus’ concern with what it is to be an existing individual is dictated by his recognition that it is impossible to understand what it is to be a Christian if one does not know what it is to be an existing individual.<sup>32</sup>

Ferreira’s brief summary of Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* reveals the overall detail of the Socratic/Christian pedagogy. Socratic human spirituality prepares one for the explicitly Christian spirituality, because it cultivates of human ‘existence’ in ‘inwardness’—the capability of ‘spirit’ (or ‘chest’) response to the gospel.

In summary, both Kierkegaard and Lewis intentionally cultivated ‘basic’ and Christian human personhood through combined Socratic and Christian pedagogies designed to reach post-Christian pagans.

#### *A Christian-Platonist Theology of Eros*

The fourth shared feature I will describe is the basic theological universe of Kierkegaard and Lewis. Most authors do not specifically identify the worldview perspective from which they are writing unless doing so is useful for their purposes. Since Kierkegaard wanted to stress ‘subjectivity’, he rarely addressed objective Christian theology, which was still broadly presupposed by his culture. In contrast, as noted above, Lewis needed to stress the objective theology that called for a subjective response, since by his time both were increasingly lost to modern humanity. Therefore, there is much in Lewis’ corpus that explicitly reveals his

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31 Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, 94–95.

32 M. Jamie Ferreira, *The ‘Socratic Secret’: The Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs in Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript—a Critical Guide*, ed. Rick Anthony Furtak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.

'Christian-Platonic' view of reality but very little in Kierkegaard.<sup>33</sup> And what Kierkegaard did offer was typically the unknown or paradoxical aspects of the objective Christian realities, such as when Johannes Climacus writes, 'But what, then, is this unknown, for does not its being the god merely signify to us that it is the unknown? ... and that even if we could know it we could not express it.'<sup>34</sup>

Paul Tyson helpfully defines Christian-Platonist theology when he writes that 'there is a strongly derivative relationship between the world that appears to us in our perceptions and the transcendent reality that goes beyond what we are able to directly perceive.'<sup>35</sup> Lewis also describes this relation of the finite to the infinite:

When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites us to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects. And in there, in beyond Nature, we shall eat of the tree of life.<sup>36</sup>

Eating of the tree of life signifies communion with God, revealing that integral to Christian-Platonism is a 'theology of eros'. It also signifies that even the deepest aspects of a love relationship to the infinite, loving God are conveyed and 'understood' by finite humans through analogical symbols. This symbolic, sacramental aspect of gospel communication permeated the writing of Kierkegaard and Lewis as analogical 'stagings' that, as they knew well, fell short of the full reality. Nevertheless, they witnessed to that reality and enabled participation in a love relationship with God that is fulfilled by never being fully quenched. Hughes writes, 'These stagings succeed precisely when they fail: when they push us beyond themselves and stir us to respond to infinite eros in kind.'<sup>37</sup> It can be seen that this factor provides the answer to our first factor of longing. As Lewis said, 'To have it is, by definition, a want: to want it, we find, is to have it.'

Tyson helps to explain why this view of Christian reality must determine all communication thereof:

Here humility before a reality that always stands over us (that is, we *under*-stand and live *within* reality, we do not have a God's eye overview of reality) is a necessary requirement for any true illumination of reality. ... As with Jesus' use of parables, and as with Plato's use of dialogues, in the Narnia stories Lewis

33 The Narnian character 'Digory' reveals the pervasive Christian-Platonic view of Lewis, and even its pedagogical usefulness: 'It's all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what *do* they teach them at these schools!' C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 161.

34 Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 44.

35 Paul Tyson, *Returning to Reality: Christian Platonism for Our Times* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 9. Tyson provides a helpful chapter on Platonism generally and of Lewis as an adherent of it, titled 'The Christian Platonism of Lewis and Tolkien'.

36 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Collier, 1962, 1965), 17.

37 Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging*, 5–6. Hughes presents Kierkegaard's entire authorship as framed by the 'Christian-Platonist theology of eros'; I am indebted to Hughes for this descriptive phrase, which appears in the subtitle of his book.

speaks in imaginative, narrative, and analogous ways about what reality is really like.<sup>38</sup>

Kierkegaard and Lewis submitted their authorships to God's reality that limits and relativizes human finite understanding and language. This factor therefore not only provides the frame of the whole, but also safeguards the other factors or their cumulative function from being overly exalted or deified. Neither each aspect nor all of them in combination can be deified, because they are fulfilled in the theology of eros. Even explicitly Christian pedagogy is not deified, because its direct communications are still only analogical, an imperfect expression of the unseen realities of God. Should anyone object that Christ was indeed seen in the flesh (and thus a perfect expression of God) while he walked on earth, Kierkegaard's response was to have Johannes Climacus point all such 'easy-believers' with their 'childish orthodoxy' to the paradox of the God-man who was seen but could never be fully comprehended.<sup>39</sup>

The tendency towards self-deification is of course the perennial temptation of humans (Gen 3:1–6). Modernism's core problem was its pretension to a 'God's-eye view' of 'objective' reality. Ironically, that pathway led to the abolition of man, because finite creatures can find true knowledge only through the finite subjectivity of men with 'chests' and 'spirit'.

#### *Summary of the pedagogical factors*

We have been covering some complex, abstract ground, so I will summarize briefly.

*Longing* is a perennial factor permanently placed in humans and part of the image of God.<sup>40</sup> It can be ignored, but it always remains as God's silent 'witness'. It can be cultivated in both Socratic and Christian spirituality. In a sort of 'order of salvation' of human response to God, it is the beginning which never ends in the theology of eros. Its cultivation pervaded the pedagogies of both Kierkegaard and Lewis.

*Aesthetic literary performance* capitalizes on human longing. It enables and enhances the necessary Socratic methods of pedagogy to overcome the reflective 'surface-knowledge' of the present age and its intellectual-spiritual bankruptcy, which is related to the abolition of the human spirit or 'chest.'

*Socratic spirituality* provides the effectual means for the restoration of 'practical reason'. It cultivates the all-important seat of human agency: magnanimity and spirit—the connection to 'the Tao'—the basic moral knowledge of humanity that abolished man needs to 'recollect'. Socratic spirituality is preparatory for and coheres with explicit Christian spirituality. It serves as a basic human pedagogy preparing post-Christian pagans for openness to their proper end, which is provided in the Christian pedagogy of whole persons in Christ.

The *Christian-Platonist theology of eros* provides the universe in which the other factors 'live and move and have their being' (Acts 17:28). The other factors are all

38 Tyson, *Returning to Reality*, 24, 29.

39 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 596.

40 See Lee C. Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 111. Barrett's book insightfully discusses the 'theology of eros' and the nature of the Platonic influence in Kierkegaard.

ultimately fulfilled in God's *love*. To Kierkegaard and Lewis, the natural and spiritual are all one and cohere together in the gospel of Christ, which thereby encompasses Socratic and Christian spirituality.

Their pedagogies were potent prescriptions against 'the abolition of man', framed by inviolable human 'longing' and 'infinite eros' and filled in by the means of aesthetic performance in service of Socratic and Christian spirituality.

### **The viability of Lewis and Kierkegaard's pedagogies today**

Viability, of course, is all about practical implementation. Has this introductory paper given you enough information to motivate you to leap into applying Lewis and Kierkegaard's pedagogies? It might be presumptive of me to think so. Nevertheless, I will conclude with some suggestions as to why these ideas remain viable today.

If Kierkegaard and Lewis provided viable pedagogies for post-Christian pagans of their own generations, it should follow that given the increased post-Christian development in the West, their pedagogies should remain relevant. As the forces of man's 'abolition' have continued and even increased, recovery from our civilizational dehumanization may well depend on cultivating human re-centring between the poles of human longing and God's infinite eros and on following the gospel's prescription towards the goal of human re-formation through Socratic and Christian pedagogy. Their pedagogies embody the hope that man's so-called abolition is not the final word on the destiny of humankind.

I also find great significance in the odd fact that the 'anti-apologist' Kierkegaard and the master apologist Lewis shared so much of their pedagogy and prescriptions. This fact implies a mutual agreement, across a century of separation, that evangelism must be *holistic*, aimed at the whole person. Holistic pedagogy was the prescription for countering modernism's tendency to reduce man to his 'rationality', which risked resulting in the abolition of man. Ironically, much of modern Christianity, through ignorance of its own philosophical presuppositions, has sought to counter the abolition of man by using modernism's own toolkit of rationalism in both evangelism and discipleship.<sup>41</sup> When Christianity functions in a modernistic fashion, it loses its capacity to overcome the abolition of man by failing to cultivate 'the chest'. The knowledge of its own converts does not rise much above 'surface reflection', leaving people like Kierkegaard's 'Christian pagans' of low human quality. Thus, the holistic pedagogies of Kierkegaard and Lewis may be viable where modernist Christianity has struggled to reach, convert and disciple today's pagans.

Another odd aspect of the similarities between these two writers is that the 'arch-individualist' Kierkegaard and the ecumenical Lewis of *Mere Christianity* were proposing similar solutions. But Kierkegaard's ideological partnership with Lewis in terms of the path to basic human formation helps us move away from an individualistic caricature of Kierkegaard. In actuality, his pedagogy has positive value in encouraging the formation of human community for society and the church.

Both writers' pedagogies were self-consciously missional, seeking to meet their readers where they were and to contextualize the holistic gospel for them. They

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41 See Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 1–7.



followed the pattern of Christ, who not only came down to humans but even entered their humanity to bring the divine pedagogy to them. Christ's incarnation demonstrates that viable missional ministry is Socratic as well as Christian.

The pedagogies of Kierkegaard and Lewis are not grade-school instruction, but their writings have been seen as providing educational models for children.<sup>42</sup> This is quite appropriate, since Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 19:14, ESV).

Lewis and Kierkegaard's pedagogies hold promise for overcoming the *abolition* of man through the *formation* of man, for the good of society at large as well as for the church. Their masterful aesthetic literary performances seem to merit, even demand, repeated 'encores'. Their genius can never be duplicated, but their spirit remains viable.

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42 For explicit Kierkegaardian pedagogy, see Sylvia McMillan, 'Kierkegaard and a Pedagogy of Liminality' (PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, 2013), <https://worldia.org/yourls/ert462bmc>; Anna Strellis Soderquist, *Kierkegaard on Dialogical Education: Vulnerable Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2016). On Lewis, see Mark A. Pike, *Mere Education: C. S. Lewis as a Teacher for Our Time* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2013).

# Does the Word of God Change the World? From Martin Luther to the 69 Theses of Thomas Schirrmacher

Thomas K. Johnson

*Everyone has heard of Luther's 95 Theses, but hardly anyone reads them. Few have read WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher's 69 Theses on world mission, but they should. This article explains the impact of Luther's theses and the potential impact of Schirrmacher's.*

When a German Protestant theologian uses the terminology of *69 Theses* in the subtitle of a book published shortly after the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, he is obviously alluding to Martin Luther's famous *95 Theses*, issued from Wittenberg, Germany, on 31 October 1517. When I first saw the text of Thomas Schirrmacher's *Biblical Foundations for 21st Century World Mission: 69 Theses Toward an Ongoing Global Reformation*,<sup>1</sup> I was driven to ask, 'Exactly what is the difference between the new 69 theses and the old 95 theses?'

Luther's theses became one of the most influential, memorable documents in world history, but few people actually read it. Schirrmacher's theses have not been widely noticed yet, but they deserve to be. Both are powerful statements. To me, the most central difference between Luther's theses and Schirrmacher's is that whereas Luther did not expect his rediscovery of the Word of God to change the world, Schirrmacher boldly and strategically hopes that a 21st-century rediscovery of the Word of God will change the world.

## The world-changing influence of the Reformation

Historians debate whether Luther really nailed his theses to the church door in Wittenberg. Invitations to academic disputation were commonly placed on a prominent door in that era. Regardless of where Luther displayed the document, I don't think he was expecting it to change the world. His statements generally address technical questions of academic theology. However, regardless of his intentions,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schirrmacher, *Biblical Foundations for 21st Century World Mission: 69 Theses Toward an Ongoing Global Reformation* (Bonn: VKW, 2018), <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462tkj1>. Parts of this article first appeared as a foreword to the book.

Luther's theses sparked a new evangelicalism that changed the course of world history.<sup>2</sup>

Kenneth Scott Latourette, the pioneering historian of missions, captured as well as anyone the Reformation's eventual effects not only in the religious realm but also in the political, cultural, social, economic and intellectual dimensions. Latourette contended that the Reformation was largely responsible for the beginning of international law as a means of regulating the relations between states in ways other than military force, accompanied by the claim that moral norms apply even to matters of war. In the political realm, Latourette continued, 'When carried to its logical conclusion, Protestantism made for democracy. Its basic principle, justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers, issued in governments in which each citizen had a voice and possessed rights and responsibilities equal with those of each of his fellows.'

Though not fully in agreement with Max Weber, Latourette recognized the role of the Protestant work ethic in encouraging economic diligence and furthering capitalism. He also connected post-Reformation Christianity with social activism, including aid for the sick and poor, orphanages, prison reform, exalting the role of women, and promoting marriage (partly by having married clergy). All this was paralleled by spectacular growth in intellectual and scientific life, plus the growth of theology as a field of learning, along with greater support for general education and the establishment of schools for all children.<sup>3</sup>

### Luther's 95 Theses in context

But Luther wasn't envisioning any of these moral and cultural developments that would ensue indirectly from his 95 Theses; he was concerned about recovering the Christian gospel for himself and for his fellow Christians.

When I first studied the 95 Theses, my tutor (Ralph Vunderink at Hope College in Michigan, USA) wisely insisted that I read them in the context of three short treatises Luther published before the end of 1520, by which time the content of classical Protestantism was taking its distinctive shape.<sup>4</sup> That, he said, would help me grasp why the Reformation was not merely a theoretical debate about indulgences and how it became a history-changing force the power of which would extend far beyond Europe. In these early works of Luther, we can see the crucial convictions that would point in culturally transformative directions.

But let us start with the 95 Theses and then rehearse some of Luther's convictions, more clearly evidenced in his essays of a few years later, that undergirded them. This will help to shed light on their modern counterpart, Schirrmacher's 69 Theses.

2 Especially since I lived in Prague for more than 20 years, I must mention that Luther acknowledged precursors of his efforts dating back to the Czech reformer Jan (John) Hus (1369–1415).

3 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, rev. ed., vol. 2: 1500–1975 (Harper & Row, 1975), 972–77. For more on the contributions of the Reformation to Western civilization, see Thomas K. Johnson, *Did the Reformation Help to Create Europe? The Ironic Relationship of the Reformation to European Development* (Bonn: Martin Bucer Seminary, 2018); <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462tkj2>.

4 The three treatises were *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of a Christian*.

Luther's *95 Theses* begin as follows:<sup>5</sup>

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.

Later in the theses Luther continued:

11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept (Mt 13:25).
12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.
14. Imperfect piety or love on the part of the dying person necessarily brings with it great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater the fear.
15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, to say nothing of other things, to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.
17. It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.

Lest the terminology of medieval theology conceal from us the existential issues on Luther's heart, notice these key words in theses 13 through 16: dying, death, fear, horror, penalty, despair, hell and purgatory. Then one phrase stands in shining, almost blinding contrast: assurance of salvation. Luther's quest was to find assurance of eternal salvation and freedom from guilt before God. At the same time, he perceived that the quest for assurance of salvation and freedom from purgatory was driving people to use inappropriate means, especially indulgences, which could easily lead in turn to false security before God. Even if the popular sermons of the day were contrary to the complex theology of indulgences and also contrary to the

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5 The *95 Theses* can be found in English translation at <https://worldea.org/yourls/ert462tkj3>.

official teaching of the Catholic Church, they were what many average Christians heard. In response Luther said:

27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.
28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.

Luther's world was ripe for someone to step forward and say that believers are justified before God and can receive assurance of salvation only by faith in the gospel, not by indulgences or any other human activity. His clear doctrine of justification transformed how the Christian life (and really all Christian ethics) was conceived. To quote Luther again:

45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.
46. Christians are to be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they must reserve enough for their family needs and by no means squander it on indulgences.
47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.

With these simple lines, Luther set new priorities and standards for Christian ethics in light of justification by faith. Care for people in need is given a prominent place; provision for one's family ranks far above indulgences; and a new standard is introduced by means of which to evaluate social institutions and practices—namely, what is 'commanded' by God in the Bible. Once Christians are free from the false security of earning or buying God's favour by means of indulgences or any other effort (such as taking inappropriate vows, especially those related to a monastery)—once they are assured of their justification—Christians are taught to engage in everyday life in a distinctive manner: loving those in need, caring for one's family, and asking what the Bible says about the social institutions and practices around them. The institutions of indulgences and monasteries were not legitimized by the Bible, whereas marriage, family and work *are* addressed in the Bible and especially in the Ten Commandments.

Note how Luther connected these principles in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, one of his 1520 writings: 'Anyone who has plighted his troth to a woman cannot rightly take a monastic vow. His duty is to marry her because it is his duty to keep faith. This precept comes from God, and therefore cannot be superseded by any human decree.'<sup>6</sup> In Luther's view, monastic vows (and everything related to monasteries) are merely human decrees, whereas keeping one's word to a woman is required, because God requires truth telling and promise keeping in the Bible.

