The World Evangelical Alliance's Journal
of Theology and Contemporary Application

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Volume 47 • No. 2 • May 2023

Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

Volume 47 • Number 2 • May 2023

Published by

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

WIPF *and* STOCK *Publishers*
199 West 8th Avenue • Eugene OR 97401
wipfandstock.com

All issues of ERT (now published in English and Spanish!)
are available on our website:
https://theology.worldea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/
To order hard copies, contact orders@wipfandstock.com

ISSN: 0144-8153
ISBN: 978-1-6667-7837-3
Volume 47 • No. 2 • May 2023

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Printed by Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 West 8th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401
wipfandstock.com

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Don't Run from Controversy

'No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.' —1 Corinthians 11:19

As a college undergraduate, I heard allegations that a charismatic Christian community active on my campus was exercising authoritarian control over members' lives. Rather ambitiously, given my limited theological discernment, I found a professor to sponsor me and undertook an independent study of the group.

When the group's leaders decided not to speak to me and threatened legal action, their reluctance to engage strengthened my determination to complete the project, which I self-published six months after beginning my research. Some viewed my work as unnecessarily dividing Christians. But a few years later, one of the group's leaders left, taking as many students as he could with him, and apologized to me. Years after that, I learned that the community's head coordinator had lost his counseling license due to his history of sexual entanglement with single women in the group.

I tell that story to remind us that sometimes, to remain faithful to the gospel, we must attempt to discern whom to treat as fellow believers and who might actually be wolves in sheep's clothing. The World Evangelical Alliance's mission begins with the words, 'Fostering unity in Christ.' But if we had no limits on whom we unite with, we would end up with false brothers and sisters in the tent. We have to set boundaries somewhere.

In this issue, we raise boundary-setting questions with regard to the so-called New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement. See page 132 for my separate introduction to the two articles related to that topic.

Some think that embracing the NAR is a case of setting our boundaries of theological tolerance too wide. On the other hand, we can also make our boundaries too narrow, excluding fellow believers from our circle of fellowship for illegitimate reasons. Jay Matenga, the WEA's Director of Global Witness, addresses that concern in his brief summary of a recent WEA mission consultation. I know of no one who more provocatively and effectively challenges Western understandings of mission than Jay.

Joe Handley of the WEA-sponsored Galilean Movement examines the state of disciple making today. In another probing mission-related article, Thorsten Prill shows how lack of cross-cultural sensitivity hampered early Christian mission to Africa and can remain a problem today.

Joel Pfahler, a knowledgeable practitioner in the realm of sports chaplaincy, presents eye-opening ministry stories and applications, along with some troubling examples of how Christian sports fans can harm the cause of Christ. Brent Neely uses Muslims' view of Christianity as a window to consider how we should think about sin. Danny Kirkpatrick, who specializes in systematic theology, offers a penetrating but readable article on who is responsible for what in our redemption. The two book reviews—on the theology of video games and Philippine evangelicals' political engagement—should be stimulating as well.

Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

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The Great Collaboration: Catalyzing Disciple Making for the Global Church

Joseph W. Handley, Jr.

The author, a leading participant in the WEA's Decade of Disciple Making and its associated 'Galilean Movement', surveys the current challenges facing the global church with regard to disciple making. He describes work being advanced by the WEA and the Lausanne Movement and calls for deeper engagement in collaboration to accelerate disciple making globally.

While I was travelling recently with Bishop Efraim Tendero, global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance, several ideas emerged in our conversations that highlight one of the key challenges the global church is facing today. We are seeking to launch 'a new initiative that is born out of the great need to urgently raise disciple makers in reaching the world for Jesus'. This movement was originally born as a result of a call from Dr. Manfred Kohl, president of Re-Forma (a WEA-affiliated organization seeking to advance quality non-formal training of ministry leaders), to about 20 leadership development specialists. Kohl's concern was to accelerate the development of Christ-like leaders around the world.[1] As theologian Stephen Loots suggested during the conversation among this group in January 2021, 'Church planting is moving at the speed of a bullet train with leadership development following on a bicycle.'

Bishop Tendero shared with me a compelling case for what he calls the three 'greats' of Scripture (which I will discuss later in this article). Midway through our travels, we had a call with Michael Ortiz, international director of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). During that call, I suggested that we gather all the primary global evangelical networks and movements to work together towards catalyzing a vision to accelerate the making of disciples in all nations.

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1 Joseph Handley, 'A Galilean Movement: For Such a Time as This', in *Be Focused … Use Common Sense … Overcome Excuses and Stupidity: Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Manfred Waldemar Kohl*. (Bonn: Culture and Science Publishers, 2022), 137–50.

The need

In 1999, John Stott at the International Consultation on Discipleship quoted J. I. Packer's comment, 'The church is a thousand miles wide and half an inch deep.' Today, 24 years later, the issue is even more pronounced. At Jakarta, Indonesia in 2019, the WEA General Assembly adopted the years 2020 to 2030 as a decade of discipleship and reframed their vision and primary focus as 'intentional, intergenerational and holistic disciple making'.[2]

C. B. Samuel, in his morning reflections at the General Assembly, articulated the problem incisively: 'Today's church has been losing credibility. Its moral character has diminished, or at least this is how people around us perceive Protestantism. In many parts of the world, the evangelical community is a disgrace of God's character. If his holiness is not part of our essence, we have nothing to offer.' Bambang Budijanto, general secretary of the Asian Evangelical Alliance, furthered this concern, citing a Barna research study showing that no more than 20 percent of believers are involved in disciple making.

More recently, the Lausanne Movement conducted multiple listening calls throughout its regional networks and issue groups, and discipleship was noted as one of the top three gaps in relation to the state of the Great Commission.[3] The resulting Lausanne report states:

> In approaching the theme of how to address the challenges facing the evangelical church, evangelical leaders emphasized the importance of discipleship and training for workers and leaders in ministry. This emphasis is also a call back to the basics. The foundational approaches of discipleship and ministry training were considered critical in facilitating ministry innovation.

These clarion calls for disciple making are instructive. Miroslav Volf exhorts us, 'Christians ... need to keep realigning themselves to the authentic versions of their faith; these realignments are termed renewals. I exhort us as Christians to reform and renew our faith so as to lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called (Ephesians 4:1).'[4] My colleague Herman Moldez from the Philippines takes this idea further:

> The World Evangelical Alliance's call to a 'Decade of Discipleship' needs radical calibration to grow deep disciples rooted in Christ (Col 2:6–7). Discipleship strategy and philosophy must be unshackled from the mass production system of current discipleship models in order to develop fruitfulness in Christlike life and leadership. This requires slowing down, focusing on young believers as well as leaders and mentoring the heart in a life-on-life conversation to process life's stories in the light of God's voice and direction (Scriptures and the Holy Spirit).[5]

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2 Vlady Raichinov, 'WEA GA: Intergenerational Disciple Making and Mission in Urban Cultures', report on days 2 to 4 of the WEA General Assembly (2019), https://worldea.org/yourls/47201.

3 Lausanne Movement, 'Executive Summary: Lausanne L4 Listening Calls', 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/47202.

4 Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing. Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 22.

5 Herman Moldez, 'Toward a Deeper Discipleship: Eastern Voices', 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/47203.

For this reason, Mary Jo Wilson and I developed a new, immersive course on disciple making for BiblicalTraining.org. The course follows a unique approach, placing longer, lingering times of Bible study alongside formation practices and small collaborative learning communities so that a discipleship lifestyle might emerge.[6] Even with good resources for disciple making (some of which are listed at the end of this article), it's imperative to see a movement launched to activate this on a global scale. Simply having good resources does not suffice.

This call is paramount for the global church today, as Van Aarde suggests: 'Matthew 28:16–20 has been described as the manifesto of the church—a manifesto that is on the same level of value as the *Shema* of Israel: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one".'[7] This manifesto, Van Aarde argues, is critical to accelerate in our present age. The commitment from the WEA and the key gap noticed by the Lausanne Movement simply bring a renewed emphasis to the glaring need we face today.

A call for collaboration

Another critical insight shown through the Lausanne listening calls is in the area of collaboration. They state, 'The need for collaboration was talked about at length in many groups. ... The emphasis on information sharing is noteworthy because it is the basis for mutual efforts for collaboration. By sharing information, stakeholders or partners can understand each other and move forward to maximize synergistic relationships.'[8] The Lausanne Movement aspires to see this type of collaboration fostered, as they launched the idea of collaborative action teams at their New York gathering on 13–17 June 2022 to begin the process of preparing for their 2024 gathering in Seoul.

This brief summary only scratches the surface. Studies on collaboration in leadership are growing and beginning to take root.[9] Lausanne's listening call process was an exercise in this form of polycentric learning itself. Studies on polycentric leadership are increasing, reinforcing the importance of the call to collaboration.[10] Mary Lederleitner states:

> God's new strategy meant that those who wanted to work fruitfully in a new era of global mission needed to work in tandem with what he was doing. That meant aligning oneself with his purposes and modeling through one's work his ministry values. In those earlier days new tools arose such as Eldon Porter's 'Linking

6 This course is available for free at https://worldea.org/yourls/47204.

7 A. G. Van Aarde, 'Hoe om in te kom en hoe om binne te bly—die "groot sendingopdrag" aan die kerk vandag volgens Mateus 28:16–20', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 62, no. 1 (2006): 103–22, translated in M. Nel and W. J. Schoeman, 'Rediscovering "Disciplemaking" and the Role of Faith-Sharing', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): a5119.

8 'Executive Summary: Lausanne L4 Listening Calls'.

9 Kirk Franklin, *A Paradigm for Global Mission Leadership: The Journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance* (PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 2016); Luigi Gentili, 'The Polycentric Leadership Model: A Circular and Decentralized Approach to Leadership Sociology', *European Journal of Business and Management Research* (2021); Joseph Handley, *Polycentric Mission Leadership* (PhD thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2020).

10 Joseph Handley, *Polycentric Mission Leadership: Toward a New Theoretical Model for Global Leadership* (Oxford: Regnum, 2022).

> Global Voices'[11] as a way to understand the scope of what was happening and to encourage leaders to collaborate. Partnering 'with' instead of 'going it alone' became the gold standard for leading well in the global church.[12]

Also, I have argued that a 'collaborative, communal approach to leadership that empowers multiple centers of influence as well as a diverse array of leaders is better suited to addressing the issues before us during this era of a globalized world.'[13] The idea builds on polycentric models from governance, which entail 'the doctrine that a plurality of independent centers of leadership, power, or ideology may exist within a single political system ... [with] many centers of authority or importance.'[14]

As Bishop Tendero articulated this emerging vision, he began framing it in terms of the three 'greats' of Scripture. The first 'great' is the Great Commandment: to love God and neighbour. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... Love your neighbor as yourself' (Mt 22:36–40). In essence, this is God's ultimate call that would lead to the proper functioning and ordering of society. If we honour God and others, the world will be a better place and our lives will be better lived.

However, how are we to achieve this Great Commandment? Bishop Tendero suggests that the second 'great' is what helps us move there: the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you' (Mt 28:16–20). As we follow Christ and make disciples, people move towards transformation, obeying that which has been taught to them. Thus, the Great Commandment takes hold of our life through the transformation brought through the Holy Spirit.

Finally, Bishop Tendero offered, to move toward the fulfilment of the Great Commission, an extraordinary third 'great' is necessary, which he calls the Great Collaboration: 'That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ... Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (Jn 17:21–23).

Call to action

As many are focusing on the two thousandth anniversary of the resurrection of Christ as a key rallying point for evangelism today, targeting 2033 as potentially a grand celebration, Bishop Tendero argues that we need a 'call' just like the final call to board a plane before the airline staff close the gate and shut the doors.[15] This would

11 Eldon Porter, 'Linking Global Voices' (2021), https://worldea.org/yourls/47205.

12 Mary Lederleitner, 'Navigating Leadership Challenges in a Polycentric World', *Transformation Journal* 38, no. 3 (2021).

13 Joseph Handley, 'Polycentrism as the New Leadership Paradigm', *Lausanne Global Analysis* 10, no. 3 (May 2021): 2.

14 'Polycentrism', *Dictionary.com*, https://worldea.org/yourls/47206. See also Elinor Ostrom, 'Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems', *American Economic Review* 100, no. 3 (June 2010): 641–72.

15 '2033: WEA Joins Call to Global Church for a Decade of Great Commission Effort', 20 January 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/47207. See also 'Ministry Leaders Unite on Fulfilling the Great Commission by 2033', Religion News Service, 8 December 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/47208.

be a clarion call to work together for disciple making as the world prepares for the special Jesus celebration in 2033.

Might it be possible that all of us involved in the Great Commission endeavour could drop our 'egos and logos', as we often say, and rally the global church to work together in a Great Collaboration, with disciple making as our prime directive? Could we drop our brands and names and collectively pray, strategize, and mobilize our energies towards this key initiative? If we all truly believe this is such a critical imperative, would not such collaboration best catalyze the global church towards these objectives?

U.S. president Harry Truman said, 'It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.' If those of us involved in the Galilean Movement, International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, the GPro Commission, Transform World, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, WEA, Lausanne Movement, etc. would drop these identifiers and come together, what might be possible?

With the WEA already investing in this Decade for Discipleship and Lausanne 4 emphasizing discipleship as one of the top gaps in world mission today, it seems timely to call others to join them and us and work collaboratively to address this significant area of need. As the WEA has already advocated:

> The World Evangelical Alliance envisions a decade during which the existing momentum of alliances, networks, churches, and partner ministries becomes aligned in an intentional focus on disciple-making, development of emerging leaders, and intergenerational interaction—all for the purpose of spiritual renewal and societal transformation. The World Evangelical Alliance will use its voice and platform to spread the vision of disciple-making, encourage intentional leadership development, and resource Alliances and the wider evangelical community through shared learning opportunities, collaboration, and storytelling of innovative initiatives.[16]

Ultimately, Bishop Tendero and I see Matthew 9:37–38 as key to this initiative today: 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.' The world we live in today is clearly harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (v. 36). What is Jesus' call? To pray, and then he sends out these labourers (disciple makers). It is intriguing that he uses the Greek word *ekballō* for 'send', because this form of the word is more forceful than simply sending. The Greek word is often used in Scripture in relation to casting out demons.[17]

Prayer is critical if we are going to see this type of collaboration come together, and the thrust of Jesus' words for the Lord to send workers from those prayers speaks volumes. As our world suffers what some are calling a polycrisis,[18] perhaps now more than ever we need a collaborative, polycentric effort as a final call!

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16 'WEA: The Call to Disciple-Making', https://worldea.org/yourls/47209.

17 William Mounce and Rick Bennett, '*Ekballo*', *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (2011), accessed via Accordance Software v. 4.5.

18 World Economic Forum, 'Welcome to the Age of the Polycrisis: The Global Risks Report 2023', https://worldea.org/yourls/47210.

A simple process

There are hundreds of solid discipleship programs and materials we could recommend. Below, we name a few that stand out to us. For now, we hope that a simple process can emerge for getting started as a Christ-like worker. One example could be the four-step process we employ at A3. We believe every Christ-like leader should exhibit the following four key outcomes throughout the duration of their life and ministry.[19]

Living in a love relationship with God

Effective ministry flows from our relationship with God—from the inside out. After 10 or 15 years in ministry, leaders can begin to lose their connection to the Lord, relying more on their strengths and experience. This creates trouble and weakens the impact of their ministry. In contrast, leaders who continue to deepen their love of God are transformed and can bring powerful change to their sphere of influence.

Growing as a Christ-like leader

Effective leaders who abide with Jesus lead more and more like Jesus. Flowing out of transformed hearts, they exhibit fruits of the Spirit and grow in Christ-likeness. If leaders are not growing in Christ-likeness, ministry can get off track and they are more susceptible to spiritual plateaus and abuse of power.

Reproducing disciple-making leaders

Fruitful leaders say, 'Follow me as I follow Jesus.' They live out that truth by reproducing themselves in others and equipping those new disciples to follow their example and thus make more disciples. This is the heart of the Great Commission to make disciples who not only follow Jesus but also make more disciples.

Catalyzing Christ-centred movements

Fruitful leaders build kingdom movements to expand the reach of their ministries. Starting new witnessing communities for spiritual growth, outreach and multiplication gives more people access to Christ's life-changing power. Catalyzing movements advance the kingdom and bring momentum that transforms people, families, cities and countries.

As mentioned above, this is just one of many approaches. Something like this that is simple and reproducible would be valuable to all of us.

Recommended resources

As the WEA moves forward in this Decade of Discipleship and as we focus time and effort at Lausanne 4 and Seoul 2024 on discipleship, here are a few resources that I would recommend.

Classic models have enduring value and are well worth reviewing. Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism* is a masterpiece that laid the foundations for

19 A3 Leadership Development Process, https://worldea.org/yourls/47211.

many of the others.[20] Building on his work (including Coleman's own participation in its development) is Billie Hanks, *Becoming a Disciple Maker*.[21]

If one is looking for a robust biblical theology of discipleship, Michael Wilkins's *Following the Master* is well worth reviewing. He walks through Scripture unpacking the idea of discipleship with depth and insight.[22] Another robust approach, tapping spiritual formation ideas, is Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*. Dallas takes a meaty approach to discipleship, incorporating elements of formation that many have seen as especially helpful.[23]

More recently, other good disciple-making resources have become available. Coleman joined Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington to develop *DiscipleShift*, which is well worth digging into.[24] I also commend the work of Bill Hull who has several resources available for discipleship, including *Conversion and Discipleship*.[25] Hull, along with Bob Logan who wrote *The Discipleship Difference*, emphasizes the importance of evangelism as part of the disciple-making continuum.[26] That crucial dimension must not be neglected.

Jenny McGill in *Walk with Me* brings further insight into the process of discipleship.[27] Hers is among the more modern voices worth paying attention to. Another fresh voice is a book coming out this year by Jessie Cruickshank, *Ordinary Discipleship*.[28] She provides an important experiential component of walking with Christ. A new source for church-based discipleship (and not simply another program) is Kevin Blackwell and Randy Norris, *Cultivate Disciplemaking*.[29]

For those wanting to connect with disciple-making churches on a global scale, Edmund Chan founded the Global Alliance of Intentional Disciplemaking Churches (www.idmcglobal.com). It is a network well worth getting acquainted with for disciplemaking journey.

Finally, I would reference again the immersive approach to disciple making that Mary Jo Wilson and I developed for BiblicalTraining.org.[30] We incorporate elements from most of the authors mentioned above into a course that also draws from the wisdom of other cultures that approach discipleship in community. Growing with others is both a biblically appropriate way to grow in and extend our walk with God and an approach that will become increasingly important as the world gets smaller, and as we interact with other cultures and nations of the world.

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20 Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006).

21 Billie Hanks and Randy Craig, *Becoming a Disciple Maker* (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 2013).

22 Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

23 Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2021).

24 Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington and Robert Coleman, *DiscipleShift* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

25 Bill Hull, *Conversion and Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

26 Robert Logan, *The Discipleship Difference* (Los Angeles: Logan Leadership, 2016).

27 Jenny McGill, *Walk with Me* (n.p.: GCD Books, 2018).

28 Jessie Cruickshank, *Ordinary Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2023).

29 Kevin Blackwell and Randy Norris, *Cultivate Disciplemaking* (Birmingham, AL: Make and Teach, 2022).

30 Joseph Handley and Mary Jo Wilson, 'Disciplemaking', BiblicalTraining.org, https://worldea.org/yourls/47204.

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Our Missions Future: Local Impact, Ripples and Waves

Jay Mātenga

Between 30 January and 3 February 2023, 172 missions leaders from 33 nations, age 26 to 76, gathered in Chiang Mai, Thailand for the 15th Global Consultation of the WEA Mission Commission (MC), known as GC23. Participants were welcomed to Thailand by Dr. Chansamone Saiyasak, of the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand's Executive Committee. His welcome was accompanied by indigenous music and dance exhibiting the God-given cultural wealth of mainland Southeast Asia peoples, showing how the gospel is being received and expressed in highly contextual ways.

As the MC's executive director, I responded from my Māori heritage, formally robed in a *kākahu* (feathered cloak). I greeted them with a ceremonious Māori blessing, presented the gift of an ornately carved wooden paddle, and concluded with a traditional Māori song of unity. This exchange, expressed through the arts, was received by participants as a moving example of the mutual respect that can be experienced across global Christianity as we seek to build bridges of understanding.

The culture-honouring introduction set the tone beautifully as we entered a sacred space to discuss the future of missions in an increasingly unstable global context. In my opening address, I expressed the MC's desire that all participants would feel safe, but that no one should expect to feel comfortable. For if we feel comfortable, it indicates that we enjoy the privilege of being part of a majority. In such a diverse gathering, we should not assume that there will be a single dominant perspective, except of course around the non-negotiables of our common evangelical faith.

The MC's chair, Dr. Ruth (surname withheld for security reasons), further elaborated that we, together, were entering a metaphorical kitchen, with each of us bringing unique ingredients favoured by our respective contexts. Some of the flavours might not be to our tastes, but they should be embraced as a necessary part of the recipe we would co-create during our time together. Such a fusion, we believed, would result in a delicacy—a blessing to one another and to the nations.