Luther turned quickly from questioning the religious system of his time, including monasteries, vows, the penitential system, the sacramental system and

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<sup>6</sup> *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. with an introduction by John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), p. 335.

indulgences, towards expositing what he found in the Word of God. For him, the key principle for understanding and applying the Word of God properly was the relationship between God's commands and God's promises, or between God's moral law and the gospel. This, I believe, was the principle that led to the distinctively Protestant type of cultural renewal and development that occurred in the lands shaped by the Reformation.<sup>7</sup>

Luther's 1520 treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* illustrates his positive application of the Word of God, using striking rhetoric to both distinguish and connect God's promises and his commands: 'A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. ... A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.'<sup>8</sup>

To explain this paradox, Luther used language that sounded vaguely Hellenistic or dualistic, though his intent was neither Hellenistic nor dualistic: 'Man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily one.' The freedom of one's internal spiritual nature does not come from anything external; such freedom comes only from the gospel of Christ. 'What can it profit the soul if the body is well, free, and active, and does as it pleases? ... On the other hand, how will poor health or imprisonment or hunger or thirst or any other external misfortune harm the soul? ... One thing, and one thing only, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the Word of God, the gospel of Christ.' But in regard to one's bodily nature, 'Each one should do the works of his profession and station, not that by them he may strive after righteousness, but that by them he may keep his body under control, be an example to others who also need to keep their bodies under control, and finally that he may submit his will to that of others in the freedom of love.' When Luther writes about being a dutiful servant of others in the realm of the bodily nature, he frequently quotes Bible verses in which Christians are given commands to obey, in this case from Romans 13.

In one's internal spiritual nature, Christians should experience the freedom of knowing they are justified before God by means of trusting in the gospel. Christians do not have to follow any external rules, regulations or expectations to be justified before God. This internal spiritual freedom allows one to submit externally to God's commands and to the needs of one's neighbors in love, as a servant to all. This approach to faith and life is based on distinguishing commands from promises and God's law from the gospel, but without falling into ontological dualism. 'The entire scripture of God is divided into two parts: commands and promises. Although the commands teach things that are good, the things taught are not done as soon as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it.' 'When a man has learned through the commandments to recognize his helplessness and is distressed about how he might satisfy the law ... here the second part of Scripture comes to our aid, namely, the promises of God.'

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7 For more on the complex relationship between law and gospel in Reformation thought, see Thomas K. Johnson, 'Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical and Homiletical Key to Reformation Theology and Ethics', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43, no. 1 (2019), 53–70, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462tkj4>.

8 *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, 53. Subsequent quotations from this treatise come from pages 52 to 85 in this edition.

As already noted, Luther does not seem to have intended anything resembling the results that Latourette so ably chronicled. Luther wanted to find assurance of salvation, avoiding the two fatal distortions of works-salvation and false security. But while mining the Scriptures for answers to his life quest, seemingly by accident, in addition to a renewed understanding of the gospel he also discovered a new understanding of ethics and society. Ethical life was no longer about purifying oneself or searching for new levels of self-denial. Instead, Luther found a renewed motive for ethical behaviour (love for neighbour); a new standard for the legitimization of social institutions (whether they are addressed in the Bible); and a renewed view of the importance of relating correctly to God's moral law and the gospel. While interested primarily in eternal salvation and in the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, inadvertently Luther also changed the direction of Western civilization by his renewed approach to ethics.<sup>9</sup>

### Schirmacher's 69 Theses

When we turn to Thomas Schirmacher's *69 Theses*, the inadvertent and accidental world-changing holism of Martin Luther's early years is replaced by conscious and intentional strategizing. Schirmacher's understanding of the Christian gospel is largely the same as Luther's, but Schirmacher is concerned, not only about assurance of eternal salvation and peace with God, but also about changing the world by the power of the Word of God.

At first glance, one does not notice justification by faith alone in Schirmacher's *69 Theses*. Indeed, the phrase 'justification by faith' appears nowhere in the text. However, by no means has Schirmacher left Luther's important discovery behind. To avoid such a misunderstanding, we simply need to note what Schirmacher taught in his studies on the New Testament book of Romans, published when he was a young man.<sup>10</sup> In these studies, he closely tied the New Testament to the Old Testament, which is also an interesting characteristic of his missiology.

While explaining Romans 3:21–31, a crucial biblical source for understanding justification by faith alone, Schirmacher noted, 'Righteousness by law-keeping, that is, the claim that one can become just by means of doing the law, cannot be described as based on the Old Testament, for even there [in the Old Testament], faith came before righteousness, as Paul will show in Romans 4 by means of the example of Abraham. Righteousness by law-keeping is, rather, a distortion of the Old Testament. We Christians may not accept this distorted picture of the Old Testament and then set the New Testament against it.'<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, regarding Romans 4 on Abraham's justification, Schirmacher wrote, 'Especially the promise to Abraham, and thereby to Israel, to which the Jews so frequently referred, is a decisive proof that righteousness is based on a promise and trust (faith), not on the law and its observance. ... Paul concludes with the explicit

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9 For an excellent overview of Luther's approach to ethics, see George W. Forell, *Faith Active in Love: An Investigation of the Principles Underlying Luther's Social Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000; original edition Augsburg, 1954).

10 The following quotations are translated from Thomas Schirmacher, *Der Römerbrief*, vol. 1 (Nuremberg: VTR; Hamburg: RVB, 1994).

11 Schirmacher, *Römerbrief*, 181, 182.

statement that Abraham is not only a good example. What applied to Abraham in the Old Testament applies to us today (Romans 4:22–25), for the juridical foundation for our faith is the same as it was for Abraham: God-given faith leads to righteousness.<sup>12</sup>

Turning to Schirrmacher's theses on mission, we find two distinctive emphases, the first on the Trinity and the second on missions in the Old Testament:

1. God is the first missionary.
2. Jesus is the missionary par excellence.
3. God the Holy Spirit is the most successful missionary.
4. The sending of Jesus' church is rooted in the fact that God first sent himself into the world as a missionary (*missio Dei*).
5. Since mission belongs to the heart of the Christian God and to the essence of the Trinity, Christianity without a concern for mission is unthinkable.

These first theses are then brought together in thesis 9:

9. Mission is rooted in the marvelous eternal covenant of election among the Father, the Son, who died for us while we were still sinners, and the Holy Spirit, who was poured out at Pentecost.

This understanding of mission must be linked with how Schirrmacher understands the relation of the two testaments, the topic of theses 26 through 31:

In the New Testament, world mission is not primarily justified by Jesus' Great Commission but rather by the Old Testament.

27. The Old Testament rationale for New Testament mission shows that world mission is a direct continuation of God's actions of salvation history since the Fall of man and the choosing of Abraham.
28. The choosing of the Old Testament people of the covenant occurred with regard to reaching all peoples, such that world mission is already a topic found in the Old Testament.
29. For this reason, in the Old Testament there are already many examples of Gentiles hearing the message of God through the Jews and finding faith in the one true God. Moreover, many passages from the Old Testament prophets are directed at Gentile peoples.
30. Accordingly, world mission efforts cannot be presented and practiced independently of the Old Testament, the history of salvation in the Old Testament, and the destiny of the Jewish people.
31. The letter to the Romans also demonstrates that world mission has to rest upon healthy biblical teaching and that a healthy systematic theology always leads to mission.

It is particularly noteworthy that Schirrmacher sees the book of Romans as missiology, not only as systematic theology. Therefore, biblical themes such as the Trinity, law and gospel, and the relation between the Old and New Testaments are organically linked to mission. This leads to the holistic approach to mission found

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12 Schirrmacher, *Römerbrief*, 205.



in the following theses, in which he becomes more consciously world-changing than Luther ever was:

32. The diversity of peoples and cultures is principally not a consequence of sin but rather desired by God. What is to be discarded from a culture is only that which expressly contradicts God's holy will, and not the diversity of human expression and lifestyle.
33. Christians have been freed from all sorts of cultural bondage. They no longer have to recognize human traditions and commands in addition to God's commands.
34. Christians can judge other cultures in light of the Bible when and if they have learned to distinguish between their own cultures, even their own devout culture, and the commands of God that are valid for all cultures.

What we see Schirrmacher recommending in theses 33 and 34 is notably parallel to what Luther did in his theses. Luther rejected many practices and institutions of medieval Christendom which he viewed as not rooted in God's commands, including indulgences, priestly celibacy and monasteries, based on a sharp distinction between his own devout culture and the commands of God. For Schirrmacher, this distinction between God's devout culture and the requirements of human cultures is part of a world-changing theory of missions. His missiology is summarized in thesis 41:

41. Not only is the proclamation of the gospel to be formulated for various cultures, but the gospel should be enculturated in the life of each community and its entire culture.

This motif of impacting but not overriding the cultures of individual communities continues in a sweeping, powerful later section:

56. The individual's peace with God, i.e. personal redemption owing to the gracious sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, is the first and most urgent goal of mission from which all other goals emerge.
57. Even if personal salvation is the first and highest goal of missions, that does not mean that there cannot be any wider objectives. Rather, all wider objectives gain their significance from personal salvation. From inner transformation follows external transformation, and from the transformation of individuals comes change in the broader, symbiotic community.
58. Social work within the Christian church was institutionally anchored from the very beginning of the New Testament church in the office of the diaconal ministry, and this in light of cultural differences.
59. In Acts 6, social responsibility within the church indeed has central significance, but that does not contradict the centrality of proclaiming God's Word and of prayer, which was institutionalized in the offices of elder and apostle.
60. Social responsibility on the part of Christians does not stop at the boundaries of the church.

61. The Bible is not a book purely for private edification. On the contrary, it repeatedly addresses many social concerns.
62. Whoever is in favor of diaconal work must also address the reasons why certain emergencies exist in the first place, as the Old Testament prophets did.
63. Human dignity and human rights are founded in the nature of human beings as creatures of God.
64. Whoever does not actively advocate for society to pursue a good and proper course intentionally or unintentionally accepts the standards of his or her environment.

One area in which Schirmmacher's theses move beyond Luther and the Reformation is the central role given to religious freedom. We can wish that Luther's bold statements about Christian liberty would have immediately led him and his fellow Reformation thinkers to advocate full liberty of religion and conscience. But in this regard, the Reformers were too much children of their age, the 'Constantinian Age', to imagine the extensive separation of church and state that would be required to permit freedom for multiple religious groups within one state. It took time for post-Reformation Christians to reach that conclusion. A principled commitment to religious freedom began to spread among Christians in the 17th and 18th centuries, although even today, many Christians live as minorities in cultures and legal systems that have not arrived at recognizing religious freedom for all.

Schirmmacher's theses on missions address this need in a section entitled 'Missions and Religious Freedom—Two Sides of the Same Coin'. Here we find the following statements:

42. Dialogue, in the sense of peaceful contention, honest and patient listening, self-critical reflection, winsome and modest presentation of one's own point of view, and learning from others, is a Christian virtue.
43. Dialogue in the sense of giving up Christian truth claims or giving up world mission is inconceivable without abandoning Christianity.
44. Paul's address in Athens shows how good and important it is to study other religions and worldviews, including their texts, and to adjust the terminology and starting point of our proclamation so as to address the adherents of other religions and worldviews intellectually and linguistically.
45. Ethics and mission belong together. Christian witness is not an ethics-free space; it requires an ethical foundation so that we truly do what Christ has instructed us to do.
46. Gentleness is not only an inevitable consequence of the fact that Christians proclaim the God of love and should love their neighbor. Rather, it is also a consequence of the knowledge that Christians are themselves only pardoned sinners and are not God.
47. Mission efforts esteem human rights and do not desire to disregard the dignity of human beings. Rather, mission efforts seek to honor and foster human dignity.

48. It is reprehensible to bring about conversions through the use of coercion, deceitfulness, trickery, or bribery. By definition, such actions cannot result in a true conversion and turning toward God from the depths of one's heart in belief and trust.
49. Peaceful mission efforts have been essentially embedded as a human right.
50. One must differentiate between advocating human rights and religious freedom for adherents of other religions, or for individuals without any religious affiliation, and endorsing their truth claims.
51. Religious freedom applies to all people, not only to Christians.
52. Since the state does not belong to any religion and is not to proclaim the gospel but rather desires what is good and just for all people, and because God has granted human dignity to all people since he has created everyone (Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1), Christians should work together with the adherents of all religions and worldviews for the good of society, to the extent that other groups allow this and reciprocate.
53. The task of the state is to protect worldly justice, including religious freedom, not to promote a particular religion.

Freedom of religion is one of the results that should flow from the proclamation of the biblical message. In an age of extreme religious persecution, widespread religious extremism and intensifying religious nationalism, this topic merits extensive mention in our missiology.

### **Concluding comments**

I would encourage everyone to read both Schirrmacher's 69 modern theses and Luther's 95 historic ones, and to find in them a link from the Reformation to 21st-century missiology. As Luther mined the Bible for answers to the greatest existential needs of humanity, he embraced God's promises in the gospel but also gave careful attention to what God commands. We should do the same, with the added historical knowledge that the Word of God has demonstrated its ability not only to answer the deepest needs of the human heart but also to change the direction of human development. With this truth in mind, we should see Schirrmacher's theses about the world, including matters such as diaconal work, human rights protections, social responsibility and religious freedom for all, as a tremendous attempt to take Luther's unintended impact and repeat it in a conscious, intentional manner. I, for one, would like to see the Word of God change our world again and again.

# The *Diaduoin*: How John's Gospel Complements Mark<sup>1</sup>

Andrew Messmer

*Why is John's Gospel so different from the Synoptics? Andrew Messmer provides a strong argument for the possibility that John wrote his Gospel to complement Mark's Gospel through this detailed analysis of how the two books relate to each other.*

In 1998, Richard Bauckham published a book chapter entitled 'John for Readers of Mark' in which he argued that John's Gospel was written to complement Mark's.<sup>2</sup> His argument rested heavily on two redactional comments found in John 3:24 and 11:2 which, Bauckham argued, are best understood as correlating links with Mark 1:13–14 and 14:3–9.<sup>3</sup> The implication is that the author of John's Gospel could

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1 The title contains a Greek play on words. Tatian's harmony of the four Gospels is known as the *Diatessaron* (through the four). Since I am correlating only two Gospels, this should be called a *diaduoin* (through the two).

2 Richard Bauckham, 'John for Readers of Mark', in Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 147–71. Several scholars now recognize a close relationship between John and Mark; cf. Eve-Marie Becker, Helen Bond and Catrin Williams (eds.), *John's Transformation of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 2021). For a critique of Bauckham's proposal, cf. Wendy North, 'John for Readers of Mark? A Response to Richard Bauckham's Proposal', *JSNT* 25, no. 4 (2003): 449–68. North argues that Bauckham's entire argument fails because of his supposed misinterpretation of John 11:2, but this is simply not the case; even if he had misinterpreted that verse, Bauckham identifies many other indicators that John assumes knowledge of Mark, some of which are summarized below.

3 This idea is not original to Bauckham. It is at least as early as Eusebius of Caesarea (*HE* 3:24:7–13), who pointed to John 2:11; 3:23, and 3:24 (but not 11:2) in support. Other patristic scholars were not so sure that the chronology of the opening chapters of John's Gospel could be reconciled with Mark, Matthew and Luke. For instance, Origen saw the placement of the overturning of the moneychangers' tables in John 2 as an intentional 'error' that forced the reader to look for a deeper spiritual truth (*Com. John* 10:1), whereas Theodore of Mopsuestia explained this (apparent) chronological error away by saying that Matthew (and presumably Mark also) did not care so much for the order of events as for reporting the events themselves (*Comm. John*, Book 1, commenting on Jn 2:1). On the other hand, surprisingly, Augustine correlates the four Gospels' chronologies at this point without any comment on the possible difficulties involved, almost as if he were unaware of them (*Harmony* 2:17:34).

assume that his readers were already familiar with Mark and thus could have made the appropriate connections.<sup>4</sup>

These links, as Bauckham noted, ‘would encourage readers/hearers of John who also knew Mark to correlate the rest of the two Gospel narratives in a similar way’.<sup>5</sup> For about two pages of text, Bauckham demonstrates how the two Gospels can be correlated with each other. However, he then stops after placing John 11 between Mark 10:31 and 32 (of which more will be said below), leaving the rest of the Gospels uncorrelated. Thus, while Bauckham has provided a good justification to correlate John and Mark, as well as an example of how to do so with approximately half of each Gospel, the work has been left unfinished.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this article is to complete the task Bauckham began. After providing a survey of some more literary clues as to how John intended to complement Mark’s Gospel, I present a full tabular comparison of the two and then discuss important observations arising from the analysis.

### Other literary clues between John and Mark

Bauckham did much work to show that John’s Gospel assumes a knowledge of Mark’s Gospel in various ways, and no attempt is made here to add to these arguments.<sup>7</sup> Rather, I have gathered the evidence in summary form to assist the reader in seeing more completely how John’s Gospel relates to Mark’s, and to justify further the attempt to correlate the two Gospels in their entirety. In addition to the redactional comments explained above, at least three categories of data show how John is interacting with Mark’s Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

First, on several occasions John’s Gospel seems to assume events recorded in Mark’s Gospel. John 1:25 assumes that John (the Baptist<sup>9</sup>) was baptizing; this is not recorded in John’s Gospel but is stated in Mark 1:4. John 1:32 assumes Jesus’ baptism; this is not recorded in John’s Gospel but appears in Mark 1:9–11. John 5:33–35 assumes the end (or eclipsing) of John the Baptist’s ministry; this is not

4 Two more redactional comments not mentioned either by Eusebius or Bauckham may link John and Mark. First, John 13:2 may function as a kind of theological interpretation of the events recorded in Mark 14:10–21, with John 13:30 functioning to make clear that Judas did not partake of the bread and wine mentioned in Mark 14:22–25; second, John 4:44 may be an allusion to Mark 6:1–6, thereby linking the two texts.

5 Bauckham, ‘John for Readers of Mark’, 155.

6 In 2014, Jimmy Akin published a similar correlation of John and Mark as is attempted in this paper, but our reconstructions differ from one another. See ‘Did John Use Mark as a Template? A Detailed Analysis’, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462am>.