The three full days of GC23 discussion centred around the three elements of our theme: our, missions, future. *Our*: who is a participant in God's mission today? *Missions*: what are major priorities for God's mission today? *Future*: where ought missions to be directed and how do we get there? In keeping with the by-line of 'local impact, ripples and waves', our plenary speakers each promoted the view of 'insiders' as central to God's purposes in the world. As the incarnate Jesus came into the world in a specific time and place, so the gospel incarnates into a context at specific times

Jay Mātenga (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary), of mixed New Zealand Māori and European heritage, is director of the WEA's Department of Global Witness and executive director of its Mission Commission.

and places, with the potential to transform communities and environments through faithful, Holy Spirit–enabled disciples. We might call these resident disciples indigenous or local, but given the masses of diaspora in our world, they might also be dislocated from, yet still represent, their traditional backgrounds. The common denominator is that they share values that are similar across the Majority World: collectivist, highly relational, hospitable, holistic, honour-oriented, rich in ancient cultural norms, and developing expressions of our faith with theological perspectives that tend to look different from what I call the Eurocentric theological consensus.

Ripples intersect, overlap and create waves. Despite such intercultural tensions, we promoted the need for greater inclusion of participants in God's mission, both within borders and across borders. Demographer Gina Zurlo helped us see, from current and historic global data, the indigenous nature of churches that flourish and sustain growth over time (and the crucial role of women in that sustained spread), creating what is today a truly world Christianity. After further input from a culturally diverse range of mission leaders, we committed to honouring all participants in God's mission—local ministers, hosts/receivers and guests/expatriates, younger and older, male and female, professionally trained ministers and/or obedient workplace witnesses, in person or online. All these participants are needed as we look for ways to strengthen participation and encourage innovation that spreads the whole gospel to the whole world and establishes enduring churches.

As we heard from indigenous church planters who are involved in large movements to Christ among their countrymen and women, at great personal risk to themselves and their families, the MC committed to pushing back against attitudes that would deny the existence and legitimacy of millions of biblically faithful followers of Jesus who have converted from other majority-religion backgrounds. Speaking from the position of a Westerner in missions, Craig Greenfield concluded our plenaries with a charge to 'outsiders', to reposition themselves as servants and put 'insiders' at the centre as guardians of the gospel for their people—in other words, to let the locals lead.

In sum, we celebrated the fact that the unchanging gospel continues to spread to all nations by all nations in dynamically new ways, led by some of the most unexpected pioneers. But is that not just like our God?

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When the Game Stops ... for Prayer

Joel Pfahler

Sports chaplains are always on call, serving a frequently unreached people group: professional athletes. This article describes their behind-the-scenes work in a manner that offers lessons for Christian ministry—and on how Christian sports fans can represent Christ more fully.

On 2 January 2023, a packed stadium in Cincinnati, Ohio, and a nationwide television audience were watching one of the most important games of the regular season in the most popular US sports league. Two of the best teams in the National Football League (NFL), the Buffalo Bills and Cincinnati Bengals, were battling for playoff positions.

But the teams never completed the game, because in the first quarter, Bills player Damar Hamlin suddenly collapsed from cardiac arrest after making a routine tackle.

As the game stopped, paramedics jumped into emergency service. So did another little-known member of each team: the chaplain.

Many chaplains who serve professional sports clubs in the United States and around the world are affiliated with parachurch organizations such as Athletes in Action, the sports ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ International. Chaplains are professional clergy and usually not former professional athletes. But Bengals chaplain Vinny Rey is an exception. He was a Bengals player for nine years.

Rey, who was watching the game from the stands, contacted the Bengals' director of player engagement and proceeded to the tunnel that connects the locker rooms to the playing field to support the players.

'I had a chance to pray with [Bills chaplain] Len Vanden Bos', Rey recalled. 'We got on a knee right there. You can only imagine, at that time everybody's looking to us.'

The game was suspended and players eventually returned to their locker rooms.

'From there', Rey said, 'I went into the locker room and I did pray with a few guys, but mostly I was just there. I didn't ask people if they were okay because I knew that a significant amount of guys probably weren't. I gave out a couple dozen hugs just to let them know "I'm here."'

While Hamlin was treated by paramedics on the field and taken to the hospital, members of both teams formed a large circle and bowed their heads in prayer. The following day, all 32 NFL teams changed their profile pictures on Twitter to a picture of Hamlin's jersey and text that read 'Pray for Damar'. Buffalo Bills star player Josh Allen urged people, 'Please pray for our brother.' A commentator on ESPN, the

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leading US sports television network, acknowledged the outpouring of prayer—and he even prayed himself on live television.

If physicians hadn't been ready to treat Damar Hamlin after his cardiac arrest, he wouldn't be alive today. And if chaplains weren't serving teams, what would happen to the players' spiritual and emotional health? Interviews with professional sports chaplains reveal a unique ministry to athletes whose careers, even when well compensated financially, often bring significant pressure, public criticism and isolation.

A source of comfort amidst a tough life

Bill Alexson, president and founder of SportsPower International, was chaplain for the National Basketball Association's Boston Celtics for 20 years. 'Everybody thinks NBA players have it made because they're rich and famous', Alexson said. 'People love them for what they do, not who they are. Their careers are temporary, and when it's all done, they're kind of left high and dry.'

The image of athletes as recipients of widespread adulation doesn't square with reality, says Reza Zadeh, chaplain for the NFL Denver Broncos. 'Athletes are viewed as a commodity, not as a person', Zadeh explained. 'They don't know whom to trust because everyone's out to get something from them. If it's not asking for money, people want their influence. People want them to endorse a product.'

Andrew Eppes, a chaplain for the US national men's soccer team, recalled an occasion when he visited a player in Scotland. The player's wife asked Eppes, 'What are you doing here?' He replied, 'I'm here because I care about your marriage.' After overcoming her initial disbelief, the wife explained, 'Everybody comes to take from us. People want tickets, people want a place to stay. People want a tour guide for the city, they want access to my husband, they want a jersey after the game.'

Zadeh stated that especially when a team is not performing well, critical fans overlook the emotional and physical demands the players face. When athletes have to endure harsh public criticism, he said, 'that's a really sad place to be for a lot of the players. I think a lot of guys, once they get into the NFL, realize, "Oh man, this is not at all what I thought it was going to be when I got here."'

In this context, chaplains find that to gain athletes' trust, they need to emphasize that a person's value does not depend on performance. And they don't ask athletes for favours.

Eppes explained, 'I tell them right off the bat that I'm not there for a picture with them. I'm there because I just want to hear about their life, how they're doing. And most importantly, I want to know how their heart is doing, because the heart is the wellspring of life' (Prov 4:23).

Damon Gunn, chaplain for the NBA Houston Rockets, described the main purpose of his ministry as 'helping guys realize that basketball isn't their sole purpose or plan for their life, that God has something so much deeper'.

Mike Tatlock, who serves the NBA Portland Trail Blazers, said the league has actually encouraged the chaplains' role because 'the number one thing that the athletes wrestle with is anxiety. And the league admitted that they weren't equipped to deal with that.

'The one thing we do more than anything', Tatlock continued, 'is to help them with their emotions, their mental and spiritual well-being. We bring to the table the peace of Christ that passes all understanding. That is the remedy for the things that these guys struggle with.'

Alexson added that chaplains must be sensitive to the fact that athletes face enormous pressure to perform well. 'When they do something wrong, it's in the newspaper the next day', he noted. 'At chapel, they come in and give their burden to the Lord, and they hear an inspirational message that they can take on the court with them and help them deal with all the craziness in their life. A lot of these guys find peace for the first time.'

The pressure can be even greater in individual sports such as track and field. Madeline Manning Mims, who won gold in the 800 meters at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, has served as a chaplain at every Olympic Games since 1984.

'The chaplain's role is so vital', Mims said. 'You may have one wedding for every 10 funerals'—that is, for every athlete pleased with his or her performance, there are about 10 disappointments. 'People you love are seeing their dreams die after years of training. To be there with them as they experience [grief from a disappointing performance] is one thing. It is another thing for them to experience it alone.'

Chaplains make an effort to reach out to everyone, not just the athletes who already have a Christian background. As Mims stated, 'The role of a chaplain at the Olympics is pastoral care. What you do is increase the ability of the young athletes to evangelize by empowering them in their faith to gear up to share. You love them, you encourage them, and then those who are not Christians or don't believe in anything ... you still care for them with acts of kindness. You don't ignore them ... you love them, you encourage them, you listen. You do a lot of listening.'

Cristobal Chamale, Athletes in Action's director for Latin America and the Caribbean, approaches athletes by 'giving counselling or sharing with them some Christian principles to apply in their sport, and to help them use these values in their competition'.

The main value that Chamale teaches athletes is to keep God first and glorify him through their performance. Chamale credited one Olympic athlete with reminding him that success isn't defined by winning a medal.

'I was talking with a judo athlete. When his competition was done, he came to the chapel and I said, "How did you do?" And he said, "Well, I didn't get a medal." I said, "I'm really sorry." And he said, "No, don't be sorry about it. I was the first judo athlete from my country to even reach this level of competition."'

Chamale added, 'We need to help athletes to focus in a better way on their performance. Because, you know, there are not many gold medals at the Olympic Games compared to the thousands of athletes competing. Success means being in peace and satisfaction with yourself that you gave your best in your competition.'

A very different story in Togo

Not all professional athletes have the same experience as the highly paid NFL and NBA players who are constantly surrounded by adulation, pressure and demands for attention. The situation in Togo, West Africa, is quite different.

Togo sports generally recognizes two levels of athletes: 'professionals', who are good enough to play in Europe and return home only to play for the national team, and 'elites', who play in Togo's domestic leagues. 'Pro athletes are more difficult to reach', said Pilabana Wiyao Koffi, Togo's national director for Athletes in Action. And location is not the only reason.

'Many times when a local elite athlete is called up to play with the national team, it becomes more difficult to work with him', Pilabana explained. 'He will start thinking that you want his money. It is the same with the pro athletes.'

Pilabana began working with Campus Crusade for Christ in Togo in 2001 and launched the sports ministry in the following year. From 2002 to 2005, he built credibility with athletes, coaches and officials in Togo's football (soccer), basketball, volleyball and track and field federations. In 2006, he made his first trips serving the Togo men's national football team, to Cairo for the Africa Cup of Nations, and later to Germany for the World Cup.

Pilabana described his role in this way: 'I talk to the players about unity. I do team building exercises with them to help them know the importance of being together. I pray with them. I share the gospel with them. I study the Bible with some of them. In Togo, athletes are mostly idol worshippers. I help them to trust God.'

Pilabana has had interesting opportunities to minister to others too. 'When the team has difficulties with player salaries, I am the one the president asks to talk to the team', he indicated. He is frequently asked to pray that God will provide the money for players' and coaches' salaries.

'They don't have guidance for life', Pilabana said of the team members he serves. 'Our culture is based on idolatry and it is a spiritual battle. Sunday is game day and the athletes are not involved in local churches. The lessons I provide to them are the only biblical guidance they receive.'

Key ministry principles

The strategy and lifestyle of successful sports chaplains embody the application of familiar biblical principles in an unusual context—one in which travel and game schedules prevent most athletes from regular involvement in a church. Following are some of their key principles—which are quite applicable to Christians ministering in other walks of life.