7 In addition to his ‘John for Readers of Mark’ book chapter, cf. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), esp. ch. 14, ‘The Witness of the Beloved Disciple’.

8 Although one may object that the first two categories cancel each other out and that the interpretation could be reversed so as to make Mark’s Gospel dependent on John, three arguments make this explanation unlikely. First, the unanimous testimony of the early church places John as the latest of the four Gospels. The comments at John 21:18–23 refer to Peter’s death and imply that considerable time has lapsed since that event, suggesting that John was written after Mark. Finally, the idea of the beloved disciple displacing Peter in the story makes sense only if Peter’s testimony (i.e. Mark’s Gospel) is already known.

9 John is not called ‘the Baptist’ anywhere in John’s Gospel.

recorded in John's Gospel but is found in Mark 6:14–29. John 6:67–71 assumes the calling of the Twelve; this is not recorded in John's Gospel but appears in Mark 3:13–19. John 18:24 assumes Jesus' trial before Caiaphas; this is not recorded in John's Gospel but is described in Mark 14:53–65. John 21:2 assumes that James and John are known as the 'sons of Zebedee'; John's Gospel never uses this name, but it is presented in Mark 1:19–20; 3:17; 10:35.<sup>10</sup>

Second, on several occasions John's Gospel can be read as providing additional information not found in Mark's Gospel. Mark 1:5 does not mention the place where John was baptizing, but John 1:28 identifies it as Bethany. Mark 6:45 does not record the reason why Jesus left with such haste after the first feeding miracle, but John 6:14–15 explains that the crowds were about to make Jesus king by force. Mark 14:3–9 does not provide the name of the woman who anointed Jesus' head, but John 11:2 identifies her as Mary the sister of Lazarus. Mark 14:47 does not give the name of the man whose ear Peter cut off, but John 18:10 identifies him as Malchus. Mark 14:54 does not mention how Peter gained access to the courtyard of the high priest, but John 18:15–16 says that a servant girl let him in at the request of the beloved disciple. Mark 14:58 assumes an event in which Jesus has threatened to tear down and rebuild the Temple; this event is nowhere recorded in Mark's Gospel, but John 2:19 says that it happened when Jesus cleansed the Temple. Finally, many characters not mentioned in Mark's Gospel are named with an appropriate introduction in John's Gospel, such as Philip (1:44),<sup>11</sup> Nicodemus (3:1), Lazarus (11:1–2; 12:1, 9), Caiaphas (11:49; 18:13–14, 24), the beloved disciple (13:23; 19:26; 20:2), Barabbas (18:40)<sup>12</sup> and Joseph of Arimathea (19:38).<sup>13</sup>

Third, many passages in John's Gospel seem to present the 'beloved disciple' as displacing Peter (generally believed to be the source behind Mark's Gospel). John 1:37–39 has two disciples meeting Jesus before Peter meets him in 1:40–42; one disciple is identified as Andrew while the other is left anonymous, presumably the beloved disciple himself. John 13:23–24 describes the beloved disciple as reclining on the chest of Jesus while Peter is further removed and must send his question to Jesus through the beloved disciple. John 18:15–16 says that Peter gained access to the high priest's courtyard only thanks to the beloved disciple. John 19:25–27 places the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross and has Jesus entrusting his mother to him, with Peter conspicuously absent from the scene. John 20:29 has the beloved disciple reaching the tomb before Peter, and it also implies that he believed in Jesus' resurrection before him (or anyone else, for that matter). John 21:7 says that the beloved disciple recognized Jesus first and then told Peter. Finally, John 21:20–24 indicates that the beloved disciple has outlived Peter.

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10 Another possible example is John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2; 18:2, all of which could assume that the readers know of Judas' betrayal of Jesus although it is not mentioned until 18:5. However, this is not necessarily the case since the same phenomenon regarding Judas is found in Mark 3:19 although the betrayal does not occur until Mark 14:43–46.

11 That is, except for the bare mention of his name in Mark 3:18.

12 Barabbas is mentioned in Mark 15:6–15, but he is never called a *lēstēs* (robber, revolutionary), which is how John's Gospel introduces him in 18:40.

13 Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in Mark 15:43, but John's Gospel provides new information not found in Mark.

## Correlating John with Mark

The data given above justify an attempt to correlate John with Mark. The various texts have been arranged in tabular form to show more easily how the two Gospels relate to one another. To further guide the reader, the events are identified with respect to location and time and/or duration. Where possible, major blocks of text are condensed into the same event.

Event/Description	Location	Time/Duration	Mark	John
Prologue	--	--	Mk 1:1	Jn 1:1–18
John the Baptist's ministry before baptizing Jesus; Jesus' baptism	wilderness, Jordan (Mk 1:4–5, 9)	unspecified	Mk 1:2–11	--
Jesus' temptation in the wilderness for 40 days	wilderness (Mk 1:12)	40 days (Mk 1:13)	Mk 1:12–13	--
John the Baptist's testimony about himself and Jesus	Bethany-across-Jordan <sup>14</sup> (Jn 1:28)	spans two days (Jn 1:29)	--	Jn 1:19–34 <sup>15</sup>
Jesus meets five disciples (Andrew, anonymous disciple, <sup>16</sup> Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel); wedding at Cana	presumably Bethany-across-Jordan (Jn 1:28, 35, 43); Galilee (Jn 1:43); Cana (Jn 2:1)	spans three days (Jn 1:35, 43; 2:1)	--	Jn 1:35–2:11
Jesus in Capernaum	Capernaum (Jn 2:12)	spans 'a few days' (Jn 2:12)	--	Jn 2:12
Jesus in Jerusalem for the Passover; Temple cleansing; meeting with Nicodemus	Jerusalem	just before Passover (Jn 2:13)	--	Jn 2:13–3:21 <sup>17</sup>

14 That is, to distinguish it from Bethany-near-Jerusalem.

15 By placing this episode after Jesus' 40-day temptation in the wilderness, the apparent chronological contradiction between John and Mark is avoided. The opposite correlation was found in, for example, Tatian, who placed John 1:19–34 before Mark 1:12–13 (*Diatessaron* §4). Origen (*Comm. John* 10:1, commenting on John 2:12–25) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (*Comm. John*, Book 1, commenting on John 2:1) also noted the problem.

16 Most likely, this is the beloved disciple.

17 Bauckham, following the majority position, says that John has moved Mark's Temple cleansing from near the end of Jesus' ministry (11:15–18) to near the beginning ('John for Readers of Mark', 159). However, there are strong arguments in favour of two separate Temple cleansings, which I have followed here. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 176–78, 181; Andreas Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 111; Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 217–19 (slightly favouring). For the chronological data, esp. regarding John 2:20, cf. Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, trans. Doug Scott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), §3.2.4.

Jesus baptizing in the Judean countryside; John the Baptist's testimony	Judean countryside (Jn 3:22; 4:3), probably near Aenon and Salim (Jn 3:23)	after Passover (Jn 3:22); must have spanned some time <sup>18</sup> (Jn 4:1-2)	--	Jn 3:22-36 (and 4:1-3)
Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman	Sychar of Samaria (Jn 4:4-5); travelling from Judean wilderness to Galilee (Jn 4:3)	perhaps four months before harvest time (Jn 4:35); <sup>19</sup> stayed for two days (Jn 4:40, 43)	--	Jn 4:1-43
John the Baptist's arrest	unknown <sup>20</sup>	probably some time before Jn 5:33-35 <sup>21</sup>	Mk 1:14a	--
Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee, the Sea of Galilee, the Tetrarchy of Philip, and the Decapolis; themes of authority, miracles, and conflict; appointment of the Twelve; parables	various places in and around Galilee, the Sea of Galilee, the Tetrarchy of Philip, and the Decapolis	spans at least two or three Sabbaths (Mk 1:21; 2:23; 3:1-2 [?]) <sup>22</sup>	Mk 1:14b-5:43	Jn 4:45 (?)
Jesus rejected at Nazareth	Nazareth (Mk 6:1; Jn 4:44)	Sabbath (Mk 6:2); uncertain duration of itinerant preaching (Mk 6:6)	Mk 6:1-6	Jn 4:44 (?)
Jesus heals an official's son in Cana	Cana (Jn 4:46)	apparently after rejection in	--	Jn 4:46-54 <sup>23</sup>

18 If the reference to 'four months until harvest' in John 4:35 is concrete as opposed to proverbial, and if the reference to 'white fields' in the same verse fits better with barley or wheat harvests in April/May and June, respectively, than with the fruit harvest in October, then Jesus would have spent several months here, that is, from after Passover until at least the early winter months.

19 See the previous note. This event may have happened in the winter, but that is not certain.

20 While not mentioned by either John or Mark, Josephus states that the castle at Macherus was the place of John's imprisonment and subsequent death (*Antiq* 18:116-19).

21 That is, if this is an allusion to the completion of John the Baptist's public ministry, be it by imprisonment or death; for this view, cf. Bauckham, 'John for Readers of Mark', 156.

22 It is uncertain whether the Sabbath mentioned in Mark 3:1-2 is the same as the one mentioned in Mark 2:23 or a different one. Regarding other specific time frames during this period, Mark 1:21-38 is one 24-hour period; Mark 4:1-41 is one day (perhaps including Mark 5:1-20); Mark 5:21-43 is one day.

23 Bauckham ('John for Readers of Mark', 155-56) suggests that this event may be read to have taken place before Mark's account of the Galilean ministry begins, since it occurs when Jesus (travelling north from Samaria) is in Cana, before He reaches the Sea of Galilee (Mk 1:16). This could be true if Mark 1:14-15 functioned as a type of introductory summary of Jesus' preaching message.



		Nazareth (Jn 4:46)		
Jesus sends the Twelve to cast out demons and heal the sick	presumably Galilee	long enough for Jesus to travel to Jerusalem and back (see below)	Mk 6:7–13	--
Jesus in Jerusalem for undefined feast	Jerusalem (Jn 5:1)	occurs during the Twelve's itinerant ministry (see above)	--	Jn 5:1–47 <sup>24</sup>
The Twelve return to Jesus and report	presumably Galilee	uncertain	Mk 6:30	--
Jesus feeds 5,000	'other side' of the Sea of Galilee (Jn 6:1); <sup>25</sup> uninhabited place (Mk 6:31)	soon before Passover (Jn 6:4) <sup>26</sup>	Mk 6:30–44	Jn 6:1–14
Jesus walks on water	nearby mountain (Mk 6:46; Jn 6:15); Sea of Galilee (Mk 6:45)	same day as the feeding (Mk 6:45) <sup>27</sup>	Mk 6:45–52	Jn 6:15–21
Jesus talks about the feeding and compares it to eating His flesh and blood	Capernaum (Jn 6:59)	next day after feeding (Jn 6:22)	--	Jn 6:22–71
Jesus healing, casting out demons, feeding 4,000; theme of	various places in and around Galilee such as Genne-	extensive travel implied (Mk 6:56) <sup>29</sup>	Mk 6:53–9:50	Jn 7:1a

24 As Bauckham writes, 'Mark narrates what the twelve did when Jesus sent them out on a mission (6:7–13, 30), with no indication of what Jesus himself did meantime, whereas John narrates a visit of Jesus to Jerusalem in which no mention is made of the disciples (John 5)' ('John for Readers of Mark', 156).

25 Luke 9:10 places the feeding of 5,000 men in Bethsaida, but Mark 6:45 says that Jesus sent his disciples to Bethsaida after the feeding, thereby presenting a potential discrepancy. However, based on the testimony of Matthew 11:20–24 and John 1:43–44; 12:21, there is sufficient justification to posit two separate Bethsaidas (similar to two separate Bethanys). John Nolland translates the key preposition *pros* in Mark 6:45 as 'in the direction of (Bethsaida)', with their actual landing being in Gennesaret (Mk 6:53) (*Mark*, 348). However, not all scholars are convinced. For example, R. T. France discounts Luke's testimony in favor of Mark's (*Mark*, 264).

26 Note the reference to green grass in Mark 6:39, thus allowing for a date near Passover (March/April).

27 It can further be specified that this incident occurred at some time between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. (Mk 6:48).

29 More specifically, Mark 8:1–9 spanned at least three days (Mk 8:2) and Mark 8:27–9:29 spanned

conflict; the Twelve confess Jesus as the Christ; Jesus begins teaching on His death and resurrection; the transfiguration	saret, Tyre and Sidon, Decapolis, Dalmanutha, <sup>28</sup> Sea of Galilee, Bethsaida, Caesarea Philippi and Capernaum			
Jesus mocked by brothers	Galilee (Jn 7:1, 9)	soon before the Feast of Tabernacles <sup>30</sup> (Jn 7:2)	--	Jn 7:2-9
Jesus in Jerusalem during Feast of Tabernacles; healing; theme of conflict	Temple for second half of Feast (Jn 7:14; 8:20) <sup>31</sup>	Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:2, 10, 14, 37; 8:20; 9:14) <sup>32</sup>	Mk 10:1a	Jn 7:10-10:22
Jesus in Jerusalem during Hanukkah	Solomon's colonnade in the Temple (Jn 10:22-23)	Feast of Hanukkah <sup>33</sup> (Jn 10:22)	Mk 10:1a	Jn 10:22-39
Jesus teaches on divorce; blesses little children; encounter with rich young man	Bethany-across-Jordan (Jn 1:28, 35, 43; 10:40)	some time implied (Mk 10:1; Jn 10:40) <sup>34</sup>	Mk 10:1b-31	Jn 10:40-42
Jesus teaches on His death and resurrection and heals Bartimaeus	on the way from Bethany-across-Jordan to Jerusalem <sup>35</sup> (Mk 10:32) via Jericho (Mk 10:46) <sup>36</sup>	maybe spanned a few days <sup>37</sup> (Mk 10:32, 46; Jn 11:6, 39)	Mk 10:32-52	--

at least six days (Mk 9:2). On either side of this Galilean ministry (Mk 6:53-9:50), John places Jesus in Jerusalem soon before Passover (Jn 6:4) and soon before the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:2). This implies that Mark 6:53-9:50 took place at some point between March/April and September/October, that is, over a period of six to eight months.

28 Dalmanutha was apparently on the 'other side' (Mk 8:13) of Bethsaida (Mk 8:22). Since it could not be in the Decapolis (they left from there; Mk 8:10), it was in either Galilee or the Tetrarchy of Philip.

30 The Feast of Booths begins on the 15th day of the 7th month, Tishri. This occurred in the fall, during September/October.

31 If John 7:53-8:11 is authentic, then Jesus also went to the Mount of Olives (Jn 8:1).

32 More specifically, John 7:37-10:21 spans one day (the last day of the feast, a sabbath).

33 Hanukkah begins on the 25th day of Kislev. This occurred in the winter, during November/December.

34 More specifically, John 11:6 implies at least three days.

35 Actually, Jesus would travel to Bethany-near-Jerusalem, just two miles outside Jerusalem itself (Jn 11:18).

36 Jericho is on the travel route from Bethany-across-Jordan to Bethany-near-Jerusalem.

37 It appears that it took one day for news to travel from Bethany-near-Jerusalem to Bethany-across-Jordan, since Jesus waited two days after he had heard the news (Jn 11:6) and arrived four days after Lazarus had died (Jn 11:39). Apparently, it was this news that brought Jesus out of Bethany-across-Jordan to the Jerusalem area.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead	Bethany-near-Jerusalem (Jn 11:1, 18)	apparently spanned one day	Mk 11:1a	Jn 11:1–53 <sup>38</sup>
Jesus with disciples in Ephraim-in-wilderness	Ephraim-in-wilderness (Jn 11:54)	unspecified	--	Jn 11:54–57
Jesus anointed with perfume	Bethany-near-Jerusalem (Jn 12:1) <sup>39</sup>	six days before Passover (Jn 12:1)	Mk 11:1a; 14:3–9 <sup>40</sup>	Jn 12:1–11
Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem; perhaps also some interactions and teaching in Jerusalem	Jerusalem (Mk 11:1; Jn 12:12)	five days before Passover (Jn 12:1, 12)	Mk 11:1b–11a	Jn 12:12–50
Jesus and disciples return to Bethany-near-Jerusalem	Bethany (Mk 11:11b)	five days before Passover (Mk 11:11)	Mk 11:11b	--
Jesus curses the fig tree, cleanses the Temple, and leaves Jerusalem	between Bethany-near-Jerusalem and Jerusalem (Mk 11:12–13); Jerusalem (Mk 12:15); presumably Bethany-near-Jerusalem (Mk 11:19)	four days before Passover (Jn 12:1, 12; Mk 11:12)	Mk 11:12–19	--
Jesus teaches on fig tree; theme of conflict; parables; foretells destruction of Temple	between Bethany-near-Jerusalem and Jerusalem (Mk 11:12–13, 20); Jerusalem (Mk 11:27)	three days before Passover (Jn 12:1, 12; Mk 11:12, 20)	Mk 11:20–13:37	--
Chief priests, scribes, and Judas plot Jesus' death	Jerusalem	two days before Passover (Mk 14:1)	Mk 14:1–2, 10–11	--

38 Bauckham argues that all of John 11 should be placed between Mark 10:31 and 10:32 ('John for Readers of Mark', 157). But Mark 10:46 states that Jesus and His disciples were in Jericho on their way from Bethany-across-Jordan to Bethany-near-Jerusalem, thus requiring John 11 to come after Mark 10:32–52 and not before.

39 More specifically, this happened in Simon the Leper's home (Mk 14:3).

40 This pericope has been displaced in Mark's Gospel for thematic reasons. In order to form another well-known 'Markan sandwich' of betrayal (14:1–2), honor (14:3–9), and betrayal (14:10–11), the story was placed here (see below). Thus, according to John's chronology this story did not happen two days before Passover, as a surface reading of Mark's passage might suggest (Mk 14:1), but rather six days before Passover (Jn 12:1).

Jesus eats Last Supper with disciples; washes their feet; Judas leaves; foretells Peter's denial; teaching on love and Holy Spirit; Jesus' prayer; all sing a hymn	Jerusalem; upper room (Mk 14:15)	first day of Unleavened Bread when the Passover lamb is sacrificed (Mk 14:12); evening <sup>41</sup> (Mk 14:17; Jn 13:30); before the Feast of Passover (Jn 13:1)	Mk 14:12–26a <sup>42</sup>	Jn 13:1–17:26 <sup>43</sup>
Jesus foretells Peter's denial (second time <sup>44</sup> ) and prays in Gethsemane	Mount of Olives (Mk 14:26b); Gethsemane (Mk 14:32)	same night (Mk 14:26, 14:37, 40–41)	Mk 14:26–42	--
Jesus betrayed and arrested	Gethsemane (Mk 14:43); garden (Jn 18:1)	same night (Mk 14:43; Jn 18:3)	Mk 14:43–52	Jn 18:1–11
Jesus' trial before Annas	courtyard of high priest (Jn 18:15)	same night (Jn 18:18, 25–27)	--	Jn 18:12–27
Jesus' trial before the Council; Peter denies Jesus	Temple	same night (Mk 14:54, 67, 72; Jn 18:18, 25)	Mk 14:53–72	Jn 18:24
Jesus before Pilate; Barabbas released; Jesus beaten	Pilate's mansion (Mk 15:1; Jn 18:28)	next morning (Mk 15:1; Jn 18:28)	Mk 15:1–20	Jn 18:28–19:16
Jesus crucified	Golgotha (Mk 15:22; Jn 19:17)	third hour to sixth hour (Mk 15:25, 33)	Mk 15:21–41	Jn 19:17–37
Joseph of Arimathea asks for Jesus' body; Jesus buried	garden in/near Golgotha (Jn 19:41; 20:15)	evening of day of Preparation (Mk 15:42; Jn 19:42)	Mk 15:42–47	Jn 19:38–42
Women come to empty tomb	garden in/near Golgotha (Jn 19:41; 20:15)	early on first day of the week (Mk 16:1–2; Jn 20:1)	Mk 16:1–8	Jn 20:1

41 Depending on how Mark is counting the days, this reference to 'evening' in Mark 14:17 may be viewed as the following day.

42 The only part that overlaps with John is Mark 14:17–26a.

43 There may be some type of break at John 14:31b, but this is uncertain. Perhaps John 15:1–17:26 was spoken on the way from the upper room to Gethsemane/Kidron Valley (Mk 14:32; Jn 18:1).

44 John 13:36–38 places Jesus' foretelling of Peter's denial in the upper room, whereas Mark 14:26–31 places it at the Mount of Olives. Perhaps it refers to two separate events, or perhaps it refers to the same event and Mark has moved it here for redactional purposes. For a similar phenomenon, cf. Mark 14:1–11 and the anointing at Bethany-near-Jerusalem.

Peter, 'beloved disciple' and Mary Magdalene <sup>45</sup> come to tomb; Mary Magdalene tells disciples she has seen the Lord	garden in/near Golgotha (Jn 19:41; 20:15)	early on first day of the week (Mk 16:1-2; Jn 20:1, 19)	--	Jn 20:2-18
Jesus appears to disciples	presumably Jerusalem or its environs	evening of same day (Jn 20:19)	--	Jn 20:19-23
Jesus appears to Thomas	presumably Jerusalem or its environs	eight days later <sup>46</sup> (Jn 20:26)	--	Jn 20:24-29
Jesus appears to seven disciples; restores Peter	near the Sea of Galilee (Jn 21:1)	unknown, but during the morning (Jn 21:4, 15)	--	Jn 21:1-23

### Important observations regarding the correlation

Having completed this correlation, I now turn to four groups of observations: (1) major sections of expanding, summarizing, adding and deleting carried out by John; (2) significant sections of overlapping by John; (3) one instance of 'correcting' (or 'clarifying') done by John; and (4) miscellaneous observations.

First, there are seven major sections where John expands, summarizes, adds or leaves out material contained in Mark. John 1:19-4:43 fits between Mark 1:13 and 14 and provides material regarding Jesus' ministry before the end of John the Baptist's imprisonment. John 4:45 summarizes Mark 1:14-5:43, probably because of Mark's emphasis here on Jesus' Galilean ministry as opposed to John's emphasis on Jesus' ministry elsewhere, especially in Jerusalem and its environs. Similarly, John 7:1a summarizes Mark 6:53-9:50, probably for the same reason.

One side benefit of correlating John and Mark is that John's chronological indicators allow us to conclude that Mark 6:53-9:50 spanned some six to eight months. On either side of this Galilean ministry, John places Jesus in Jerusalem soon before Passover (Jn 6:4) and soon before the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:2), that is, soon before March/April and soon before September/October.<sup>47</sup> John 7:10-10:22 expands Mark 10:1a, probably because Mark's passing reference to Jesus' time in Judea was of special interest to John. Interestingly, John does not include any of the information recorded in Mark 11:11b-14:1-2, 10-11, although all of it happened in and around Jerusalem. Perhaps this is due to John's redactional strategy of wanting to move as quickly as possible from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his final rejection by the Jews (Jn 12:12-50) to the upper room discourse (Jn 13-17). John 13:1-17:26 complements and expands upon Mark 14:17-26a. There is not much material

45 Mary Magdalene had already come once (Mk 16:1; Jn 20:1), but after she and the other women fled from the tomb, apparently Mary Magdalene came back.

46 That is, one week later, thereby making this the following Sunday (cf. Josephus, *Antiq* 7:365).

47 So Bauckham, 'John for Readers of Mark', 156.

similarity between the two Gospels at this point, but John includes much of Jesus' teaching that is absent from Mark. Finally, John 20:1–21:23 is unparalleled in Mark (unless, of course, Mark 16:9–20 is genuine, in which case they would complement each other at some points with each one adding new material at other points). In summary, John tends to expand upon Mark's brief references to—or complete omissions of—Jesus' ministry outside Galilee, especially in and around Jerusalem, whereas he tends to summarize Mark's extended accounts of Jesus' ministry in Galilee with a short phrase.

Second, there are just two major sections where John overlaps Mark. John 6:1–21 overlaps Mark 6:30–52 in recounting Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 men and his subsequent walking across the Sea of Capernaum. The fact that John not only included both pericopae but also kept Mark's order implies that these stories had significance not only for John but also for the larger Christian community (cf. Mt 14:13–27). The other major overlap, of course, covers Passion Week, specifically Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, parts of the Last Supper (e.g. Jesus predicting His betrayal) and parts of Jesus' trial, crucifixion, burial and resurrection.

Third, John makes one 'correction' (or 'clarification') of Mark. John 12:1 specifically places Jesus' anointing at Bethany-near-Jerusalem six days before Passover, whereas a *prima facie* reading of Mark 14:1–11 easily could lead one to think it happened two days before Passover. It is clear that Mark 14:1–11 forms a 'Markan sandwich' (i.e. a chiasmic ABA' structure) in which plans for Jesus' betrayal and death (vv. 1–2, 10–11) form an *inclusio* around his anointing for burial (vv. 3–9).<sup>48</sup> This redactional technique opens the possibility of understanding Mark as having theology rather than chronology as his primary concern. If so, John has 'clarified' Mark by explaining the respective chronology of the events in question, which a reader of Mark's Gospel may have been misunderstood.

Finally, two miscellaneous observations are in order. First, it is interesting to note how John did *not* complement Mark. It is relatively easy to understand why John excluded some stories, such as the birth account and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (specifically his conflict with Satan), since they did not take place in or around Jerusalem—which is consistent with the established pattern of how John complemented Mark. It is relatively harder to understand why other information, such as Jesus' genealogy and his childhood visits to Jerusalem, was excluded, since these episodes are closer to John's area of interest. In any case, if John had access to these stories, he deemed them extraneous to his overall redactional objective.

Second, the fact that John knew Mark's Gospel has implications for the spread of Christian documents in the first century, the early development of the New Testament canon, and the Synoptic problem. As for the first two of these items, if Mark was written around the mid-60s from Rome (as seems likely) and if John was written in the 90s from Ephesus (as also seems likely), then this means that within approximately 30 years Mark's Gospel not only had reached Ephesus but was also well-known by a sufficient portion of John's readership that he could assume their knowledge of it. Additionally, the strong evidence that John *complemented* Mark's Gospel and did not seek to *oppose* or *refute* it implies his tacit acceptance of Mark,

48 For example, see John Heil, 'Mark 14:1–52: Narrative Structure and Reader-Response', *Biblica* 71, no. 3 (1990): 305–32 (esp. 305–13).

even if he thought it did not say all that could be said about Jesus (but John knew he could not capture everything either; see Jn 21:25). As for the Synoptic problem, although it still remains a puzzle, at least the relationship between John and Mark can be settled: Mark was written prior to John, and John interwove his Gospel with Mark's.

### **Summary**

This article has completed the project that Richard Bauckham began nearly 25 years ago, demonstrating how the Gospels of John and Mark can be correlated in their entirety. The comparison table presented in this article demonstrates that such a correlation is indeed possible and offers illuminating insights into how the two Gospels relate to each other. John often expands and summarizes, sometimes overlaps, and on one occasion 'corrects' (or 'clarifies') Mark. Much has been written on the relationship between the four Gospels, but this study has contributed to our understanding of the relationship between two of them. Whatever the answer to the Synoptic problem may be, at least we can be relatively certain of the relationship between John and Mark.

# Innovation in Seminary Theological Education: An Overview of Contributing Forces

Scott Cunningham

*This article examines in detail, based on extensive research by the Overseas Council, how theological education can innovate to serve the Majority World more effectively—particularly with regard to increasing access, achieving greater relevance in countries where few Christian leaders have seminary training, and maintaining financial sustainability.*

Let me begin this exploration into this subject with a personal observation. I find all too common in the West a perception of the typical seminary in the Majority World<sup>1</sup> as it commonly existed decades ago. It is a perception of a traditional school of higher education characterized by ‘four walls and four years’. That is, it is imagined that the typical seminary offers a predictable curriculum over an inflexible four-year period (or two or three years). This curriculum is taught to residential students who live on a physical campus on which exist typical ‘four-wall’ classrooms where the teaching takes place. This is the ‘traditional residential’ model. This idea of the seminary, based on this straw-man characterization, is dismissed from being an important contributor to the health of the global Church and attacked as being disconnected from the Church, irrelevant and out of touch.

There are instances where this model does persist. And in many of these cases, the criticism of being irrelevant to the leadership needs of the churches they are meant to serve is justified. Such schools focus on maintaining the status quo. Worse, they think of growth and development in terms of imitation rather than innovation. Leaders of such schools may look to important Western seminaries as models to which to aspire (often not realizing that there is more to the Western seminary than ‘four walls and four years’). Or they compare themselves to the well-known flagship seminaries within their own region and imagine that their goal should be to duplicate what already exists. Sometimes, school leaders are bound to a traditional approach to theological education, perhaps because this is the only experience or

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<sup>1</sup> The focus of this paper is on institutions of higher learning (with the main academic programs at the post-secondary level) located in the Majority World, which includes, for the purposes of this paper, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia.



model they know, teaching the same curriculum they were taught. ‘After all, the Bible doesn’t change.’

Thankfully, however, such schools constitute a minority of seminaries. More than a decade ago, Overseas Council (OC) noticed a number of schools that appeared to be engaging in theological education in unusual, innovative and at times provocative ways. To understand these innovative approaches more deeply, OC commissioned research that took place in 2011–2013.<sup>2</sup> Although the research did not focus on the prevalence of innovation in theological education, it provided a foundation for understanding the phenomenon of ‘unconventional’ theological education through an appreciative inquiry into nine seminaries.

OC has continued to observe the growing prevalence of innovation, particularly in aspects of curriculum, and it undertook further research in 2019, this time with survey responses from over 100 seminaries in the Majority World.<sup>3</sup> Survey results confirmed that over 75% of seminaries were providing some sort of non-formal ministry training. Indeed, over 40% of total students being trained by these seminaries were enrolled in non-formal programs. The picture of the prevalence and wide variety of ministry training being offered in these key seminaries undermines the traditional ‘four walls, four years’ image still held by some. Thankfully, innovation is happening and appears to be expanding.

While the research just mentioned explores the prevalence and diversity of the innovation, the purpose of this essay is to seek a deeper understanding of the forces that appear to motivate these new approaches to theological education.

## What is ‘innovation’ in theological education?

In exploring the topic of the forces that motivate innovation, we do not choose to overly limit the educational or institutional practices we consider ‘innovative’. That is, we are not seeking examples of an approach which is unique or has never existed, either in a different time or different place. Rather, since our focus is on the motivation and not the phenomenon itself, we are considering innovation from a more expansive and inclusive perspective. For the purposes of this essay, we will share the definition employed by OC’s initial research on unconventional methods, as ‘an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption’, such as close peers or one’s family, community or organization.<sup>4</sup> In using this definition, we may reference educational and institutional practices which are not unique, perhaps not even uncommon, but which are, nonetheless, new

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2 The results of this research are contained in Meri MacLeod, ‘Unconventional Educational Practices in Majority World Theological Education’ (Overseas Council, unpublished paper, 2013). The report may be accessed by contacting the author of this essay at [scott@overseas.org](mailto:scott@overseas.org).

3 A summary of the results of this research can be found elsewhere in the Manfred Kohl festschrift, in the essay by Paul Allan Clark, ‘The Churches Need Healthy, Well-formed Leaders—How Shall We Now Train?’ Focusing on ‘non-formal’ does not mean to imply that all innovation within the curriculum takes place in non-formal programs, or that all non-formal programs are necessarily innovative. However, because of the inherent nature of formal programs, with characteristics of equivalences, transferability and academic laddering, the breadth of innovation would seem to be somewhat more constrained.

4 Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995), xvii, cited by Macleod, ‘Unconventional’, 12.

endeavours for the particular school employing them. Our primary interest is not so much in the practice itself as in the motivational forces that lie behind it.

Innovation can take place in different aspects of the seminary. However, one of the most fruitful areas of innovation (that is, in terms of the variety of innovation and the perceived missional impact) is in the area of curriculum. By this, we mean curriculum writ large, including all aspects of the formational programs of the seminary that it employs to accomplish its mission.

Curricula can be notoriously difficult to change, for all sorts of reasons, from faculty turf battles to donor perception to alumni and board conservatism. Calvin Coolidge, former US president, supposedly once quipped, ‘Changing a college curriculum is like moving a graveyard—you never know how many friends the dead have until you try to move them!’ In spite of the challenges, there are numerous possibilities for curricular innovation.

Traditionally, curriculum was held together by a coherent centre, epitomized by the physical campus. It was in this location that students, faculty and resources (such as the library) converged, and thus where the teaching and learning took place over a prescribed period of time. Hence, the traditional ‘four years, four walls’. However, due to various factors, technology being primary, higher education is experiencing a remarkable ‘deconstruction’ of this model,<sup>5</sup> with far-ranging impact on the shape of the curriculum. Because of the possibility of remote teaching and learning, students and faculty no longer need to be at the same place at the same time. Books no longer need to be in one location. Indeed, they do not even need any physical presence at all, if they are available digitally. And the delivery of the typical prescribed courses over a prescribed time period is a model that is also breaking down. Once the whole is broken down into its constituent parts that no longer need to hang together, the process of reconstruction of the curriculum can result in a wide variety of expressions, as it moves away from a one-size-fits-all model dependent on a coherent centre to a collection of distributed bits which can be reconstituted depending on the available resources, needs and local contexts.

Nearly forty years ago, evangelical theological educators took notice of the possibilities for curriculum innovation and embraced this as a value in the ‘ICETE Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education’.<sup>6</sup> The third heading of the ‘Manifesto’, on ‘Strategic Flexibility’, addresses three areas of the curriculum: the need to serve the formation of more than only one type of leader (pastors); the need to take into account different academic levels; and the need to embrace a variety of educational modes, not only a traditional approach.

Another way of exploring possibilities for innovation in the curriculum is through the familiar who, what, when, where, why and how questions:<sup>7</sup>

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5 Other terms for this phenomenon can be used including ‘decentralization’, ‘disaggregation’, ‘unbundling’ and ‘distributed’.

6 International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, ‘ICETE Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education’ (1983, rev. 2002), <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462sc1>.

7 This approach is followed by Brian E. Woolnough, ‘Rethinking Seminary Education: Bridging the Field and Academia’, *Lausanne Global Analysis* 8, no. 5 (2019), <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462sc2>.

- Who are our students? Who could be our students? Who should be our students? Who needs training but is not now able to access it? Who does the teaching and mentoring of our students? Who could they be?
- What are the subjects in our curriculum? What are the affective, behavioural and cognitive objectives of our courses and programs? What is the profile of our graduate? What will the context of ministry look like for our projected graduates in five or ten years?
- Where do the teaching and learning take place? Is there a physical location or a virtual meeting space? What does this place look like, and how does that facilitate the teaching and learning? Where is the expected ministry location and what does it look like?
- When do the teaching and learning take place? Is it synchronous or asynchronous? Does it take place only during prescribed classes or at other times also? What is the cadence of the teaching and learning? Do teaching and learning take place after the prescribed period of the formation program?
- Why do we exist as an institution? To what end are we providing these teaching and learning opportunities and programs? In what ways do we intend for our graduates to serve the churches who send them?
- How do our students learn and become formed as ministers and how, then, do our teachers teach with this in mind? What are we doing intentionally to form our students? What are we doing unintentionally? What are we intentionally not doing?