Be present and available. 'You're representing God by your presence', said Mims. 'We come to empower the athletes ... and so you need to meet the athletes where they are. We don't just wait for people to come to us. A lot of times they can't [come to us] because of their schedule. So you go where they are and you serve them. We come here to serve.'

Christian Taylor, a US Olympic gold medallist in track and field, prioritizes attending chapel when he's competing away from home. 'Being in foreign lands and having a chaplain to come in and say, "Hey, I'll meet you where you are"—it's a perfect illustration of what God does. He's the perfect gentleman. "I will meet you where you are, and I want to do this walk with you."'

Value them unconditionally as people, not as performers. 'It's not my role to [coach them in their sport]', Zadeh stated. 'I talk about how their soul, their heart

and their marriage are, or what they are dreaming about. I want to show them that I'm interested in their life.'

Zadeh, like most NFL chaplains, conducts Bible studies for coaches and players on their day off from practice, while his wife leads a Bible study for players' wives.

Similarly, Robert Brooks, the NFL Cleveland Browns' chaplain, says spending time with players outside the team facility is valuable 'because now they're not really thinking football. They're thinking, "Man, you're doing life with me." And life is so much more than football.'

Show no favouritism. George McGovern, director of pro football ministry for Athletes in Action, emphasized, 'Don't make any distinction between the kid on the practice squad and the highest-paid player in the locker room. That practice squad kid is just as valuable to God.'

Jodi Hasbrouck, who ministers to elite female track and field athletes, agreed: 'You have to be as willing to minister to the no-name athlete as to the well-known one. If you're not willing to do that, you shouldn't be in this line of work.'

Tatlock takes that principle a step further: 'It's not just the players who are impacted by the chaplain—it's everybody on the team, from the staff assistants to security at the door.'

Allow yourself to receive spiritual ministry as well. Chaplains work hard to build relationships with members of the organization they serve, but they need support too. Colin Pinkney of the NBA Charlotte Hornets found it particularly refreshing to interact with other team chaplains at a league-wide event. 'We're all part of the same team, serving the same God with the same mission, though in different cities', Pinkney said. 'I'm grateful that we got to connect, because now we can go back into that lonely world of chaplaincy with the strength of knowing that we're not alone.'

Mourn with those who mourn. Zadeh, who learned from 12 years as a pastor that 'funerals are the best opportunity to share the gospel', had such an opportunity in December 2021. His Friday morning Bible study at the team facility turned into a ministry time for the entire Broncos team and staff after retired star Demaryius Thomas died the previous day of a seizure disorder.

For Vinny Rey of the Bengals, Damar Hamlin's collapse provided a similar opening. 'I had a chance to give a message to some people within the organization and management and even some of the coaches. [Head coach] Zach Taylor said, "There are other people here you could speak to. We have a director of player development, two team psychologists, and a chaplain." Some players really took advantage of that. Even though it was a hard thing to get through, I think the Lord used it to get glory throughout our nation.'

Always be ready to share. Because of the intense challenges they face, athletes can become unexpectedly open to faith. 'One of my favourite experiences as an NBA chaplain', Tatlock says, 'is seeing guys come in who have no relationship with Christ and no idea what's even available with chapels. And then all of a sudden, out of curiosity, they check things out. Relationships start and guys come to know Christ, get discipled, and then go out and start leading others to Christ."

Don't forget the family. Many of the chaplains I have interviewed highlight the loneliness and isolation experienced by players' spouses, especially when the player first joins a new team. Many chaplains' wives minister to the players' and coaches'

wives by befriending them, showing hospitality and doing Bible study. In this way, the whole family is ministered to. Zadeh says multiple teams use the same women's Bible study material, so sometimes when a player changes teams, the wife can continue the same study in a new city.

Celebrities are people too

Many Christians around the world are also passionate sports fans. Although few of them will serve as chaplains in any capacity—let alone for professional sports teams—many Christians display their attitudes toward celebrities quite openly. And it isn't always pretty.

Hasbrouck and Rey's exhortation for Christians who encounter athletes is to treat them as regular people. 'I know an athlete who started going to a new church', Hasbrouck said. 'When the pastor found out who she was, he thought he could use her for his agenda. It's an easy trap to fall into, but athletes don't want to be used.

'The thing that matters most is not their platform, it's their heart. And when we try to use athletes to accomplish our own agendas, their own spiritual growth becomes secondary.'

Chaplains constantly remind athletes that their spiritual life is more important than the game, but Christian fans—even pastors—sometimes talk about athletes as if they're value is determined by their performance.

As the NFL Denver Broncos struggled through a disappointing season in 2022, losing most of their games, 'I watched pastors and ministry leaders in Colorado trash the Broncos on their Facebook pages', Zadeh commented.

Zadeh mentioned one player's wife who wears noise-cancelling headphones while attending games so that she won't hear nearby fans say crude things about her husband.

Pilabana, the chaplain in Togo, described the church's attitude towards athletes there as different but no better. 'In Togo, the church sees athletes as sinners—people who will never worship God. The church does not want to enter the world of sport. Christians need to pray for athletes to come to Christ, but that is not the case.' As a result, part of Pilabana's mission, in addition to ministering directly to sports teams, is to seek to involve the church in his ministry.

Christians serving in many other countries have told me that many churches have similar attitudes to those Pilabana finds in Togo and don't have a vision for using sports as a vehicle to reach their neighbours.

Such unfriendly attitudes and behaviours regarding athletes aren't surprising when they come from the world. But Christians need to remember that in God's eyes, people's value doesn't come from their performance on a playing field. God cares deeply for each human being, and he expects his followers to exemplify the same compassion.

In the soul of every athlete, coach and team employee are spiritual needs, and chaplains are serving God by meeting those needs. Sports-loving Christians should always remember that every athlete, from the star to the struggling backup, is a person whom God created. Regardless of their apparent lifestyles, they are not any more unredeemable in God's eyes than we were before God saved us (Eph 2:1–5).

Moreover, in many countries, athletes are a spiritually unreached population to whom no one is taking the gospel. How can we expect them to turn to the Lord if they are not hearing about him (Rom 10:14–15)? Instead of falling prey to prevailing cultural attitudes, can you help to bring the good news to the world of sports?

ERT (2023) 47:2, 117–131

Evangelical Missionaries and the Lack of Cross-Cultural Competence: An Historical Perspective

Thorsten Prill

This article describes how 19th-century evangelical missionaries to Africa erected barriers that hindered the spread of the gospel due to their lack of cross-cultural skills. It also discusses positive examples and draws applications to the contemporary church setting.

Many scholars have identified a deep-rooted attitude of ethno-cultural and spiritual superiority as the main stumbling blocks for Western mission work on the African continent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, this view is too simplistic. Another crucial but widely overlooked factor that contributed to missionaries' mistakes was their lack of cross-cultural competence.[1] 'Many mistakes which older missionaries made', writes Alan Tippett, 'were honest mistakes made in true zeal for the Lord', mainly because they were sent out without any anthropological training.[2] The same applies to missionaries who came to Africa in the second half of the 19th century.[3] Because of their lack of cross-cultural training and experience, evangelical missionaries underestimated cultural barriers, resulting in misunderstanding and miscommunication between them and the indigenous African population.

Lack of cross-cultural experience and training

Unlike Gottlieb Viehe, who was born in Germany but spent his childhood and youth in the United States,[4] or Martin Rautanen and Carl Hugo Hahn, who both grew up

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1 Cf. Darrel L. Whiteman, 'Anthropology and Mission: The Incarnational Connection', in *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 85.

2 Alan Richard Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1987), 384.

3 Cf. Lysle E. Meyer, *The Farther Frontier: Six Case Studies of Americans and Africa, 1848–1936* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1992), 15.

4 Nils Ole Oermann, *Mission, Church and State Relations in South West Africa under German Rule (1884–1915)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999), 34.

in the multilingual and multicultural context of the Czarist Russian Empire,[5] not every missionary who came to Africa from Europe or North America in the 19th century had cross-cultural experience. (The three pioneer missionaries named above all served in Namibia.) Many missionaries were ordinary craftsmen, farmers or office clerks who had not been exposed to other cultures before entering the African mission field and who had received only basic training.[6]

At the seminary of the Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission, whose first missionaries came to South Africa in 1854,[7] the curriculum consisted of only three subjects: biblical studies, English and music.[8] There was no course offered in culture or theology of mission. The preparation of evangelical Anglican missionaries in Britain was not much different. Andrew Walls notes, 'English missionary recruits were often of modest educational attainments.' He explains that the college of the Church Missionary Society in London was established to give its students a basic education.[9] Alison Hodge observes that the main emphasis was on the transfer of theological knowledge and that 'during the course both the Old and the New Testament were studied; there were lectures on doctrine, the Prayer Book, Apologetics and Logic.'[10]

Remarkably, a similar approach characterized North American evangelical faith missions. James Karanja writes about the early recruitment policy of Africa Inland Mission (AIM):

> At the beginning AIM only emphasized that Africa provided conditions that were 'utterly different from those that call for the learning and culture of a Paul or an Apollos'. To these early missionaries Africa was 'no Ephesus with its learning, but only sin, darkness, ignorance, barbarism and primitivism'. To meet these needs it was argued that missionaries did not need 'so much scholastic and theological knowledge as that wisdom given by the Holy Spirit, energy, zeal, devotion, and a close walk with God that make great a man that is no scholar'. Therefore it was not necessary to 'staff the mission with men who had received theological education of the kind that would qualify them for the ordained ministry'. Great energy seems to have been spent recruiting dedicated laypeople for overseas service and from this source it was envisaged the mission would fill its ranks.[11]

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5 Cf. Simo Heininen, 'Martin Rautanen in Namibia and the Mission Board in Helsinki', in *Changing Relations Between Churches in Europe and Africa: The Internationalization of Christianity and Politics in the 20th Century,* ed. Katharina Kunter and Jens Holger Schøjrring (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 56.

6 Cf. Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110; Oermann, *Mission, Church and State Relations*, 222.

7 Hans-Werner Gensichen, 'Harms, Ludwig', in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 280.

8 Rolf Sauerzapf, 'Ein Mann mit Gott ist immer in der Mehrzahl: Aufgezeigt am Leben der Pfarrer Wilhelm Löhe und Louis Harms', *CA Confessio Augustana* 3 (2018): 134.

9 Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 209.

10 Alison Hodge, 'The Training of Missionaries for Africa: The Church Missionary Society's Training College at Islington, 1900–1915', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4, no. 2 (1971): 85.

11 James Karanja, *The Missionary Movement in Colonial Kenya: The Foundation of Africa Inland Church* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2009), 16.