Though not commonly included in this list of questions, there is another which can be fruitfully asked in considering innovation: with whom? Who are our partners in our formational endeavours? How do we partner with churches? How are we partnering with other seminaries or academic institutions? Are there other organizations that we can fruitfully partner with? With whom are we intentionally connecting students to be part of their life-long formation process?<sup>8</sup>

Responding to these questions from a fresh perspective can open a multitude of avenues for curriculum innovation. As we have seen, many schools are already asking and answering these questions in fresh ways. But what is their motivation? What prompts them to ask these questions in the first place and answer them in unconventional ways? We turn to three important forces leading to innovation.

### **The challenge of accessibility**

Research in the global Church has concluded that approximately nine out of ten churches are led by individuals who do not have formal theological education.<sup>9</sup>

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8 This is the question asked by Julia Freeland Fisher: 'This new wave has less to do with just transforming how students learn, and instead has the potential to revolutionize how they connect—to experts, mentors, and peers.' See 'The Next Decade of Disruption in Education? Unlocking Networks' (Christensen Institute, 2020), <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462sc3>.

9 Todd Johnson, 'Majority World Pastors' (email to Eddy Thomas), 15 June 2018. Johnson refers to research conducted by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, of which he is the director.

While research has not investigated the proportion of church leaders globally who have no form of ministry training whatsoever, we may use the confirmed data point of ‘nine out of ten’ as an indicator of a significant missiological challenge—the deficiency of trained church leaders in the Majority World. We refer to this challenge, which is probably the greatest missiology task for today’s Church, as the Church’s Global Leadership Challenge.

Behind the deficit is actually a positive observation—the remarkable growth of the Church in the Global South, which is one of the underlying disruptive forces for innovation in theological education. The high-level statistics are well known. In Africa, for instance, Christianity grew from 9% of the population to nearly 50% in the last century.<sup>10</sup> In just the last 15 years, Christianity in Africa has increased by 50%, with an average of 33,000 individuals becoming Christians or being born into Christian homes each day.<sup>11</sup> The building of equipped leaders is simply not keeping pace with this growth of the Church. Typically, leaders do emerge in these newly planted churches. To be clear, the result is not so much a deficiency of leaders as a gap in the training of leaders. The long-term outcome, if unaddressed, is unhealthy, doctrinally vulnerable, stagnant and sometimes fading congregations.

Our observations suggest that most often emerging leaders do not lack a desire for equipping for ministry; rather, they lack the opportunities to access ministry training programs in their current form. This is due to numerous barriers which stand in the way:

- *Educational.* Formal programs, by definition, require a certain educational achievement in order to progress to the next level on the academic ladder. One benefit of non-formal programs is increased flexibility in educational prerequisites for participation.
- *Geographic.* Schools that use a physical campus where the teaching and learning take place limit access to students who can be physically present. One of the advantages of online learning is the elimination of this barrier. Use of extension programs also helps to mitigate this barrier. One seminary in Sri Lanka maintains seven extension centres throughout the island, which serve 43% of their total students.
- *Financial.* Students often lack sufficient resources to enrol. This is primarily due to the relatively high cost of providing higher education, particularly in traditional approaches. Schools attempt to lower the cost for students through lowering the cost of the educational program itself or raising funds from other sources besides student tuition. Since financial sustainability is such a significant challenge, we will look at this issue more closely later.
- *Linguistic.* Formal programs tend to use the ‘national language of higher education’. This can be a barrier to students whose educational experience has taken place in other local languages. This obstacle can be overcome by

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10 Gina A. Zurlo, ‘African Christianity’, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462sc4>.

11 Krish Kandiah, ‘The Church Is Growing, and Here Are the Figures That Prove It’, *Christian Today* (2015), <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert462sc5>.

designing alternative programs aimed at a group of students who are fluent in a localized language.

- *Family and ministry involvement.* Often students cannot relocate themselves or their families due to commitments in their current location. Among others, these commitments might be the student's ministry commitment, their own employment or that of a spouse, or the education of their children. Educational models that do not require physical presence on a campus overcome this barrier. It is sometimes mitigated by programs offering courses which are intensive or modular in nature, requiring only short amounts of time away from home.
- *Technological.* Although the offer of online programs can overcome some barriers, it can also introduce other technology-related obstacles, such as the potential student's lack of Internet connectivity, the cost of technological devices or connectivity or the lack of technological fluency.
- *Gender-related.* Biases against training women for ministry can lead to subtle obstacles related to their family, church and community. Schools can offer targeted support and assistance to women to assist them in their desire for ministry training.<sup>12</sup>

If seminaries are to assist students to overcome these barriers, they must see those who need training but who face such obstacles as their potential students. This relates to a question we posed earlier: Who could and should be our student? Often this requires a change in way the seminary views its own mission. When seminary leaders see their mission as not 'to offer a master's degree in theology' but 'to serve the church by providing appropriate ministry training for those who need it', this missional shift serves as motivation for seeking innovative ways to overcome such barriers. The challenge of providing access to students who need training but are currently outside the reach of current programs has previously been identified in OC's research as a critical motivating force for innovation in the seminary's educational programs:

Stakeholders across all schools expressed a passionate vision for serving the church by providing accessible theological education for the working adult student. Board members, administrators, and faculty alike expressed concern for unmet educational needs essential for a healthy church. It seemed central to their sense of call to provide accessible and relevant theological education. This burden for the church, coupled with an awareness of the changing context, seemed an important catalyst that pushed them toward new and unproven approaches.<sup>13</sup>

This more expansive sense of mission, combined with the identification of potential students who need ministry training for the health of the Church and the obstacles

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12 Since 2013, OC has distributed nearly \$500,000 in scholarship assistance to seminaries specifically for the training of women in theological education. OC's research has determined that schools which offer targeted scholarship assistance to women, on average, have a higher proportion of female students than those schools which do not offer scholarships only for women.

13 Macleod, 'Unconventional', 10.

they face in accessing that training with current models, is a primary motivating factor in innovation in theological education.

### The challenge of contextualization and relevance

Ultimately, the mission of the seminary is to serve the mission of the Church.<sup>14</sup> The seminary doesn't exist for itself; it exists for and must be intentionally shaped to serve the Church. Hence, the forms and outcomes of theological education must be aligned with the context of the churches which the seminary serves.

To the extent that this does not happen, the seminary is rightly judged as disconnected, irrelevant or out of touch with the realities of the church which it exists to serve. At times, seminaries appear to have been designed to serve a church of a different place or a different time. This is somewhat understandable. Missionaries who established centres for ministry training tended to replicate or at least base new institutions on patterns which were most familiar to them in their home countries. 'National' faculty trained in countries other than the ones they serve in might find the replication of the way they were taught to be the most straightforward approach in their own teaching.

Similarly, curricula designed decades ago may have been shaped with the context of that time in mind. However, given the pace and breadth of cultural change, if the curriculum has changed little since then, it has probably lost much of its relevance to current cultural and church realities. Given the inertia of the curriculum, it is understandable if programs and curricula fail to keep pace with the changes in the context of the churches which they intend to serve.

However, the very nature of the gospel and the Church demands that our ministry training must be responsive to the realities of our contexts.<sup>15</sup> We can say that the disruptive force underlying the challenge of contextualization is the very nature of the gospel and Church. If the seminary exists to serve the mission of the Church, then it must frequently check to see that its formational programs are appropriate to the contextual realities of the Church and its mission of speaking and living the gospel in the world.

As an example of the Church's innovation compelled by its understanding of the gospel, it's appropriate here to reference an enormously significant innovation and gift to humanity on the part of the early Church—the hospital.<sup>16</sup> Though early civilizations may have had the material resources, knowledge of medicine, and doctors, they never established hospitals. It was the very nature of the gospel and the mission of the Church which was the foundation for this invention by the Christians.

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14 The Lausanne Movement's *Cape Town Commitment* (2011) puts it this way: 'The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church' (section IIF.4).

15 See Evan Hunter, 'On the Shoulders of Giants: Traditioned Innovation and Leading Change', *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* 3, no. 1 (2017). Hunter builds on the work of Greg Jones on 'traditioned innovation'. Hunter notes, 'However, as contexts, theological questions, societal needs, and student objectives have changed, schools must continue to adapt and change their curricula as well' (p. 12).

16 I'm grateful to Gregory Jones for pointing me to this instructive parallel in the history of the Church. For a brief history, see Mike Aquilina, 'How the Church Invented Health Care', *Angelus* (15 July 2019), <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert462sc6>.

The Christian understanding of human dignity, the Second Great Commandment, the pattern of Jesus as healer, and the command to show hospitality all formed the theological foundation. Because of this, the Church felt compelled to respond to the context of its world, particularly widespread illness. And so, in the fourth century, Christians established the first hospitals, the best-known being that of Basil of Caesarea. Because Christians were proximate to the need of the hurting world and due to their understanding of the gospel and the mission of the Church, Christians 'had to' invent the hospital to meet this need. In a parallel manner, seminaries, seeing the needs for leadership development in their context and recognizing the inadequacy of current models, respond to those needs innovatively.

Deeply embedded in this challenge of contextualization and relevance is the need for the seminary to be willing and able to listen carefully to the Church in its context. If the seminary is to serve the Church well, it must learn to listen well. Evan Hunter, in his article summarizing the work of Govindarajan and Trimble on 'reverse innovation', relates the story of how Mahindra became the dominant tractor manufacturer in India (over the competing John Deere products from the US). Mahindra did so by carefully identifying the needs of their clients and then building a product that met those particular needs.

In the same way that Mahindra relied on teams to explore the needs of their market, theological educators need to listen closely to the differing and changing needs of the Church in diverse contexts and to remain open to fresh approaches. Discoveries may lead to new designs that depart from previous iterations but also prove more effective in equipping leaders for ministry in new contexts.<sup>17</sup>

### **The challenge of sustainability**

A third force for innovation in the seminary stems from the challenge of financial sustainability. We do not mean by this that the goal of every seminary should be 'self-sustainability', as though a seminary should operate only on revenue from student-derived tuition. Nor do we suggest that financial donations should be limited to the particular churches that directly benefit from the services of the seminary. Rather, for our purposes, financial sustainability is a state of equilibrium between the mission of the school, its educational program and its financial resources. The goal is to achieve reliable sources of revenue which will allow fulfilment of the school's mission through its educational programs.

Because the traditional seminary is patterned on the university,<sup>18</sup> they share similar financial models and, thus, many of the same financial challenges. This financial model includes high costs for buildings and other infrastructure, high fixed costs for faculty and other staff, and revenue from student tuition, donations and other income. Most schools, even in the best of circumstances, will find that achieving financial sustainability is a challenge. For this reason, we would suggest that the underlying disruptive force behind this source of innovation is the inherently unsustainable financial model of the university. Recognizing these

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17 Evan Hunter, 'Reverse Innovation: In Search of Better Solutions Than Best Practices', *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* 1, no. 2 (2016): 12.

18 We hesitate to call the university a 'Western' model. Though the centuries-old history of the university began in Europe, universities are now found in every country.

challenges, seminaries have sought innovative ways to reduce expenses, increase revenue and modify educational programs (or even the school's mission) to achieve financial sustainability.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous factors have contributed to a situation where financial sustainability is becoming even more difficult:

- At a time when missionaries were a higher proportion of the staff, the school was not responsible for significant staff compensation. Gradually, missionaries were replaced with staff indigenous to the region, along with responsibilities for compensation and other expenses (such as government-mandated payments).
- Missionaries were not only 'free labour' (that is, free to the seminary), but they also brought donor interest and other financial assistance from the churches that supported the missionary. The departure of the missionary thus had a double effect—higher salaries to be paid and a decrease in donations from the missionary's network.
- Accreditation has become important for many seminaries. To achieve this goal, expenditures increased for additional (and more credentialed and thus more expensive) faculty and staff, library holdings, and other facilities.
- In some places, government regulations have had a major impact. This includes not only mandated government taxes and payments, and compliance with other government regulations and labour laws, but also staff and facilities requirements for government recognition or accreditation.
- Competition has increased for some seminaries. In some cases, this includes competition for students, as well as for donors. With the increased use of online education, the seminary's competition is not just the school in the same town, but schools on the other side of the world. Free theological education courses are being offered online, and even by a few residential programs of well-supported, missionary-run seminaries. This limits the ability of other seminaries to charge tuition.
- Adding higher-level academic programs also adds to costs (for additional library holdings and for faculty with higher credentials). The trend of increased numbers of seminaries in the Majority World offering programs at the doctoral level has been documented.<sup>20</sup>

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19 There is now a wealth of material on the topic of financial sustainability for the seminary. Much of this is a result of the early partnership of Overseas Council and ScholarLeaders International (SLI) in the Vital Sustainability Initiative. This project has continued to grow under the leadership of SLI. Numerous articles on the topic can be found in the *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* at <https://worldlea.org/yoururls/ert462sc7>. The single most helpful book on the topic is Emmanuel O. Bellon, *Leading Financial Sustainability in Theological Institutions: The African Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017).

20 Evan Hunter, 'A Tectonic Shift: The Rapid Rise of Ph.D. Programs at Evangelical Theological Schools in the Majority World', *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* 1, no. 2 (2016): 41–60.



These factors have stimulated creative paths toward financial sustainability. Generally, this means seeking either to lower costs or to raise revenue.

One approach is to reduce the number of core faculty and instead use part-time (less expensive) adjunct faculty. A consortium of Francophone schools exchanges some faculty members. A seminary in Ukraine relies heavily on visiting professors from the West who come for intensive summer programs—and bring additional donations with them. With the growth of online education, visiting professors can be sourced from nearly anywhere.

Some schools are exploring joining together in consortia. Such agreements could facilitate the sharing of courses and faculty. A consortium is being formed in northeast India around a shared online platform allowing for the sharing of IT costs, but potentially also the sharing of faculty, students and courses.

Some schools have sought to reduce the burden of electricity costs through the installation of solar panels—a large up-front capital expense which might be funded by donations. In terms of increasing revenue, examples of creative fund-raising efforts abound, and schools have gradually increased in their sophistication in this area, many now with multi-staffed departments for fund-raising.<sup>21</sup>

Several decades ago, schools began exploring ‘third-stream’ revenue,<sup>22</sup> in which existing (or purchased) facilities and resources are used in a for-profit manner to benefit the school. A number of schools operate guest houses (sometimes repurposing dormitories) and conference halls. A seminary in Zambia once used their land for a banana farm. A seminary in Ethiopia uses their valuable location on an urban boulevard to rent space in its campus building to businesses.<sup>23</sup> Computer schools, Internet cafés and English language schools leverage for profit capacity that the school already possesses. At times, schools find that third-stream projects attract donors who see the potential of providing endowment-like funding to an institution, rather than indefinite operating funds. However, many schools have learned that they do not have the expertise to operate a business profitably and resort to hiring such expertise. Others have learned that their business also suffers from unpredictable economic downturns and business competition, which reduce their profit margins.

Some schools have sensed that there may be an opportunity to grow student numbers through online courses. It is thought that, once the up-front costs for online programs are paid, larger numbers of students will more than cover the initial outlay. However, schools are finding it difficult to charge for online courses, especially when so many are available at no cost whatsoever.

Just as with the challenges of accessibility and contextualization, the challenge of financial sustainability is ongoing and widespread. Because sustainability involves so many different factors—educational program, mission, and costs and revenues—

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21 It would be appropriate here to mention that the honoree of the festschrift in which this article was originally published, Dr Manfred Kohl, consistently and persuasively argued for the establishment of fund-raising departments in seminaries in the Majority World. Much of the success of such programs finds its roots in this aspect of Dr Kohl’s work.

22 That is, a third source of revenue after student tuition and donations.

23 Desta Heliso, ‘Third Stream Income: The Case of the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology’, *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* 1, no. 1 (2015): 38–43.

and because it is such a powerful motivator, we expect that it will be a continued area of innovation, as schools seek to utilize the resources of the school effectively and efficiently towards continuing their mission.

### **Innovation and the pandemic**

With the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, forces converged and were accentuated, which brought about widespread disruption to Majority World seminaries during 2020 and into the present. These disruptive forces were both educational and financial.<sup>24</sup>

With government restrictions on in-person gatherings and on travel, along with the government closure of schools, most OC-related seminaries, at least for a time, closed fully to in-person classes. For those schools that were primarily teaching in-person, this completely disrupted the usual mode of educational delivery. Schools scrambled to find new ways to provide accessibility for students, at first rapidly shifting to some form of emergency remote teaching and then gradually employing more robust forms of online theological education.

As the pandemic persists and most schools are now on the path towards making successful adjustments to their educational programs, the financial disruption is perhaps even more challenging, with all the factors of sustainability going from bad to worse. Entire economies were disrupted with the loss of jobs in the host countries, leading to the inability of students, families, churches and donors to provide tuition or donations. In addition, there were unexpected costs: paying for protective equipment, assisting families who were infected or lacked money for living, as well as costs related to implementing remote teaching.

Thus, the impact of the pandemic has been a major disruption of the entire educational and financial models of the seminary. So, if the seminary were to survive and if it were to continue to fulfil its educational mission, it would need to adapt, change and innovate in significant ways. In this respect, the pandemic ‘forced’ innovation. Many schools, having in pre-pandemic days dipped their toes into the world of online theological education and even having expressed intentions to pursue this at a later date, were now thrown without warning into the proverbial deep end, to either sink or swim. Schools were forced to ask questions, challenge assumptions and overcome constraints in these new, unfamiliar waters.

Many have described the pandemic as a pivotal or liminal moment. This suggests that many of the changes being ‘forced’ upon schools because of the pandemic will persist. Some will persist because the effects of the pandemic may be longer-lasting than originally expected. Other innovations will persist because schools have observed positive outcomes which will also benefit them in ‘normal’ times. For example, four schools in Nepal, India and Bangladesh have formed a consortium to provide online learning to their students, allowing them to share costs, faculty training and IT support. In the future, they could also share students, courses and faculty. A seminary in Lebanon, primarily residential for its pre-pandemic

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24 The impact of COVID-19 on seminaries, along with a hopeful response, is well described by Evan Hunter, ‘Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis: Moving from Desperation to Hope in Theological Education’, *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* 6, no. 1 (2020): 21–30.

programs, has shifted permanently to a hybrid approach, using intensive on-site residential modules combined with online learning. Fully one-third of OC-related seminaries have experienced a growth in the number of students after a year of the pandemic, mostly by providing access to theological education through online modes to students who could not access traditional programs. One seminary in Sri Lanka notes that their new offering of online courses has helped them fulfil a long-time objective of reaching students in other countries, with expatriate ethnic Sri Lankans now taking classes online. There are compelling reasons to think that many such changes will be long-lasting. Some innovations forced by emergency conditions have demonstrated that many of the changes previously considered off limits or imagined only in long-range planning are, in fact, quite implementable and potentially beneficial for the long term.

## Conclusion

Some, upon surveying seminary theological education in the Majority World, express pessimism or are even dismissive of its positive contribution to the health of the global Church. The seminary, in their minds, is largely inaccessible to those who need ministry training, disconnected from the life of the Church, and built on an unsustainable financial model. This essay offers a different perspective. Although seminaries are not without legitimate criticism, we have argued, beginning with evidence of widespread innovation (particularly in the area of non-formal ministry training offered by the seminary), that in three respects, we see strong forces that are leading to further innovation. Behind these forces stand important realities for the Church:

- Behind the challenge of accessibility is the reality of remarkable Church growth and the need to equip additional leaders.
- Behind the challenge of contextualization and relevance is the very nature of the gospel and the Church, which compels us to respond to the changing realities of a broken world so as to fulfil the Church's mission.
- Behind the challenge of sustainability is the inherent difficulty of the university's financial model, leading schools to explore creative ways to find equilibrium between the school's mission, finances and educational programs.

These are enduring challenges and realities (which were only accentuated by the current COVID-19 pandemic). But by God's grace, motivated by these challenges, seminaries in the Majority World are discovering innovative ways to better serve the mission of the Church.

# Confronting Lying Biblically in Honour- and Shame-Oriented Cultures

Ajith Fernando

*Various forms of lying are ubiquitous even amongst Christians, harming our integrity and witness. This article identifies reasons why lies are so common and acceptable and deploys biblical truth to call all of us to a higher standard.*

This essay seeks to find culturally sensitive and biblically driven ways to combat the epidemic of lying that is seen among Christians, especially in collectivist cultures, where shared community values are important and lying is often an acceptable value. A two-fold strategy is presented. First, make revulsion for lying a shared value. Then it would be considered a shame to lie, and shame is a powerful motivation for action in collectivist cultures. Second, let Christians know that the Bible teaches that God abhors lying and that lying will be judged.

It gives me great pleasure to write this in honour of my friend Dr Manfred Kohl. He has sought to bring kingdom values to bear among Christians in the Majority World, especially through theological education. Among the values he paid attention to was integrity. So I thought I would make my contribution to this book by discussing ways to confront one of the commonest expressions of a lack of integrity in the church: lying.

## An acceptable practice

Lying has become so acceptable in our nations that people do not hesitate before telling a lie. Every day many people in Sri Lanka recite, as part of their religious ritual, their resolve not to lie, but they break that resolution shortly after. It is a common practice to take sick leave when workers want to stay away from work for personal reasons or to agitate for their rights. Christians sometimes lie and add, ‘God is my witness’, to buttress the lie.

A child cries when she sees her father leave home. Her Christian mother pacifies her by saying that he is going to a shop and will come back soon. Actually, he was leaving on a two-week trip. Some years later, when someone comes to the door and the daughter informs the mother about it, she tells her, ‘Tell him I’m not at home.’

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This is the mother who introduced her daughter to Christianity. Over time, she comes to adopt the view that lying is acceptable for Christians.

The tendency to lie is part of our fallen nature and is adopted from the time a child learns to speak, even before he discovers that his parents lie. A two-year-old child who has just broken a glass is asked whether he is responsible for the accident. Without hesitation, he denies doing it.

There are also cultural motivations for lying in some societies. In most Asian cultures, honour and shame are major factors determining whether an action is right or wrong. This orientation that gives more prominence to honour and shame is growing in the West too. If an action brings shame on a person or a group, that action is considered wrong. According to this value system, if telling the truth brings shame, it is wrong to tell the truth.

The shame of telling the truth is especially seen when it comes to admitting that one has done something wrong. A friend of mine was falsely accused of being responsible for a costly mistake that happened in his office. His boss scolded him in obscene and insulting language in front of his colleagues when they were gathered for their tea break. Later a colleague told the boss that another member of the staff was responsible for the mistake. The next day, during the tea break, the boss praised my friend for his good work in the office. He did not accept his error. But he communicated my friend's innocence in a way that would make him not lose face.

### **Shared values in cultures with strong community solidarity**

How can we create a culture where lying is not tolerated? I will present two important biblical keys. The first key is related to the fact that because the Bible was written in a culture where honour and shame were important values, due attention was given to these values in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Honour- and shame-oriented cultures are more community-oriented (or collectivist) than individualistic. Community solidarity is strong in these cultures. The community decides on what is honourable and what is shameful. Our challenge, then, would be to make truthfulness a shared honourable value in the community and lying a shameful value.

The Bible is alert to the reality of the avoidance of shame being an important value. It uses this value to present sin as something shameful. The Bible often presents sin as shameful and righteousness as honourable. Matthew devotes a whole chapter to Jesus talking about the shameful of hypocrisy (Mt 23:1–39). Paul says, 'But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place. ... Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret' (Eph 5:3–4, 11–12).<sup>2</sup> In a section about family life, Paul presents

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1 This has been documented extensively by the writings of John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina. See especially Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Pilch and Malina, eds., *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993). See also David A. de Silva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

2 Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

neglect of elderly relatives as shameful. He says, 'If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Tim 5:8).

Applying the above to the problem that lying is not shameful in many societies, our task would be to help nurture attitudes within our Christian communities where lying is considered shameful and truth-telling honourable. We desire to see revulsion for lying becoming a shared value within our communities. That attitude would make its way into the behaviour of Christians, who will find many disincentives to lying in the fellowship.

### **How the Bible makes revulsion for lying a shared value**

Though lying is not shameful in many communities, the Bible often presents it as a dishonourable act which is to be avoided.

#### *Immediate confrontation*

The first problem recorded in the Bible that the church faced related to the lie of Ananias and Sapphira. The response to that from the leader of the Church, Peter, was immediate confrontation: 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?' (Acts 5:3). A large gift had been given to the needy church. It was an act of generosity, as such gifts were voluntary (Acts 5:4). But Peter ignores the generosity and focuses on the lie they had told about having given all the proceeds from the sale of their land. Peter and God, through his harsh judgement, were sending a message to the church that lying was not tolerated.

Usually when people, especially leaders, lie, others know that they have lied, but they overlook it. A leader comes late for a meeting one morning. The real reason for his coming late is that he got up late that morning. But it would be shameful to say that. So he says he was late because of the traffic he encountered. It is a religious holiday, and the people know that on such a holiday there is not much traffic on the road. They know their leader has lied. But no one confronts him, because they must protect the honour of the leader. They ignore the lie to keep up appearances. His earthly respect is preserved, but he has lost spiritual esteem which lies at the heart of biblical credibility. He will need to adopt earthly methods to maintain his honour in the church.

However, the Bible is sensitive to cultural issues when it comes to confronting sin and error in honour- and shame-oriented cultures. Confrontation must be done with sensitivity to the culture. In a passage on rebuking church members, the young pastor Timothy is told, 'Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father' (1 Tim 5:1). I have seen Westernized Christian leaders in Sri Lanka publicly rebuking older Christians in ways that humiliate them. I always felt that was an unnecessary violation of our cultural norms.

Significantly, Ananias and Sapphira lied about money. The Bible often warns about the dangers of loving riches (1 Tim 3:3; 6:9–10). Judas was dishonest about keeping accounts in Jesus' team (John 12:6). This is an area that has brought much scandal to the contemporary church. Christians distort the facts when applying for funding or when reporting about the use of funds. Some even doctor receipts to claim more than they spent. I have had salespeople, knowing that I will claim the

funds from an organization, ask me how much they should write on the receipt. Inflating the price is considered almost a normal practice in society.

In an environment where lying is an acceptable practice, confronting it would be considered an example of disloyalty to people in the group. But Peter was willing to do this at a time when a member displayed great generosity.

### *God hates lying*

Whatever culture Christians belong to, if they know God hates something, they would be careful to avoid it. God's hatred of lying is clear from the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Proverbs uses strong language when it says twice that 'a lying tongue' and 'lying lips' are an 'abomination' to God (Prov 6:16-17; 12:22). Lying, then, is among those 'abominations (*to 'ebah*) that provoke loathing.'<sup>3</sup> This is shame language. It would be shameful for those committed to God to espouse something that God considers shameful. Preachers and teachers must be faithful in communicating to their people God's abhorrence of lying.

### *Lying violates our new identity*

Our identity as Christians is very important to us. When we became Christians, there were some things we left behind because they violated our new identity. One of those things is lying. Paul said, 'Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices' (Col 3:9). Lying belongs to our old identity. Christians do not do that kind of thing anymore. It is contrary to our new identity as children of God. Like the previous point, this truth is something that must be communicated in preaching, teaching, discussions and conversations. Because it may be distant from people's thinking when they become Christians, it needs to be communicated often. Sadly, many who pray to receive Christ do not realize that becoming a Christian includes a lifestyle of not lying. They received a message that was deficient in the area of repentance.

### *Lying violates Christian community*

Corporate solidarity is a key value in community-oriented (collectivist) cultures. Members are expected to act as a unit in many situations. Corporate solidarity is an important aspect of Christian community too. But its essence is a spiritual unity coming out of union with Christ. We belong to his Body and our actions impact the Body. What is unique about spiritual unity is its emphasis on unity coming out of godly behaviour. John said, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another' (1 Jn 1:7). Walking in the light in the context of 1 John 1 included a sincere pursuit of God's ways and being honest about our failings.<sup>4</sup> These two factors can be overlooked sometimes in collectivist cultures. One who fights on behalf of the community would be highly esteemed, even though everyone knows he is having an adulterous affair. In a biblical community, such a person

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3 P. E. Koptak, *Proverbs*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 190.

4 See John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 79.

would be disciplined and not permitted to represent the community. Christian solidarity includes spiritual accountability.

Included in walking in the light was truthfulness. Those who lie violate the Body and cannot have genuine ‘fellowship with one another’. It is like a thumb sending a wrong message to the middle finger, thus making the hand dysfunctional. Paul says that being members of the Body of Christ is a reason for us to speak the truth: ‘Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another’ (Eph 4:25). Conversely, when we lie to the body, we lie to God. Peter told Ananias that he lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3), not to man but to God (5:4).

Sadly, evangelical Christianity has been weak in its understanding of the doctrine of the Body of Christ. This has had many unhealthy effects on the life of the church. One of these is the loss of understanding that we violate the Body of Christ when we lie.

### *Lying is self-deception*

John says, ‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us’ (1 Jn 1:8). In any culture it is shameful to deceive oneself. Only fools allow that to happen. Today many people lie to avoid shame. But in the new community we abstain from lying to avoid shame, because it is shameful to lie. It makes us into fools. Our cultures affirm that shame is an important factor in determining right and wrong. The Bible also affirms this, and it presents new criteria for shame. Lying was once honourable. But in the new community it is shameful.

### *Leaders set an example*

At least six times, Paul asked his readers to follow his example (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:9). He once told Timothy, ‘You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me’ (2 Tim 3:10–11). Donald Guthrie observes that the Greek word translated ‘have followed’ (*parakolouthēō*) carries the meaning ‘to trace out as an example.’<sup>5</sup> William Mounce explains that ‘almost every virtue ... [mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:10–11] appears elsewhere in the [Pastoral Epistles] in an admonition to Timothy, either using the same word or the same concept.’<sup>6</sup> Paul practised what he preached and intended others to follow the example of his behaviour.

The effect of the example of leaders is particularly powerful in collectivist cultures, where leaders are usually held in high esteem.<sup>7</sup> Their people trust them and are willing to follow them. When the people recognize that their leaders are holy people, there would be a major incentive to holiness in the community. It is matter of deep shame to me that many young Christians have told me that they cannot trust their leaders because they know they lie. Some have even told me that these leaders

5 Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 178.

6 William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 2000), 556.

7 For a fuller treatment of this theme, see Ajith Fernando, *Discipling in a Multicultural World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 150–57.



justify lying, using examples from the Old Testament. It would be dangerous to use narratives from exceptional situations and from an era lacking God's fuller revelation in Christ to disobey the explicit teaching in the Bible.

In a culture where lying is common, leaders who do not lie would stand out as a challenge to their people. The Bible talks of a person who is acceptable to God as one 'who swears to his own hurt and does not change' (Ps 15:4). These are people who are known to be willing to suffer in order to keep their word and maintain their integrity. This is an attitude to the spoken word that stands in sharp contrast to the atmosphere of lying in the church.

I have a bad habit, when telling stories in a talk, of exaggerating to make the stories more striking. For example, I may describe a small meeting as a large gathering. I have learned to correct myself, then and there, when I do this. It is quite humiliating and usually the apology elicits a smile from the audience. But hopefully it gives people the message that lying is not tolerated in the church. For me, it also means that a hindrance to the free working of the Spirit through me is removed.

### *Habitual liars will change or leave*

We said that community solidarity is an important factor in collectivist cultures. We said that we want this solidarity to extend to spiritual accountability. We also showed that for this extension of the idea of solidarity to spiritual accountability to take place, first, the community must teach the importance of truthfulness and the wrongness of lying. Second, it must require truthfulness from its members and confront lying when it appears. Third, the leaders must demonstrate truthfulness by their exemplary lives.

In my 45 years as a staff worker of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, I have tried to teach the importance of truthfulness often when I speak to volunteers and staff. I often say that in a youth movement we work through young volunteers who sometimes in their enthusiasm do unwise things and bring shame to the organization. I say that this is something that goes with youth work and that we are willing to bear that shame. But there is one thing we will not tolerate: lying. When a person lies, we cannot work with that person candidly. They cannot overcome their weaknesses as they do not admit to them, and we cannot trust them enough to have true Christian fellowship with them.

If a group pushes an abhorrence to lying in such an unmistakable way, people accustomed to lying will change or leave the group. We have seen both these scenarios in Youth for Christ. Some people have survived for a long period of time while lying. But it finally surfaces. And when confronted about it, they either change or leave.

A young man from a very dysfunctional background came to Christ in our ministry. He found great affirmation through the acceptance he received from his new Christian friends and through involvement in God's work. There was nothing he loved more than fellowship with our people and involvement in our work. But he continued to lie and use obscene language. He was often rebuked for this, but nothing seemed to help change him. Eventually, he was disciplined and prohibited from getting involved in any of our programs. He felt like his world had come crashing down. He struggled for a time with deep anger and loneliness. But finally,

God got through to him and he decided to follow Christ completely, renouncing the vestiges of his past life, including lying. Today, many years later, he is a leader with a wide and effective ministry.

Authentic biblical community life where truthfulness is a shared value, then, is a key to overcoming the cultural inclination to lying.

### **A fuller understanding of the nature of God**

The second key needed in creating a culture where lying is not tolerated in the church is a proper understanding of the nature of God.

#### *The fear of judgement*

Many people lie because they fear the consequences of telling the truth. Biblical Christians do not lie because they fear the consequences of lying. Paul said, 'For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil' (2 Cor 5:10). This prospect elicits fear in the Christian, which motivates action. Paul continued, 'Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others' (5:11a). We are constantly aware of the fact that the 'The Lord will judge his people' and that 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb 10:30–31).

God has given us a glimpse of his attitude toward lying with the judgement on Ananias and Sapphira. That passage says twice that after their deaths 'great fear came upon' the church (Acts 5:5, 11). Revelation 21:8 explicitly says, 'But as for ... all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.'

James explains how the prospect of judgement inspires us to be truthful. He urges his readers to be patient amid troubles and not to grumble (Jas 5:7–10). When things are getting tough, they may be tempted to escape from a dangerous situation. So he asks them to remain steadfast (5:11). Then he gives one aspect of being steadfast in tough times: 'But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no' (5:12a). We must be truthful, however hard that is. And why? 'So that you may not fall under condemnation' (5:12b). We live constantly with the reality that unrighteousness will be condemned. And that motivates us to be truthful even when the going gets tough.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, this fear of God's wrath is not a feeling that keeps us under bondage and destroys our freedom. It is a friend who alerts us to danger and directs us along the path to freedom.

#### *The shame of judgement*

Just as people lie because they fear the consequences of telling the truth, people also often lie to avoid the shame that comes from telling the truth. Yet the Bible teaches that the greatest shame is the shame that comes at the final judgement. I was able to find 24 passages in the New Testament which connect the judgement with shame.

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<sup>8</sup> See Robert L. Plummer, *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 12: *Hebrews–Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 279–80.

Those who were unprepared for the judgement are presented as fools (Lk 12:20; Mt 25:1–13), and there is going to be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

While openness about confessing sin and telling the truth, regardless of the consequences, may be culturally distant to our people, shame is not! The prospect of extreme shame at the judgement would show them the folly of lying. So if the teachings about judgement in the Bible are true, we do people a favour by confronting them when they lie, because we help them to repent and avoid huge shame at the judgement.