Similarly, the training that missionary candidates received at the Boston Missionary Training School, an institution founded by American premillennialist A. J. Gordon in 1889,[12] was hardly adequate for the task. 'The basic training given was just that—basic. The early curriculum failed to offer courses in language training, anthropology, sociology, church history, let alone Hebrew or Greek—training missionaries needed to prepare for the challenges they would face.'[13]

The qualifications officially required of American missionaries sent out by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) between 1845 and 1932 were very basic too. The SBC constitution simply expected missionaries to hold membership in a local SBC church and to 'furnish evidence of genuine piety, fervent zeal in their Master's cause, and talents which fit them for the service for which they offer themselves'.[14]

David Hollinger provides a theological explanation for the limited training many missionaries received, without any cross-cultural instruction:

> The great surge of missionaries going abroad in the 1880s and 1890s included many fervently evangelical men and women who believed that the world might end fairly soon. Quick conversion was necessary. Missionaries of this otherworldly orientation were only marginally interested in establishing long-term institutions. They also saw little reason to immerse themselves in local cultures.[15]

Put differently, because of their eschatological views, many missionary candidates and mission organizations considered in-depth theological training unnecessary, if not a waste of time. According to Marius Nel, this correlation between eschatological convictions and missionary training could also be observed among the early Pentecostal missionaries who served in Africa:

> The commitment to mission based on eschatological urgency also led to practical and short-term ministerial training. The purpose was to produce evangelists and missionaries in a minimum amount of time. The most important part of the training was to partake in evangelistic-missionary tours and unlike established divinity schools the barest amount of theology was taught.[16]

Other missionary candidates underwent an intensive preparation which 'consisted of Latin, Greek, classical literature, philosophy, as well as theological training',[17] but they were astonishingly ill-prepared to live among people of other cultures. As Lyman Reed points out, most missionaries at that time were not trained at

12 Scott M. Gibson, 'A. J. Gordon and H. Grattan Guinness: A Case Study of Transatlantic Evangelicalism', in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney, Paul S. Fiddes and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 310.
13 Scott M. Gibson, *A. J. Gordon: American Premillennialist* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 138.
14 Louis R. Cobbs, 'The Missionary's Call and Training for Foreign Missions', *Baptist History and Heritage* 29, no. 4 (1994): 27.
15 David Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 9.
16 Marius Nel, *African Pentecostalism and Eschatological Expectations: He Is Coming Back Again!* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), 40.
17 Paul Leshota, 'Postcolonial Reading of Nineteenth-Century Missionaries' Musical Texts: The Case of Lifela tsa Sione and Lifela tsa Bakriste', *Black Theology* 12, no. 2 (2014): 140.

all to minister cross-culturally.[18] They received spiritual and professional training but nothing on cultural relationships. As a result, these missionaries were prone to erecting barriers which would hinder the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church.

In *Pitfalls of Trained Incapacity*, Birgit Herppich argues that the preparation of missionaries of the Basel Mission, one of the largest and most influential mission societies in the 19th century,[19] actually hindered missionary work in Africa and other parts of the world. According to Herppich, the Basel Missionary Training Institute (BMTI) 'constituted a "community of practice" which produced various levels of "trained incapacity" in the missionaries it sent to foreign lands'.[20] As the main reason for such a development, Herppich indicates that BMTI trainees came from similar social, cultural and denominational backgrounds. Most of the candidates were farmers, weavers and soldiers from the Württemberg region of Germany, which was, as Seth Quartey notes, known for the earnest study of the Bible in private meetings, individualism and a romantic view of agricultural and rural life.[21] Herppich summarizes the purpose of their seminary training as follows: 'The BMTI closely reflected and functioned largely to deepen the German cultural and Pietist religious values, practices and emphases of the participants' background.'[22] As a consequence, the missionaries found it difficult to adjust to life on the mission field, build relationships with indigenous people, and communicate the gospel meaningfully with them. Herppich describes the impact of the mission's training approach on the work in Ghana as follows:

> BMTI training established religious convictions and practical emphases which were applied inflexibly in the intercultural encounter. This impeded adjustment to different contexts, the realization of organizational goals, and the emergence of an African appropriation of Christianity, and constituted a major factor in the mission's initial failure.[23]

Given this deficient training, it is not surprising that a sizeable number of 19th-century Western missionaries serving in Africa had minimal cross-cultural competence. As a result, they made mistakes and erected barriers that hindered their ministries. They not only misunderstood local customs and values but also saw no need to contextualize themselves and the Christian gospel, or if they saw that need at all, they struggled with the task.

Ignorance and the categorical thinking trap

Missionaries in southern Africa, for example, made the mistake of viewing the custom of *lobola* (bride price) through their cultural lenses. They concluded that this

18 Lyman E. Reed, *Preparing Missionaries for Intercultural Communication: A Bicultural Approach* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1985), 7.

19 Birgit Herppich, *Pitfalls of Trained Incapacity: The Unintended Effects of Integral Missionary Training in the Basel Mission on Its Early Work in Ghana* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 3.

20 Herppich, *Pitfalls of Trained Incapacity,* 4.

21 Seth Quartey, *Missionary Practices on the Gold Coast, 1832–1895: Discourse, Gaze and Gender in the Basel Mission in Pre-Colonial West Africa* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007), 24.

22 Herppich, *Pitfalls of Trained Incapacity*, 9.

23 Herppich, *Pitfalls of Trained Incapacity*, 10.

payment, which a bridegroom had to give to his future father-in-law, was a degrading practice that needed to be abolished. By responding to *lobola* in such a way, the missionaries demonstrated deficiencies in their cultural competence. Modupe Labode describes the opposition to *lobola* by some Anglican missionaries who worked in South Africa in the second half of the 19th century:

> They often alleged *lobola* was the sale of women into slavery. In a world in which chattel slavery was still practised, such an allegation carried an emotional charge. The assumption was that *lobola* needed to be confronted in the same way as slavery had been. Moreover, at this time British women were asserting their 'right' to choose their own husbands, to marry for love and companionship, and to rule in the domestic sphere; the right of women to liberty, freedom, and love through marriage were often linked by those opposed to *lobola*.[24]

Similarly, Norwegian missionaries who served among the Zulu people tended to be extremely critical of *lobola*. They held, as Hanna Mellemsether writes, that 'women as a category were deprived of dignity and power, existing merely as a commodity in a masculine marketplace of "bride trade".'[25] The practice of *lobola*, these missionaries were convinced, was irreconcilable with the Christian message. However, the problem was that the missionaries failed to grasp the true nature and purpose of the custom. In *Transformations of African Marriage*, David Parkin and David Nyamwaya point out that in Zulu culture *lobola* was seen partly as a gift exchanged between the families of the bride and groom:

> There was a special etiquette governing the transaction of the *lobola*. The bride's mother had to be consulted before its disposal, and the groom's family would delay *lobola* negotiations, even when they had all fifteen cattle to hand, as a mark of respect for the bride's family, by showing that their daughter was not simply purchased like a commodity. A whole series of other exchanges, principally among women of the two families, further enforced the idea that *lobola* was, at least in part, a form of gift exchange.[26]

Parkin and Nyamwaya also hint at another purpose of the *lobola* custom: as a source of material security for women. They note that some of the cattle paid by the groom were actually earmarked for both the bride and the bride's mother. As a result, these women were able to build up their own small cattle herds. Harriet Ngubane points out that the bride's father held the cattle only in trust for his daughter and her family and that he could sell them only after having consulted the bride's mother.[27] She adds that these animals could be used as a bride price if any of the

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24 Modupe Gloria Labode, *African Christian Women and Anglican Missionaries in South Africa 1850–1910* (PhD thesis, Lincoln College, Oxford University, 1992), 157.

25 Hanna Mellemsether, 'African Women in the Norwegian Mission in South Africa', in *Gender, Race and Religion: Nordic Missions 1860–1940*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Mission Research), 162.

26 David Parkin and David Nyamwaya, 'Introduction: Transformations of African Marriage: Change and Choice', in *Transformations of African Marriage*, ed. David Parkin and David Nyamwaya (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 10.

27 Harriet Ngubane, 'The Consequences for Women of Marriage Payments in a Society with Patrilineal Descent', in *Transformations of African Marriage*, ed. David Parkin and David Nyamwaya (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 176.

bride's full brothers wanted to get married. In this case, the brother was obliged to provide protection and support for his sister if she ever fell into need. Ngubane writes, 'This means that a married daughter goes on receiving protection from her parental home even after both her parents have died: that is, she always has someone from her natal family who will uphold her rights and give her asylum in case of need.'[28]

Finally, as Lamin Sanneh reminds us, *lobola* also served the purpose of encouraging fidelity in marriage.[29] Some missionaries clearly overlooked these positive aspects of the custom. By insisting that Christians should not take part in *lobola*, they risked damaging their ministries. Thus, quite frequently, African Christian men and women protested vehemently against the missionaries' rigid course. pointing out that it was difficult for them to find marriage partners due to the missionaries' prohibition.[30] Other new believers wrongly concluded that fidelity was not an important aspect of Christian married life.[31]

Strikingly, missionaries also misinterpreted the distinct roles men and women played in Zulu culture. Norwegian Lutheran missionaries in South Africa, for example, were often the sons and daughters of smallholder farmers and independent fishermen.[32] In their home culture, hard manual labour was almost exclusively a male domain. In Zulu communities, however, women were 'responsible for cultivating the land, while men were hunters and soldiers and the ones who took care of the cattle.'[33] For the Norwegian missionaries, many of whom belonged to the neo-pietist movement,[34] this division of labour was unacceptable. They saw their own system, which consisted of a male public sphere and a female domestic sphere, as God-given and normative.[35] They viewed the treatment of women in the Zulu community 'as the epitome of heathenism'.[36] The Norwegian missionaries found it difficult to take a step back and question their assumptions about what they were observing in Zulu culture.

Berge writes that the Norwegian missionaries belonged to a culture that was influenced by strong nationalistic ideas.[37] At that time, Norway was in a union with the Kingdom of Sweden and there were efforts to define Norwegians as distinct from

28 Ngubane, 'The Consequences for Women', 176.
29 Lamin Sanneh, 'The Yogi and the Commissar', in *World Order and Religion*, ed. Wade Clark Roof (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 180.
30 Mellemsether, 'African Women in the Norwegian Mission', 161.
31 Sanneh, 'The Yogi and the Commissar', 180.
32 Frederick Hale, *Norwegian Missionaries in Natal and Zululand: Selected Correspondence 1844–1990* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1997), 8.
33 Mellemsether, 'African Women in the Norwegian Mission', 163.
34 Hale, *Norwegian Missionaries in Natal and Zululand*, 10.
35 Mellemsether, 'African Women in the Norwegian Mission', 163.
36 Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129.
37 Lars Berge, 'Divided Loyalties: An African Christian Community during the 1906 Uprising in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', in *Themes in Modern African History and Culture: Festschrift for Tekeste Negash*, ed. Lars Berge and Irma Taddia (Padova, Italy: Liberianumuniversitaria.it edizioni, 2013), 115.

their Swedish and Danish fellow Scandinavians.[38] Members of the Norwegian pietist groups leaned towards apolitical cultural nationalism. They aimed 'to cleanse' Norwegian culture, as Gudleiv Bø puts it, 'from liabilities in society, which they found offensive'.[39] Though the pietists, as Mark Granquist notes, 'did not withdraw officially from the Church of Norway, in many places they founded separate "prayer houses" (*bedehuset*) for their preaching and religious activities.'[40] It seems to have been not uncommon for Norwegian pietists to think in dichotomous categories such as us and them, private and public, good and bad, or right and wrong.

As people who had been influenced by both cultural nationalism and a two-dimensional way of seeing life, the Norwegian missionaries were quick to make judgements about the Zulu people and their cultural practices. 'Almost everything in Zulu culture was considered heathen. This included dress, food, beer and medicine.'[41]

Missionaries who think in such dichotomous categories are in danger of making judgements that hinder their ministries and the work of the gospel. They may condemn a particular cultural norm or practice of their host country as wrong and promote their own way of doing things as the only right way when in reality neither one is right or wrong but just different.[42] The conviction that their cultural practices are right might give them a sense of security, as Lingenfelter and Mayers note,[43] but local people may perceive them as arrogant and, as a result, refuse to listen to and cooperate with them. Unfortunately, many 19th-century Norwegian missionaries in Zululand seem to have fallen into that cultural trap.

Lack of contextualization

The lack of cross-cultural and competence among missionaries was also evident in the area of gospel proclamation, i.e. in their preaching and teaching ministries. Bruce Nicholls writes about evangelical missionaries:

> Evangelical communicators have often underestimated the importance of cultural factors in communication. Some have been so concerned to preserve the purity of the gospel and its doctrinal formulations that they have been insensitive to the cultural thought patterns and behavior of those to whom they are proclaiming the gospel. Some have been unaware that terms such as God, sin, Incarnation, salvation and heaven convey different images in the minds of the hearer from those of the messenger.[44]

38 Dag Thorkildsen, 'Norwegian National Myths and Nation Building', *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 27, no. 2 (2014): 265–67.

39 Gudleiv Bø, 'The History of a Norwegian National Identity', https://worldea.org/yourls/47212, 21.

40 Mark Granquist, *A History of Luther Seminary: 1869–2019* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 40.

41 Berge, 'Divided Loyalties', 115.

42 See also Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting In Around the World* (Downers Grove. IL: IVP, 2002), 22–32.

43 Cf. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 54.

44 Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 8.

Most seriously, the missionaries did not understand that everyone who wants to communicate the good news cross-culturally 'stands at the crossroads of three cultures'.[45] These three cultures are the missionary's own culture, the culture(s) of Scripture in which the gospel message was first spoken, and the target culture of those whom the missionary wants to address. To communicate the gospel effectively and relate to their target audience without falling into syncretism, a good grasp of all three cultures and their underlying worldviews is essential.[46] David Singson describes the task of contextualization in a helpful way:

> When a person has been raised in one culture as a Christian and enters another culture to bring the gospel, the person brings more than just the gospel. The person is bringing his or her cultural understanding of the gospel and cultural manifestation of it. In other words the gospel has been contextualized in the culture of the Christian. As we introduce the gospel in another culture, we must attempt to lay aside our own cultural understanding and manifestation of the gospel and allow understandings and manifestations of the gospel to develop in the light of the host culture, that is, to become contextualized.[47]

David Hesselgrave speaks of an 'intermediate position' in which cross-cultural missionaries find themselves. In this position, they need to look in two directions. The first direction is the Bible culture, which includes all cultural contexts in which the biblical message was originally given. The second direction is the respondent culture with its specific values, norms and customs.[48] Hesselgrave outlines the task of contextualization as follows:

The missionary task, therefore, is to properly exegete (decode) the biblical message. With minimal intrusion of his own cultural understanding, he must encode the message in a culturally relevant form in the target culture so that the respondents will understand as much as possible of the original message. This is not the simple task that many have supposed.[49]

It seems that a good number of 19th-century Western missionaries failed to see that their own European or North American Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran or Presbyterian experience of the Christian faith had 'already, either consciously or unconsciously, been recontextualized from the biblical world to their own'.[50] Therefore, they presented the gospel in a way that was first and foremost culturally relevant to themselves and less so to their African audience. In other words, they preached a Westernized gospel in a Western manner to a non-Western context.

In Xhosaland, for instance, the initial evangelistic efforts of Wesleyan missionaries were rather unsuccessful. The Xhosa people struggled to understand the gospel

45 Marvin J. Newell, *Crossing Cultures in Scripture: Biblical Principles for Mission Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 235.
46 Newell, *Crossing Cultures in Scripture*, 235.
47 David K. Singson, 'Why Cultural Anthropology for Christian Mission' (2015), https://worldea.org/yourls/47213, 5.
48 David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 74–76.
49 Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 76.
50 Roger Standing, 'Mission in Context', in *As a Fire of Burning: Mission as the Life of the Local Congregation,* ed. Roger Standing (London: SCM Press, 2013), 173.

message proclaimed by the Western missionaries and therefore rejected it. Hildegarde Fast writes:

> For the most part, then, the Wesleyan Gospel was either poorly comprehended or left its listeners unconvinced. ... Although many Xhosa would state that the message was 'holy, just, and good', the Wesleyans did not understand that this assent was a polite way of refusing the new teaching.[51]

Fast adds that the Wesleyan missionaries were ignorant of important aspects of the Xhosa worldview and culture. Thus, the missionaries who initially used Khoikhoi interpreters assumed that, like the Khoikhoi, the Xhosa worshipped a personal divinity who could be approached directly.[52] The Xhosa, however, acknowledged the existence of a power 'which was mysterious, impersonal, and pervasive'. Consequently, they found it hard to accept the personhood of God and to make sense of his human attributes.[53]

The concept of God was not the only stumbling block for the Wesleyan missionaries. Fast notes:

> Missionary ignorance had additional shortcomings. Their message stressed the benefits of Christianity in the next life and under-emphasised the fulfilment it could provide on earth. Most sermons were delivered on 'the solemn realities of another world, the resurrection from the dead, and the day of Judgement'. Because Xhosa religion had no specific ideas concerning the afterlife, their worldview was 'unashamedly this-worldly in orientation'. The Wesleyans sometimes made passing reference to the 'unspeakable happiness attainable' in this world but did not elaborate on how this could be realised.[54]

The missionaries assumed that the Xhosa were afraid of death and therefore would respond positively when told that heaven was open through faith in Christ.[55] This assumption strongly influenced their preaching: 'Though the concepts of heaven, hell, and their respective punishments or rewards were alien to Africa, they were constantly preached in the expectation that fear of both was familiar to the Xhosa.'[56] Obviously, the Wesleyans did not understand that death was not the end of life but a rite of passage for the Xhosa: at their death, the living would become ancestors, i.e. the living dead, who had the power to bless the living.[57] Kapolyo's explanation of the living dead is particularly helpful. He describes them as 'the spirits of the departed who are nevertheless very much alive and well and resident in the neighbourhood either in a physical reality like a tree or simply as a disembodied spirit'. As such, they are still part of the family and must not be ignored.[58] For the Xhosa, as for most sub-

51 Hildegarde H. Fast, '"In at One Ear and Out at the Other": African Response to the Wesleyan Message in Xhosaland 1825–1835', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23, no. 2 (1993): 150.
52 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 151.
53 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 151, 153.
54 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 154.
55 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 162–63.
56 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 164.
57 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 163.
58 Joe M. Kapolyo, *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives through African Eyes* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 135.

Saharan Africans, the material world and the spiritual world were firmly connected; they constituted one community. Therefore, they did not see death as a threat.

While the missionaries understood salvation almost exclusively in spiritual terms, the Xhosa's understanding of salvation was 'prosperity and happiness in this life'.[59] Though both the Old and the New Testament stress that God is the one who provides for his people, protects them from dangers, guides them through life and can heal them,[60] the Wesleyans kept silent about these aspects of the Christian faith in their proclamation.[61] Fast concludes:

> Instead of building on the existing knowledge of divinity, then, the missionaries introduced a God who was personal and approachable but who paradoxically seemed unwilling to meet the temporal needs of his worshippers. The message was accordingly perceived as irrelevant to them as a race and to their material needs.[62]

Finally, the Wesleyan missionaries made the mistake of assuming that the Xhosa had no awareness of sin and evil. When the missionaries rejected the Xhosa belief in ancestors and witchcraft, they overlooked that both were intrinsically linked to the Xhosa understanding of sin and suffering. Thus, the Xhosa believed that attitudes like anger, envy and hatred were independent agents which could seize a person, who then would turn to witches or sorcerers.[63] The latter had the power to harm others by casting spells, and not even ancestors could protect anyone from these attacks. By not taking the unseen spirit world, which played a significant role in the Xhosa worldview, seriously, the missionaries also missed the opportunity to introduce them to the biblical teaching on these matters or to teach the gospel in a culturally relevant way.[64]

Wilbur O'Donovan lists some core elements of such a contextualized gospel presentation:

> In most African traditional religions, 'salvation' means acceptance by the community. Along with this, salvation would include deliverance or protection from witchcraft and evil spirits and the possession of life force. Each of these ideas can be compared with a truth about the salvation of God. God's salvation means that because of what Jesus did for us on the cross we can be accepted by God the Father when we receive Christ ... . It means we are accepted into the extended family of God, the Church ... . God's salvation also means that we have God's Holy Spirit living within us ... . Because of the Holy Spirit's presence, God can protect us from witchcraft and evil spirits ... . He can also give us supernatural life force for holy and abundant living ... . Thus God's salvation meets the deepest needs of the African heart.[65]

59 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 155.
60 E.g. Ps 18:2; 23; 27:1–3; 41:3; Is 41:10–12; Mt 6:33; Mk 1:34; Phil 4:19.
61 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 155.
62 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 156.
63 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 157, 158, 162.
64 Fast, 'In at One Ear', 158.
65 Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2009), 126.