Today Christians do not die if they lie, as happened with Ananias and Sapphira. If that were to happen, many of our churches would be severely depleted! But during special revelatory periods God shows his will in unmistakable ways so that we know what he thinks. He has reserved his judgement to the end. There is a lot we do not know about judgement. But we know that Jesus clearly said, 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Mt 7:21). On the day of judgement, people will claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many mighty works in Christ's name (7:22). But Christ will say to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (7:23). The prospect of shame at the coming judgement should encourage habitual liars to repent of their ways.

### *A culturally distant understanding of God*

The above teachings about God are culturally very distant to people in both the West and the East. Many of the structures within Western culture were fashioned out of the belief that we are accountable to a supreme God who is morally pure and who will judge humanity. Humans are morally accountable to him. That enabled honesty and truthfulness to become part of the ethic of Western culture. Now, with the rejection of belief in a supreme God, we wonder how it will affect their understanding of morality. Already many revealed truths have been rejected and replaced by an ethic of inclusivity that regards some actions the Bible calls 'sin' as human rights that must be affirmed. Already analysts are saying that the West is rejecting the idea of dependence on absolute truths to govern life. Shame is replacing ideas of sin and guilt.<sup>9</sup> One wonders how long the emphasis on truthfulness, which was generally considered a high value, will last.

In the East, often the gods are not viewed in terms of moral purity. In fact, certain behaviours of some gods could be characterized as grossly immoral. People follow the prescriptions dictated by the god or his representative to ensure that they receive a blessing from the god. They are not accountable to this god for all their actions. Often the gods are more like doctors to whom they go for help with specific needs, but who do not make moral demands of them. So you may find underworld figures who are fervent devotees of a god and who contribute generously to this god's shrine.

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<sup>9</sup> Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (n.p.: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 52; Alan Mann, *Atonement in a 'Sinless' Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 31–59. Mann, however, says that shame in the post-industrialized West is different from that in shame- and honour-oriented societies, being 'an intensely private affair' (p. 37).

There is not much of the doctrine of a future judgement in Eastern religions. Many adherents believe in reincarnation or rebirth, but the karma that is carried on to the next birth is distant from the person born, who has no recollection of his previous life. So the prospect of judgement is often not a big motivating factor in behaviour.

When people from such backgrounds become Christians, they often *transfer* their ideas of the gods to the Christian God. They also view him as a doctor to go to for needs, not as one to whom they are accountable for all their actions. Their understanding of God needs to be *transformed* to the biblical idea of a holy God to whom we are accountable regarding all we do. A lot of the preaching new believers hear is oriented towards promising God's blessings to them. And this can further buttress their idea of God being merely like a doctor who meets needs. Such 'blessings preaching' must be augmented by preaching that incorporates the idea of accountability to a morally pure God.

The church must be proactive in helping to transform people's understandings of God to incorporate the idea of judgement and accountability. That must become part of their worldview, their approach to life.<sup>10</sup> An occasional sermon on judgement may not suffice to effect so major a change. Worldviews are imbibed through constant exposure more than incorporated through a stray sermon. The biblical approach to the issue is to include judgement as part of our approach to life and to mention it even while speaking about different topics. Sometimes it is given as an aside, a small part of a larger picture. We need to be talking about judgement in ordinary conversation. In this way, it unconsciously becomes part of our approach to life.<sup>11</sup> Ideally Christians should be taking judgement into account in all the decisions they make. In the history of the church, judgement has been misused in Christian proclamation and presented in unbalanced ways. But misuse does not warrant disuse. If it is not part of the worldview of Christians, a major aid along the path to holiness has been overlooked.

## Conclusion

We have presented a two-fold strategy to combat the epidemic of lying in the church. First, make revulsion for lying a shared value. Then it would be considered a shame to lie. And shame is a powerful motivation for action, especially in collectivist cultures. Second, let Christians know that the Bible teaches that God abhors lying and that it will be judged.

When a friend of mine heard that I was writing this article, he wrote to me to say that he regularly prays the prayer of Proverbs 30:8a: 'Remove far from me falsehood and lying.'<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah exclaimed, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?' (Jer 17:9). If that is so, it would be wise for all of us to pray that prayer regularly!

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10 See Martin E. Marty, 'Hell Disappeared. No One Noticed. A Civic Argument', *Harvard Theological Review* 78, no. 3-4 (1985): 386.

11 See Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions about Hell* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), chapter 14, 'Proclaiming the Message of Judgment.'

12 Personal correspondence with Ebenezer Perinbaraj, 6 July 2021.

# Seeing the New Testament through Asian Eyes

Esa J. Autero

*How can Majority World Christian leaders apply the Bible to their cultural settings if their seminary textbooks are all Western-focused? The newly released An Asian Introduction to the New Testament offers a thoroughly Asian way of reading and applying the Bible, as one of the book's contributors explains in this article.*

Many students are surprised to discover that the Bible is an Asian book! Though the geopolitical definitions of the ancient world were not quite identical to ours, even the ancient Jewish historian Josephus viewed Israelites as *Asianos*. Hence, it is high time to return the Bible to its proper context.

I have had the privilege of participating in a collaborative effort to recognize the Bible's Asian roots and to bring Asian perspectives to bear on its contemporary use. I was a contributor to the newly published *An Asian Introduction to the New Testament*, edited by Johnson Thomaskutty (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022).

Most professors, teachers and students of the Bible are familiar with the genre of New Testament introductions (and the corresponding Old Testament equivalent). These standard works, used in most introductory Bible college and seminary classes, cover such topics as the authorship, date, genre, purpose and message of the NT books. I have personally used such books for almost 20 years while teaching in the United States and around the world. Most of these introductions focus exclusively on the original context of the NT books. The evangelical ones tend to emphasize the message and theological considerations, while the more liberal ones concern themselves more with questions of the documents' original formation and their historical reliability (or lack thereof). Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds and matters of methodology are also discussed, usually in the first few chapters.

But two things are generally absent from these introductory works. First, there is usually very little if any hermeneutical discussion. For example, how does the reader's situatedness (culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic location, etc.) influence the interpretation of the NT books and their message? Second, the introductions seldom delve into implications of the message for present-day Christians. Regarding this latter point, the Western paradigm has followed J. P. Gabler's (1787) insistence on relegating biblical studies to a historical and descriptive task, keeping issues of theology and/or application separate from the daunting task

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of historical reconstruction. This distinction was reinforced by Krister Stendahl 60 years ago in his article 'Contemporary Biblical Theology' (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962). This notion has reached almost a status of dogma among Western evangelicals—or so it seems based on a look at the standard NT introductions (such as those by D. Guthrie; D. A. Carson and D. Moo; D. Gundry; and A. Köstenberger et al.).

So how does *An Asian Introduction to the New Testament* (AINT) relate to the standard Western NT introductions? Many of the authors have received their doctoral degrees from Western universities or seminaries, so one might perhaps expect a typically Western-style introduction with some Asian flavors. Indeed, AINT does follow the received genre of NT introductions in form, covering the standard questions of authorship, date, purpose, genre and message. Yet it also differs in many other aspects, not least in its insistence that the NT speaks to the reader's present-day realities. This aspect is not merely a side comment but is closely woven into every section of the book. Before I explain how AINT accomplishes this task, I will briefly situate AINT in recent scholarly discussion on global NT interpretation and hermeneutics—that is, areas beyond the standard queries of Western NT introductions.

Recent years (really starting in the 1990s and more so in the 2000s) have seen an increasing flow of monographs and articles from various critical angles and contextual realities (geographically speaking, from Latin America, Africa and Asia) and from various subgroups or hermeneutical angles within these larger geographical contours. Among the pioneering works in this regard is Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Teología de la liberación* (*Theology of Liberation*, 1971). Though not primarily a work on the Bible, it draws from many biblical passages, not least from the Exodus narrative. Among evangelicals, Rene Padilla's *Misión Integral* (*Integral Mission*, 1974–1975/1986) has become a classic influencing theological thinking and praxis around the world. Carlos Mester's *Flor sem defesa* (*Defenseless Flower*, 1983) and Ernesto Cardenal's *Evangelio en Solentiname* (*Gospel in Solentiname*, 1975–1977) focus more on popular readings of the Bible.

In the African context, Itumeleng Mosala wrote *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* in 1989. Gerald West is well-known for his *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (1998) and other books on liberation hermeneutics and contextual Bible study. In Asia, one of the most prolific biblical scholars is undoubtedly R. S. Sugirtharajah, who introduced post-colonial hermeneutics to Western biblical scholars in the early 1990s. He is perhaps best known for his pioneering anthology *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (1991). Sugirtharajah's works reflect his pluralistic perspective and as such have not found much interest or support from evangelicals. On the other hand, K. K. Yeo's *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (1998) is written from a more evangelical standpoint. Another influential work incorporating the impact of one's cultural location is F. F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert's two-volume, 1995 anthology *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation* (volume 1, *in the United States*, volume 2, *in Global Perspective*).

These works challenged Western biblical scholarship to look beyond its own idiosyncrasies. With some exceptions (e.g. Padilla), evangelicals have not pioneered contextual hermeneutical endeavours in the field of biblical studies. Nevertheless, there are signs that evangelicals are starting to take this hermeneutical conversation seriously.

If the era from the 1970s to 1990s saw the emergence of new hermeneutical endeavours, the post-2000s era introduced pastors and scholars to contextual commentaries. Though evangelicals were not at the forefront of this development either, they have taken upon themselves the task of contextual commentary writing with vigour more recently.

One of the first non-Western commentaries was the *Global Bible Commentary* (2003), edited by Daniel Patte. It covers the entire Bible, though each book is given only a few pages. The *Latin American Bible Commentary (Comentario Bíblico Latinoamericano)*, ed. by A. Levoratti et al.), published in 2005 in Spanish, covers both testaments and includes several high-quality articles on hermeneutics and popular readings of the Bible. The actual commentary sections are less innovative. Another pioneering work was *A Postcolonial Commentary on the NT Writings* (ed. by F. Segovia and R. Sugirtharajah, 2007).

One of the first distinctly evangelical undertakings in this genre, the *Africa Bible Commentary* (gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo, 2010), includes a commentary on each biblical book and features numerous short articles on specific issues relevant to Africa, such as ancestors, HIV/AIDS and ethnic conflict. The *South Asia Bible Commentary* (gen. ed. B. Wintle, 2015) largely follows the same format, with specific articles focusing on South Asian realities (e.g. the caste system and karma). Individual volumes have also come out in the *India Commentary on the NT* (gen. eds. B. Wintle and R. George), *Africa Bible Commentary Series*, and *Asia Bible Commentary Series* (ed. Federico Villanueva). These evangelical commentaries merit more detailed analysis.

The steady flow of non-Western books and commentaries is an indication that biblical scholars in the Global South want to make their own voices heard alongside those of their Western partners. This effort is indeed worth applauding. As such, it is best to situate AINT within this burgeoning tradition of global biblical scholarship. What makes AINT unique is not its specific genre as an NT introduction but its connection of NT issues to various Asian realities, and not just as an afterthought or even mere application. In fact, many chapters allow Asian flavours to permeate discussions of foundational issues such as authorship, purpose and literary genre. This tendency appears more extensively in AINT than in most of the works indicated above.

NT introductions, through their wide use in theological colleges and seminaries around the world, are very influential in shaping students' foundational knowledge as well as their hermeneutical and theological reflections. As far as I know, until now Asian students have largely used Western books in their NT introduction classes. This practice has undoubtedly fostered theological thinking and spiritual formation that are not ideal or perhaps at times even relevant for Asian students and pastors. AINT fills this gap and will help to develop theological thinking and identity formation among Asian students, pastors and scholars in their own contexts.

AINT's 573 pages of text contain an introduction and 23 chapters. Each chapter starts with the usual questions of authorship, date, genre and purpose; the final part of each chapter relates the message and themes of the NT book to Asian realities. Overall, AINT is a good fit for both undergraduate or graduate courses such as NT introduction, NT theology, hermeneutics (especially global hermeneutics in non-Western contexts) or similar courses.

The authors represent a range of major Protestant streams, such as Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist and Pentecostal-Charismatic. A few authors are graduates from Catholic universities, though it is unclear whether they are members of the Catholic Church. Four of the 23 authors are women and four currently reside in the West (three in the US, one in Australia). Slightly over half received their doctoral degrees from Western institutions. There is also a good representation of various Asian nations, including India, Myanmar, South Korea, China, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

As indicated, the last part of each chapter focuses explicitly on Asian realities. These are discussed in conjunction with the major themes, literary patterns and symbolism of the NT book. For example, Jae Hyung Cho highlights the importance of the Law as a basis of identity for the Matthean community and then relates that to the Indian traditions of *Manu Smirti* and Korean church history (pp. 60–64). Naw Eh Tar Gay compares the plight of various ethnic groups under Myanmar's military dictatorship with the persecution of the early Christians living in the Roman colony of Philippi (pp. 303–7). Johnson Thomaskutty discusses the *logos* concept in the Johannine prologue and relates it to the Hindu concept of the primordial *OM/Aum* sound; he then elaborates further by referring to Keshub Chandra Sen's understanding of Trinity as *Sat, Cit, Ananda* (Being, Intelligence, Bliss) (pp. 142–43).

Each of these examples highlights ways to interpret the NT in light of Asian realities. It is not enough to state, for example, that the background of the *logos* concept in John 1:1–3 may be traced to OT wisdom, Hellenistic Judaism, Stoicism or the like, or to later Nicean or Chalcedonian Christological debates. Rather, *logos* is brought into conversation with Hindu traditions as well as with Indian Christian theological reflection. This approach enables readers to approach the *logos* concept from the perspective of Indian cultural realities and opens up new possibilities for reflection and contextual theology.

Hermeneutically, most authors of AINT use analogy, point-of-contact and similarity/difference patterns to move back and forth between NT texts and the present-day Asian realities. Some consciously take NT's sociohistorical context as a starting point while others begin with the present-day realities in mind. For the most part, the authors do not claim to give an exploration of the 'central themes' of a given NT book; rather, they highlight themes and topics that are important for contemporary Asian readers. As such, the present-day context informs the content even for those authors who do not explicitly articulate this intention.

All the chapters in AINT relate concepts and stories not only from the NT but also from various Asian traditions, cultural patterns and religions. Of course, this diversity comes with some challenges as well. For example, how can one best portray the religious or cultural 'other' accurately and truthfully, especially in view of the



great diversity within various religious traditions, within the space constraints of a short chapter? And how can the writers explain Asian concepts and practices so as to enable readers unfamiliar with these religious and cultural traditions to understand them? Non-Asian readers obviously will need considerable help with acculturation, but even many Asian readers will not be familiar with a particular tradition.

Suppose, for example, that someone from the Philippines or South Korea reads a section about a passage in the NT which is then compared to the Indian *bhakti* tradition, *Mahabharata* or *Manu Smirti*. Not many Bible college students or seminarians in the West would recognize these terms. Yet in my experience, even some students from India are unfamiliar with the Hindu traditions and scriptures of their own context. Students who cannot connect with particular traditions may find the comparisons to Asian realities difficult to understand. In any case, more feedback from students, pastors and professors is needed to reflect further on this point.

Of course, not every comparison in AINT highlights a specific religious tradition or concept. In fact, the most frequent point of contact between the NT world and present-day Asia realities in AINT concerns the cultural pattern of honour and shame. Perhaps this could be called a pan-Asian cultural pattern, although it certainly takes different forms from location to location.

The AINT authors offer a mixed, constructive evaluation of Asian cultural and religious traditions. Overall, traditions from other religions are not either summarily dismissed or wholeheartedly embraced. Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and other traditions are engaged constructively and critically in the light of each author's theological framework and convictions. Some are more affirming than others, though most seem to exhibit a broadly evangelical outlook. Slightly surprising is the lack of engagement with the Qur'an or Islamic traditions, even though some authors come from Muslim-majority countries (e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia) or places where Muslims form a significant minority (e.g. India).

A few authors in AINT provide critiques of their own country's traditions and/or theologies. For example, Roji George describes difficulties in both Brahminical and Dalit theology (pp. 257–58). Xiaoli Yang points out, in a discussion concerning church leadership in Titus, that sometimes a 'teacher can abuse a student and a student can become a subservient servant ... senior [church] leaders in Asia tend to be authoritarian ... reluctant to pass the baton to the younger generation' (p. 388). Finally, creative ways to address Asian traditions are also presented, such as in Gilbert Soo Hoo's treatment of the honour-shame theme in Hebrews.

By their willingness to engage the NT from uniquely Asian perspectives, the AINT authors offer something new and fresh for all readers. It is commendable that Asian authors want to bring forth their own scholarship and, at the same time, to assert their identity and bring the NT back to the soil where it comes from. AINT is not just another NT introduction (there are almost too many of them already). Rather, it demonstrates that Asian scholars are eager not only to explore biblical texts from their own vantage point but to prepare a new generation of students and pastors who will make disciples and extend God's Kingdom in a way that Asians can truly appreciate.

## Book Reviews

Kevin Kinghorn with Stephen Travis, *But What About God's Wrath?  
The Compelling Love Story of Divine Anger*

Brother John of Taizé, *The Wrath of a Loving God:  
Unravelling a Biblical Conundrum*

Justyn Terry, *The Five Phases of Leadership:  
An Overview for Christian Leaders*

Perry Shaw, Cesar Lopes, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano and Bob Heaton,  
*Teaching across Cultures: A Global Christian Perspective*

### ***But What About God's Wrath? The Compelling Love Story of Divine Anger***

**Kevin Kinghorn with Stephen Travis**

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019  
Pb., 157 pp.