Like the Wesleyans in Xhosaland, many Western missionaries did not understand their task of re-contextualizing the gospel message from the biblical culture to the indigenous African culture of the people they wanted to win for Christ. Joseph Galgalo explains this lack of contextualization:

> Most of the earlier missionaries operated from a theological framework that advocated total conversion of the African person from perceived heathenism to Christianity. Although this was done with the best of intentions, it involved [an] uncritical assumption that the African person religiously speaking is 'an empty vessel', ready to be filled with Christian content. However, since the Gospel encounters the African person from a particular religious vantage point, it will make sense if the traditional religious experience of the Africans can be considered as a useful foregrounding to communicate the new religious truth.[66]

The missionaries' failure to understand their context and to contextualize themselves and their message had manifold consequences. Many missionaries, like the early Wesleyans in Xhosaland, saw little or no fruit of their work as people rejected the gospel. The African people were given the impression that they had to become European or American in order to become Christians.[67] As a consequence, they came to see Christianity as a white man's religion which was not relevant to them.[68] Other missionaries noted that people converted to Christianity but the impact of the transforming power of the gospel on their culture and worldview was limited. Instead of living out their newfound Christian faith in ways that were faithful to biblical truths and, at the same time, relevant to their African context, their lifestyles, thinking and decisions were still shaped and influenced by traditional religious beliefs, values and customs which conflicted with biblical teachings. Victor Ezigbo speaks of 'religious schizophrenia' in many African Christians, created 'by some missionaries' insensitive attitudes towards indigenous worldviews'.[69] This phenomenon can still be observed today. Galgalo notes:

> Today, as a result of the missionaries' 'empty and refill' or 'uproot and plant' method, we have Christians who are still strongly rooted in their cultural beliefs or are at best simply confused—partaking of both of these religions and overlooking even apparent contradictions. These Christians, having received Christianity as a second home alongside their traditional spirituality, constantly move between these two religious homes, each complete with its thought-world, beliefs and practices, borrowing and applying elements from both as it suits them.[70]

People who lament the lack of spiritual and theological depth in the African church often comment, in a rather generalizing and sometimes sarcastic way, that

66 Joseph D. Galgalo, *African Christianity: The Stranger Within* (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2012), 14.

67 Cf. Matt Chandler, Eric Geiger and Josh Patterson, *Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 208.

68 Cf. Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 10.

69 Victor I. Ezigbo, *Re-imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 16–17.

70 Galgalo, *African Christianity*, 14–15.

'African Christianity is a mile wide and an inch deep.'[71] While it cannot be denied that the contemporary African church struggles with syncretism, nominalism and (increasingly) secularism,[72] such an over-generalized statement is not necessarily helpful if we want to describe the African church of the 21st century, as it seems to ignore the endless efforts of many African Christians to create an African worldview that is biblically shaped.[73] Having said that, it is certainly true that a lack of spiritual and theological depth characterized wider parts of the 19th-century church in Africa. Although Byang Kato, in more general terms, identified a lack of sound theological training in missionaries as one reason for this phenomenon,[74] the lack of proper contextualization of the biblical message by missionaries contributed significantly to the spiritual shallowness in many Mission Initiated Churches, some of which can still be observed today.

In some cases, 19th-century mission leaders recognized the theological and cross-cultural deficiencies of missionaries and decided to take drastic measures. One such case was that of Peter Martin Metzler. In the early 1850s, Metzler was recruited by Johann Ludwig Krapf of the Church Missionary Society, a supporter of Christian Zionism.[75] When Metzler and other German missionaries came to East Africa, Krapf's fellow missionary Johannes Rebmann soon concluded that these new missionaries were not suitable for missionary service. Steven Paas writes:

> However, Rebmann did not believe in Krapf's strategy, and had warned against Zionist fantasies. He found that Metzler and his friends were unable to acculturate and could not fit in with the missionary work among the African people. Consequently, Rebmann sent them home, which caused bitterness in Metzler.[76]

Positive examples

Despite these negative cases, there were also serious attempts by numerous culturally competent Western missionaries to contextualize the Christian faith.[77] Klaus Fiedler's research shows that many German missionaries in Tanzania studied their host cultures at great length so that they could present the gospel in a manner understandable to the indigenous people.[78] In addition, missionaries not only tried to create Christian versions of traditional African practices and rites[79] but also sought

71 Alemayehu Mekonnen, *The West and China in Africa: Civilization without Justice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 342.

72 Galgalo, *African Christianity*, 5.

73 Mary Nyambura Muchiri, *Papers on Language and Culture: An African Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 61.

74 Byang H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), 15.

75 Steven Paas, *Christian Zionism Examined: A Review of Ideas on Israel, the Church, and the Kingdom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 90.

76 Paas, *Christian Zionism Examined*, 91.

77 Cf. Steven Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity: History and Typology', in *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, ed. Steven Kaplan (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 10.

78 Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 15.

79 Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', 16.

to preserve traditional cultural elements which they considered valuable and compatible with the development of genuine Christian spirituality.[80]

One of these missionaries was Bruno Gutmann (1876–1966), a German Lutheran who worked among the Chagga people of Tanzania.[81] Gutmann trained for missionary service in Leipzig, where he studied Swahili before he left for East Africa in 1902.[82] In Tanzania he not only learned Kichagga, a language he would become fluent in, but also committed himself to the study of Chagga culture, the legal system, and other aspects of Chagga social life and history.[83] As a result of his studies, he published almost 500 articles, papers and books. Gutmann had a positive view of Chagga culture. Though he recognized its sinful elements, he held that Chagga society was far more in line with God's will than most European societies.[84] His concern, as Stefan Höschele writes, was 'the church's identity in a local African society'.[85] Gutmann's work aimed to develop a genuinely African church, not the reproduction of a Western-style church. He saw it as the task of mission, as Frieder Ludwig notes, not to get rid of traditional African values but to integrate the biblical message into the African cultures through gentle persuasion.[86] Ernst Jäschke, who became Gutmann's successor in 1938,[87] presents a helpful description of Gutmann's missionary approach and legacy:

> Gutmann's preaching and writing were focused on presenting Christ to people of animistic faith, revealing to them that the 'Lord of Heaven' in whom they unknowingly believed is the father of Jesus Christ. Among a people already in the throes of civilization's invasion upon their traditional lifestyle, his missionary method was to utilize the ancient relationships of clan, neighbourhood, and age groups as divine gifts and vehicles for the propagation of the gospel. In the process he brought new missionary incentives to both his home church and the African church. The evidence of his effectiveness is that today the entire population of Old Moshi is baptized.[88]

As part of his efforts to indigenize the Christian faith, Gutmann integrated Chagga dances into church meetings,[89] including a fertility dance performed at the harvest festival. To make use of this dance, the German missionary Christianized the words of the accompanying songs. Steven Kaplan explains the motives behind such Christianization of African rites:

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80 Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', 19.

81 Klaus Fiedler, 'Gutmann, Bruno', in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 421–22.

82 Per Hassing, 'Bruno Gutmann of Kilimanjaro: Setting the Record Straight', *Missiology* 4, no. 7 (1979): 424–25.

83 Hassing, 'Bruno Gutmann of Kilimanjaro', 425.

84 Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture*, 29.

85 Stefan Höschele, *Christian Remnant–African Folk Church: Seventh-Day Adventism in Tanzania, 1903–1980* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 268.

86 Frieder Ludwig, *Church and State in Tanzania: Aspects of Changing in Relationships, 1961–1994* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 25.

87 Ernst Jäschke, 'Bruno Gutmann's Legacy', *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1, no. 12 (1980): 167.

88 Jäschke, 'Bruno Gutmann's Legacy', 168.

89 Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture*, 40.

> What distinguished the advocates of Christianization from the majority of missionaries was not only their sympathy for some elements in the traditional rites, but also their certainty that outright prohibition of such practices were [sic] ineffective. ... By Christianizing such rites they sought to cleanse them and purify them, eliminating the bad, substituting the good. The form generally remained African, the content became Christian.[90]

Gutmann and like-minded missionaries did not make the mistakes that Shekutaamba Nambala has identified as the biggest failure of Western missionary work on the African continent.[91] Missionaries such as Gutmann not only recognized the sincerity of traditional African worship but also valued African social structures, cultural norms and rites. Most importantly, they did not see themselves as agents of Western civilization but as agents of Christ who acknowledged that Africa had its own civilization, which was worth preserving.

Conclusion

Most Western missionaries who came to Africa in the 19th and early 20th centuries were driven by love for God and compassion for people who needed to hear and accept the good news of Jesus Christ. However, their zeal for God and the church's mission did not prevent many of them from making serious mistakes. Their paternalism, which undermined the development of indigenous church leadership, and their imposition of Western culture and theology on the indigenous population unquestionably became obstacles to the progress of mission and the growth of the church.[92] They not only resulted in practical dependency and a feeling of inferiority among African Christians, but also hindered the development of genuinely African expressions of Christianity. The missionaries' errors were, in general, not the fruit of ethnocentric worldviews or an imperialist agenda, but often of a lack of cross-cultural knowledge and experience. Many Western missionaries were simply ill-equipped cross-culturally for their ministries in Africa. Consequently, they struggled to contextualize not only the Christian message but also themselves as the message bearers. At the same time, there were instances of cross-culturally competent missionaries who appreciated and valued African cultures and worked hard to inculturate the Christian faith.

Kwame Bediako argues justifiably that the negative aspects of African mission history must not be exaggerated, as the vitality of today's African church 'bears witness to the fact that the Gospel really was communicated, however inadequate we may now consider that communication to have been'.[93] A highly critical and unbalanced evaluation of the Protestant mission movement, which ignores that most missionaries acted with good intentions, can easily discourage the church in the West from involvement in cross-cultural mission in Africa and other parts of the world

90 Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', 17.

91 See Shekutaamba Nambala, 'Namibian Churches under Colonialism', *Lutheran Quarterly* 2 (1988): 246.

92 Cf. Conrad Mbewe, *Insights from the Lives of Olive Doke and Paul Kasonga for Pioneer Mission and Church Planting Today* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Partnership, 2014), 2.

93 Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 20.

today. Hwa Yung speaks of a 'guilt complex' which contributes to 'the partial loss of nerve in Western missions'.[94] Likewise, this extreme reaction against earlier mission efforts can prevent churches in the Global South from becoming seriously involved in the task of world mission.

The mistakes made by evangelical missionaries in the past cannot be made undone, but the global church can still learn from them. African missionaries who serve in the West, for example, must be careful not to repeat the mistakes of their 19th- and early 20th-century Western predecessors who came to Africa. Contemporary Africans are not immune from developing unhelpful attitudes, as Elijah Obinna points out:

> There is a visible distinction between 'us' and 'them'. In describing the state of the church in Europe, many African Christians are quick to use such terms as 'the dark continent of Europe', 'Europe: the Prodigal Son', 'dead and cold churches', 'visionless' and the like. Furthermore, it is possible for immigrant churches to see themselves as 'Christian soldiers marching to war', as many nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionaries did to Africa, and as such undertake missions with [a] hierarchical notion of power.[95]

Paul Nzacahayo notes that phrases like 'bringing the gospel to the dark continent of Europe' carry patronizing undertones that can undermine the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ.[96] Nzacahayo suggests getting rid of the term *reverse mission* and focusing on the fact that God's mission is and has always been from anywhere to everywhere. This, he argues, will not only help African missionaries in the West to be more aware of their cultural prejudices and the need for change in their African home countries, but will also have a positive impact on Western Christianity. Nzacahayo adds, 'This will also help Western churches to learn from the indigenous peoples of the former colonies who have genuine faith experiences to share.'[97]

Another central lesson to learn from the past is that missionaries must be equipped to identify and successfully manoeuvre around the cross-cultural stumbling blocks they encounter on their global mission fields in the 21st century. Today's missionaries need to acquire cross-cultural competence and the ability to contextualize themselves and the biblical gospel if they want to be effective ambassadors of Christ. This is true for Western, Asian or Latin American missionaries who work on the African continent, and it is true for African Christians who are involved in God's mission in Europe, Australasia or North America.[98]

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94 Hwa Yung, 'A Fresh Call for U.S. Missionaries', *Christianity Today*, 9 November 2011, https://worldea.org/yourls/47214.