### ***The Wrath of a Loving God: Unravelling a Biblical Conundrum*** **Brother John of Taizé**

Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019  
Pb., xii + 132 pp.

*Reviewed by Patrick Mitchel, Director of Learning and Senior Lecturer in Theology,  
Irish Bible Institute, Dublin*

These two books, published around the same time, both set out to articulate a theological response to the age-old question of how a God of love can also be a God of wrath. How they do so differs radically, but there are also areas of overlap.

As the titles suggest, both books recognize the difficulty in conceptualizing how divine wrath and love are to be integrated. Both wish to be faithful to the biblical account of divine wrath and reject a Marcionite re-imagination of God as so utterly suffused with love as to be devoid of the unworthy attribute of wrath. Both argue that a robust theology of God's wrath is required to go beyond a simplistic understanding of God and his purposes in the world. And both differ significantly in tone and content from how God's wrath has been traditionally understood, particularly within Reformed dogmatics.

Kevin Kinghorn of Asbury Theological Seminary writes as a Christian philosopher. Eight chapters form one sustained line of argument that God's wrath,

when it arises in specific contexts, is always an expression of God's love. New Testament scholar Stephen Travis assists Kinghorn with the biblical material. A bare outline of his argument follows.

Wrath is a justified and rational pattern of action, undertaken by God to achieve certain goals in response to human oppression and self-destructive behaviour. Its emotional component is indicative of God's care and compassion, like a loving parent angered at the ill treatment of her child who acts to confront the perpetrator. Love is an essential attribute of the triune God, unlike justice, holiness or wrath. There is a crucial asymmetry between divine love and divine wrath. God, as a benevolent and loving heavenly Father, always seeks human flourishing as his ultimate goal. Other divine commitments, such as justice, holiness and glory, can be subsumed under the fundamental benevolent goal of bringing life to all people.

At particular times and in particular contexts, God's wrath is the best means of encouraging people to turn to him from oppressive and self-destructive behaviour. Kinghorn's phrase for this is 'God pressing the truth on us' about ourselves. Wrath is reactive and contingent, a divine 'last resort', and God is ever willing to abandon wrath where repentance occurs. Wrath is painful and unpleasant, but always with restorative purpose.

Sometimes, God allows people to have a foretaste of what life without him is truly like by withdrawing his presence and protection. At other times, he raises up an agent of wrath (such as Babylon). The reason for such drastic action, Kinghorn contends, is our unique capacity for self-justification and avoiding difficult truths about ourselves. This is why, for example, Jesus' teaching on forgiving others (Mt 18:35) is so confrontational: unforgiveness reveals a hardened heart that closes us off from acknowledging and then repenting from uncomfortable truths about ourselves.

In chapter 7, Kinghorn anticipates objections to this seemingly civil account of divine wrath. He responds that God pressing on us the truth about ourselves is the sharpest of weapons. Nevertheless, this psychologizing of God's wrath is difficult to reconcile with how individuals are located within a broader eschatological conflict between God and the powers of sin, death and the devil and the importance of union with Christ in final judgement. This is one instance where the author's philosophical analysis feels rather detached from the biblical narrative.

Chapter 8 does address the finality of God's wrath. Leaving debates about conditional immortality to one side, Kinghorn contends that the final experience of divine wrath is self-chosen separation from God. This is hell as natural consequence as opposed to active retribution. Kinghorn does not believe any convincing or moral case can be made for the latter. Although he does not explore the matter of billions of people who have never consciously rejected the gospel, the implication is that only wilful rejection of light received will keep a person from final reconciliation with God.

Overall, this is a readable, well-constructed philosophical argument for understanding God's wrath as an expression of his love. It is certainly a long way from Calvin's self-confessedly 'dreadful decree' of double predestination.

Brother John of Taizé takes a very different tack, arguing that there is a progressive development in how God's anger is understood within the Bible. The result is an imaginative, provocative, but ultimately frustrating read.

Fundamental to his approach is to read the biblical narrative as one of liberation. Behind it stands a loving, faithful and redeeming God. Thus, when thinking about divine wrath, to 'begin by calling into question our friend's affection for us is not a reasonable attitude' (p. 9). Any interpretation of divine wrath must be developed not by explaining it away, but by asking what dimensions of love God's wrath reveals. The book's final coda on 'The Wrath of the Lamb' explores how Brother John's ideas about the Bible's evolving theology of divine anger can be applied to John's apocalyptic vision in the book of Revelation.

The author's tendency towards allusions and assumptions can make it difficult to follow his argument at times. The broad contours are that anger can be an appropriate 'no' to a malignant presence. Precisely because God is the source of all goodness and life, he will not say yes to forces that damage and destroy. Divine wrath in the Bible takes two forms, the impersonal or 'outward' (God being responsible for a defeat in battle or a natural disaster, for example) and personal (revealing more of God's 'inner life' where anger is expressed in terms of human psychology). Within the prophetic tradition, Amos and Isaiah emphasize the impersonal wrath of God, Jeremiah and Hosea the personal.

This tension between impersonal and personal wrath is expressed throughout the biblical narrative. Brother John sees impersonal interpretations of divine anger reaching an 'extreme' form within the historical books, themselves the result of a process of editing within the 'Deuteronomistic school' after the Exile. Divine anger is used as a means to explain events in the life and history of Israel, effectively like a cause-and-effect process depending on Israel's disobedience. He sees such theology as narrow, moralistic and superficial. God is not the impartial judge who renders a detached objective verdict depending on the evidence. Such a theology implies that good and evil are in some sense equivalent and 'disfigure' the face of God. Brother John contends that later tradition increasingly questions 'a facile theology of happiness and unhappiness' (p. 58) in the wisdom literature of the Psalms, Qoheleth and Job, as well as in Jonah.

In chapter 5, the author identifies a continuing progression in how 'the yeast of the gospel' penetrates 'the dough' of Jewish traditions concerning the wrath of God. He sees significant diversity within the New Testament in how divine wrath is reinterpreted in light of Jesus. Notably, divine anger becomes oriented around a future day of wrath in which everything opposed to God's good purposes is eliminated. Brother John sees here a depersonalization of God's wrath, with judgement being the inevitable consequence of human sin and rebellion. How that judgement is experienced will depend on each person's relation to Jesus the Christ in the present. God, revealed in his Son, is wholly yes; the no is our own, not his. Anger, in essence, is not a reality in God. Those in Christ see God as he truly is: 'a God of love and love alone' who liberates us to an authentic existence (p. 88).

The sixth and last main chapter seeks to uncover what we can learn about divine anger through the 'inner' life of God's incarnate Son. From a survey of texts, Brother John concludes that anger in Jesus concerns setting right boundaries on human

behaviour rather than destroying or lessening the humanity of the person at whom it is directed. Yet this anger is combined with a sorrow, echoing the 'inner' emotion of God depicted in Hosea and Jeremiah, that reflects God's own response to a broken world. Jesus' tears over Jerusalem symbolize how sorrow is another form of saying no to 'inauthentic life' (p. 99). 'However outlandish it may appear at first sight, the tears of Jesus are in fact his anger, fully assumed and transfigured from within' (p. 103). This is a theology of atonement whereby, Brother John argues, anger does not 'come upon' Jesus from the outside—especially in the 'repulsive' explanation of God's wrath falling upon his Son; rather, Jesus shares the perspective of his Father completely.

Brother John writes elegantly and his discussions of biblical texts are frequently fascinating and illuminating. He confronts head-on difficult questions that are all too easily avoided. His insights that the biblical narrative is primarily one of liberation, that divine wrath is an expression of divine love and sorrow at humanity's rejection of life, and that any theology of the atonement must be robustly Trinitarian if it is not to lapse into damaging caricature are profoundly important.

However, I also have some reservations. The author's critical assumptions about the Bible are not defended, and there is at least a hint of Marcionite rejection of primitive Old Testament depictions of God. The book contains numerous assertions and at times contentious readings, such as the contrast between the impersonal and inner strands of divine anger within Scripture. The reader is often left wondering what an ambiguous use of language actually means; for example, salvation appears to be reconfigured to mean a transition from an inauthentic to an authentic life. In a similar vein, the eschatological hopes of the New Testament seem to be reimagined within a this-worldly horizon. Whether this is because Brother John views the New Testament writers as mistaken or is following Schleiermacher in interiorizing symbolic religious truth, or for some other reason, is left for the reader to guess.

***The Five Phases of Leadership:  
An Overview for Christian Leaders***  
**Justyn Terry**

Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021  
Pb., 125 pp, index

*Reviewed by Paul T. Criss, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Baptist  
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Many books have been written on leadership, but Justyn Terry takes a unique approach by focusing on the life cycle of leadership through five phases. Currently Vice-Principal and Academic Dean at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, UK, Terry holds a PhD in systematic theology and was dean, president and professor at Trinity School for Ministry near Pittsburgh, USA, a key institution in the global conservative Anglican movement. He was also a pastor in West London, UK for six years.

The author draws on his experience in both academic and church ministry settings in the Anglican tradition; however, the material is accessible and applicable

for leaders and leadership teams in all churches, non-profits, and many other types of organizations.

One chapter is dedicated to each of the five phases: establish trust, cultivate leaders, discern vision, implement plans, and transition out. Terry provides brief case studies, questions for further reflection and discussion, subject and Scripture indices, and a bibliography for further reading. Each chapter is divided between a case study and a breakdown of ingredients or a 'recipe' to implement throughout the phase of the leadership life cycle.

As with any good recipe, the ingredients must be slightly adjusted to fit the taste and circumstances of the organization. Although informative in terms of providing context, sometimes the case studies could impede application in various organizations; however, the ingredients sections provide clarity and potential solutions applicable to any organization in each phase. Overall, the text serves as a valuable 'quick guide' to assist leaders and leadership teams regardless of their leadership position or experience.

The first phase, establishing trust, focuses on the leader's character development. The character of a leader who engenders trust is moulded by the fruit of the Spirit as presented in Galatians 5:22–23. Each of the nine traits is unpacked and applied to character development.

The second phase, cultivating leaders, highlights strategies to mentor potential leaders and the importance of such coaching in carrying out the mission of the organization or ministry. Terry examines the leadership qualities found in the Pastoral Epistles and concentrates on identifying potential leaders, cultivating their character, developing their skills and coordinating their roles in leadership.

The third phase, discerning vision, considers the future of the organization, why it exists and how the organization's purpose should be carried out. The ingredients for this phase describe methods for determining the organization's vision, articulating its purpose and capturing its core values.

The discussion of implementing plans, the fourth phase, is the longest chapter and presents practical tools for managing in leadership. In my experience, many who come through Bible college or seminary find this to be the most elusive phase in leadership, as they have not specialized as strongly in the 'business' side of leadership. Terry offers helpful recommendations for managing people, money and time.

Whether one is moving to another position or retiring, transitioning effectively is an essential last step. The ingredients presented include discerning when to leave, leaving well, and hearing and preparing for the next call. Terry provides very practical and helpful recommendations not only for the departing leader but also for the organization transitioning to a new leader.

*The Five Phases of Leadership* is insightful and instructive for anyone from novices to experienced leaders and leadership teams. Possible church leadership uses might include training pastors, elders, deacons, search committees, non-profit or parachurch ministries and various other leadership groups.

*[Note: the next two reviews approach the same book from two different cultural standpoints.]*

***Teaching across Cultures: A Global Christian Perspective***  
**Perry Shaw, Cesar Lopes, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano**  
**and Bob Heaton**

Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham, 2021

Pb., 306 pp., bibliog., index

*Review 1: by Charles Henderson, Adjunct Professor of Counseling, Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary*

Written by multiple authors from various locations around the globe, this volume is a most helpful aid to any guest lecturer preparing to teach in another cultural setting. The book's first half is written by the above authors, with specific aspects of preparation germane to their respective fields. The second half contains various interviews from around the world that offer specific recommendations for that particular culture. The second half alone is worth the purchase for its specificity and practical help. In this review, I will focus on the first half due to its theoretical nature.

Bob Heaton writes from a very personal standpoint, revealing his failures as a US professor during his first cross-cultural attempt at teaching. He then enables the reader to grasp what it means to 'think theologically about teaching and culture'. He assumes that all people interpret the Scriptures with a cultural lens. Therefore, one must wrestle with one's own cultural interpretive lens and then humbly seek to understand the lens of the culture one is entering. Only then can one move beyond merely imparting information and into transformational teaching.

Perry Shaw picks up the theme of humility by reviewing 'three key cultural parameters: collectivism versus individualism, power distance, and thought processing'. A fourth key element is addressed in a separate chapter due to its importance and complexity: direct versus indirect communication. In precise ways, Shaw explains how the Majority World values the group over the individual (collectivism), and how a professor is naturally viewed as a 'power' and therefore one to whom deference should be shown. He then contrasts Western thought patterns that value linear and analytical thought with the Majority World's circular, holistic and communal patterns. Shaw provides a succinct explanation of the importance of entering into how a culture communicates—e.g. stories, illustrations or words that affirm a relationship. If one insists that students must adapt to the teacher's approach, interaction and learning will be severely limited.

Joanna Feliciano-Soberano first addresses the challenge of how to assess student learning. She discusses how Majority World students struggle with the Western model of written tests and essays, due to both experiencing English as a second language and the oral nature of learning in most Majority World cultures. She strongly encourages visiting professors to consider alternative methods of assessment. In the next chapter, she offers both personal and other people's testimonies of the difficulties women face in the academic and religious world. Cultural and church-based biases, she contends, present huge impediments that women struggle to overcome. Therefore, she implores visiting professors to be humble in their approach, kind in their speech, appropriate in their social interactions and affirming in their application. She concludes with specific advice for both male and female professors as to how to enter a culture appropriately.

Lopes and co-author Nicolas Panotto admit that their chapter is ‘probably the most complex’ as they seek to explain the importance of recognizing the political element one brings to the educational table. They explain how the experiences of Christians with the powers behind both governmental and economic suppression have affected their understanding of Jesus’ teaching. They then encourage humble dialogue and full recognition of the theological contributions made by those who are already teaching and leading in the host country. Lopes seeks to enable the reader to understand that ‘what the people of God (in the Majority World) encounter first is not the biblical text, but their own concrete life.’ Fully grasping and humbly approaching the various influences of the theology that *already* exists in the target culture are necessary prerequisites for success as a visiting professor.

As a missionary kid who has gone on to teach in numerous cultural settings, I found myself nodding in assent to much of what was written, especially the call for cultural awareness and humility. Where I struggled, as a conservative evangelical, was with the subtle message that if you disagree about such issues as the role of women in ministry or the integration of social justice in the gospel, you should remain silent. At one point, Feliciano-Soberano states, ‘Don’t give the impression that church history, theology, Bible translation, leadership, church planting, and pulpit ministry are the property of men alone. ... Do some research!’

This book prepares the reader for many practical issues, but perhaps the biggest takeaway may be what is not stated explicitly: any visiting professor needs a clear understanding from the host institution of its expectations regarding potentially explosive issues, from attire to topics that should or should not be addressed. Only then can a prospective visitor properly discern whether, in fact, he or she should even accept the invitation.

*Review 2: by Kwa Kiem-Kiok, lecturer in missiology and interdisciplinary studies,  
Biblical Graduate School of Theology, Singapore*

The task of doing theological education seems straightforward: get a PhD and then teach other people. That PhD should mean that one can teach almost anywhere in the world; if they speak a different language, just translate the content.

This book debunks that idea by setting out the theology and techniques of theological education. Primarily, since theological education is formational, then it is not just about imparting content. Rather, the specific features of the teacher and the learner are important, for they are both enculturated people. Furthermore, many cultural dynamics of the teaching and learning processes, together with the overall learning environment, affect the effectiveness of both teaching and learning. When those who teach bring to bear these anthropological aspects of the task, then learning, growth and formation can take place. This book models that process by highlighting these cultural aspects of teaching and learning. Indeed, the many layers of theological education have rarely been peeled away in such a helpful way.

The premise of the book, which I wholeheartedly affirm, is about forming people into mature disciples of Christ. ‘The gospel should transform both the individual and the community. ... Because the gospel is central to both what we teach and why we teach, we must first explore what teaching—for the Christian teacher—means *theologically*’, writes Bob Heaton. More than teaching theology (the subject), all



theological educators should teach theologically about God, his world and his kingdom, without a sacred–secular divide, for the transformation of people and cultures. Heaton also provides a short theology of culture, another concept that is foundational for the task of cross-cultural theological education.

One theme that comes up repeatedly is humility. When I first began to teach and a student raised a question or made a comment, many times the thought would rise in me, ‘I know more than you.’ It was hard to be humble, but so necessary. Cesar Lopes helpfully highlights the need for ‘theological humility’, which includes asking questions such as how we can contribute to the students’ growth and autonomy, how to show respect for local theologies and theologians from that context, and how that context can be brought into critical dialogue with global theologies. Theological education is situated in the students’ context and tradition, and so it must answer *their* questions in order to develop local Christian communities to maturity.

Amidst the book’s focus on providing theological education in cross-cultural settings, two issues are not covered directly. First, teaching in most theological institutions requires working as a team within that school. Little is mentioned about this point, but working with colleagues, national and international, and all the cultural baggage that comes with them is a big part of teaching cross-culturally. Some aspects of the chapters on cultural issues can certainly be applied, but this topic could have received more attention. Second, the book presumes a somewhat homogeneous class of students from one culture. These days, however, students sitting in a single class could come from different cultures. How, then, does a teacher manage the different cultures? The majority of the class could be from one culture, but a vocal minority from another culture might dominate class discussion time or take up much of the teacher’s energies. How should such situations be handled?

Theological education is indeed a noble endeavour, and opportunities to do it cross-culturally will give much joy and enrich the lives of both teachers and learners. This book is a necessary resource which will allow such flourishing to take place.