95 Elijah Obinna, 'African Christians in Scotland: Contesting the Rhetoric of Reverse Mission', in *Christianity in the Modern World: Charges and Controversies*, ed. Giselle Vincett and Elijah Obinna with Elizabeth Olson and Afe Adogame (London: Routledge, 2016), 89.

96 Paul Nzacahayo, 'A Biblical and Historical Theology of Mission: Reflections on the Flip Side of "Reverse Mission"', in *African Voices: Towards African British Theologie*s, ed. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2017), 49.

97 Nzacahayo, 'A Biblical and Historical Theology of Mission', 59–60.

98 See Anderson Moyo, 'Church Planting Considerations for African Reverse Missionaries in Britain in the Postmodern Era', in *African Voices: Towards African British Theologies*, ed. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2017), 75.

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Introduction to the Next Two Articles

Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

With the next two articles, the *Evangelical Review of Theology* seeks to tread gently into a new area: handling contemporary controversies within global evangelicalism with grace and sensitivity.

The World Evangelical Alliance seeks to empower and unify the global evangelical movement. With that role comes a responsibility to relate discerningly to all streams of Christianity and, sometimes, to speak up regarding erroneous teachings. Ever since New Testament times, the church has had to decide when a difference of opinion is not crucial to gospel witness (Mk 9:40; Rom 14:1; Phil 1:16) and when it involves false teaching that must be rejected (Mt 7:15; Gal 1:8; 3 Jn 9–10).

Several months ago, we received a submission from Richard Moore regarding the controversial impulse known as the New Apostolic Reformation. In reviewing Moore's essay, we recognized that his description of the movement and its various connections encompassed a range of participants, from relatively 'fringe' voices to more theologically grounded ones, along with widely varying interpretations of what contemporary apostolic leadership should mean.

Accordingly, we contacted Joseph Mattera, international ambassador to the global church for the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, a WEA partner organization. Mattera graciously granted us permission to reprint relevant sections of his recent book.

The two resulting articles by Moore and Mattera are not a pro-and-con pair. Rather, you will find them complementary, sharing particular concerns in common while presenting different perspectives. Moore seeks primarily to counter the inroads of questionable theology within global evangelicalism; Mattera seeks to clarify and preserve a role for modern servant leaders, similar to that of the original apostles, within today's church while distinguishing that legitimate role from self-serving versions of apostleship.

Grappling with hot-button issues is never easy, but we don't think the WEA should shirk this task. I especially appreciate WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher's personal involvement in determining how best to address this and other difficult challenges facing the contemporary evangelical church.

We welcome your feedback as we seek to address this and other tough issues with grace and mature wisdom.

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The New Apostolic Reformation and Its Threat to Evangelicalism

Richard P. Moore

The New Apostolic Reformation, among the latest in a long series of theological and practical controversies among independent charismatics, has significant impact on evangelicals globally, especially through the music produced by Bethel Church in California. Along with conducting extensive research using primary sources, the author of this article has personally experienced the NAR's impact in Europe.

In 2019, a worship leader's daughter from the influential Bethel Church in Redding, California, USA unexpectedly passed away in her sleep. Her name was Olive. In response to this sudden tragedy, the family called on the global church to pray for the resurrection of baby Olive. The hashtag '#wakeupolive' trended on social media platforms for several weeks. Bill Johnson, senior leader of Bethel, endorsed the appeal, saying, 'Not everyone dies in God's timing ... Jesus set a precedent (i.e. resurrection) for us to follow.'[1]

Southern Baptist seminary president Albert Mohler, a leading representative of orthodox evangelicalism in the US, reacted strongly to this episode. He called Bethel an outpost in a 'heterodox ... fringe movement' and 'infamous' for its theology centred on signs and wonders. Mohler provided evidence that Bethel and the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement for which it is a flagship stand outside historic Pentecostalism. He concluded that 'the theology of Bethel Church actually detracts from the gospel of Jesus Christ.'[2]

What should we do about this popular but controversial movement? We should start by grasping its historical and theological underpinnings so that we can respond effectively to its threats.

History of the New Apostolic Reformation

The NAR movement's history starts with C. Peter Wagner, a professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission until his retirement in 2001. While at Fuller, Wagner became enthralled with what would become

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1 Bethel Music, 'A Message from Pastor Bill Johnson' (2019), https://worldea.org/yourls/47215.
2 Albert Mohler, 'The Briefing', 20 December 2019, https://worldea.org/yourls/47216.

known as the NAR, and he connected with it after leaving Fuller to create the Wagner Leadership Institute.[3]

In 2012, Wagner praised the NAR as 'an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century that is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world.'[4] He defined the main characteristic of this new movement as 'the reaffirmation, not only of the New Testament gift of apostle, but also of the office of apostle'.[5]

Wagner originally gleaned most of his information and framework for the NAR from his missiological research in the Global South. He then applied the model of what he viewed as apostolic movements and their characteristics to encourage similar pragmatic outcomes in the West.[6] In 2014, Wagner wrote that churches must embrace the paradigm of apostolic government.[7] He claimed that the traditional pastoral paradigm was not working and that a switch to the apostolic paradigm was the only viable future for the church.[8]

The NAR has no official organization or formal membership, but several apostolic organizations that do have formal memberships are associated with the movement. The International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL), founded in 1999, claims to include 400 apostles from 45 nations.[9] The United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (USCAL) has 64 council members.[10] Wagner was instrumental in the founding of ICAL and was the 'presiding apostle' of ICAL when it founded USCAL.[11] ICAL defines apostles as people with 'authority to establish the foundational government of a church or business within an assigned sphere by hearing what the Holy Spirit is saying'.[12]

Some leaders in the movement have recently sought to distance themselves from critiques connecting the NAR with the right-wing Christian nationalism movement in the United States. To that end, an 'NAR and Christian Nationalism Statement' was published in October 2022. The statement disavows Christian nationalism at length but presents no extended articulation of the NAR's theological premises

3 Peter C. Wagner, 'My Pilgrimage in Mission', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23, no. 4 (1999): 164–67.

4 C. Peter Wagner, 'The New Apostolic Reformation', *Renewal Journal* (blog), 12 April 2012, https://worldea.org/yourls/47217.

5 Wagner, 'The New Apostolic Reformation'.

6 Dr. Rod Nidever, a student of Wagner, said that Wagner's error was that he was too pragmatic. He said that Wagner latched on to the NAR because he observed its burgeoning and growing nature and sought to translate that growth into the West. Nidever, interview with author, 16 September 2022.

7 C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2014), 133.

8 Wagner, *Apostles Today*. 284.

9 R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec. *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014), Kindle location 249. ICAL discontinued publishing a list of Council Apostles around 2010, so current accurate numbers are not publicly available.

10 US Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, 'Council Members', https://worldea.org/yourls/47218.

11 International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, 'History of ICAL', https://worldea.org/yourls/47219.

12 International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, 'About ICAL', https://worldea.org/yourls/47220.

except to say that apostles and prophets exist based on the fivefold ministry (Eph 4:11) and are 'important for the well-being and mission of the Church'. The statement also gives a short, more neutral definition of apostles and prophets that does not include the governmental function included in Wagner's and many other NAR definitions. Notably, several signatories gave themselves the title of apostle in their signatures.[13]

Although the restoration of the fivefold ministry (taken from Ephesians 4:11) was originally espoused by the controversial, Canadian-born Latter Rain movement of the 1940s, the NAR and ICAL have advanced it forcefully, presenting Latter Rain favorably as a true move of the Holy Spirit.[14] In contrast, the Assemblies of God, a major US Pentecostal denomination, rejected Latter Rain for practices including its approach to imparting spiritual gifts, imposition of personal leadings by supposedly prophetic utterances, and the 'erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets'.[15] ICAL describes two types of apostles: vertical apostles who govern ecclesiastically and horizontal apostles who govern by convening, mobilizing and overseeing territories.[16]

In 1998, Wagner founded the Apostolic Council for Educational Accountability (ACEA; the name has since been changed and the first word is now 'Academic').[17] Wagner described the forming of this accreditation organization in his colourfully titled book *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians.*[18] The ACEA includes 30 schools and 60 other partners.[19]

Numerous other NAR-connected training institutions not accredited by ACEA or any other body also exist, such as the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM)—known internally by students as 'Christian Hogwarts' after wizard Harry Potter's school in the J. K. Rowling book series[20]—and International House of Prayer University.[21] In Germany, Awakening Europe started a school in 2022,[22] and Schule

13 Joseph Mattera and Michael Brown, 'NAR and Christian Nationalism Statement', 10 October 2022, narandchristiannationalism.com. Mattera seeks to distinguish himself from NAR positions in *The Apostolic Movement and the Progress of the Gospel* (Ames, IA: BILD International, 2022), 50–58. See Julia Duin, 'Pentecostal Leaders Slam Christian Nationalism, NAR Beliefs', *Newsweek*, 20 October 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/47221; Tim Dickinson, 'Meet the Apostle of Right-Wing Christian Nationalism', *Rolling Stone* (blog), 1 September 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/47222.

14 Ché Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles: Operating in Your Apostolic Office and Anointing* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2019), 27.

15 General Council of the Assemblies of God, 'Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council of the Assemblies of God', 1949, https://worldea.org/yourls/47223, 26–27.

16 International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, 'Statement of Faith', https://worldea.org/yourls/47224.

17 Academic Council for Educational Accountability, 'About ACEA', https://worldea.org/yourls/47225.

18 C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010).

19 Academic Council for Educational Accountability, 'Partners—ACEA', https://worldea.org/yourls/47226.

20 'BSSM—Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry'. https://worldea.org/yourls/47227; Molly Hensley-Clancy, 'Meet the "Young Saints" of Bethel Who Go to College to Perform Miracles', BuzzFeed News, 12 October 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/47228.

21 International House of Prayer University, 'Front Page', https://worldea.org/yourls/47229.

22 'Awakening School of Ministry', *Awakening Europe* (blog), https://worldea.org/yourls/47230.

der Erweckung in Germany has partnered with Bethel Church in California.[23] Many other NAR churches consider themselves training institutions in Wagner's apostolic paradigm.

BSSM has a branch called 'BSSM Planting' that is committed to equipping leaders to build schools of supernatural ministry similar to BSSM.[24] BSSM Planting published a roadmap for planting other BSSMs that employs the Wagner apostolic activation paradigm.[25] Wagner hoped to circumvent traditional theological training in favor of what he called 'new wineskin' education, with schools, workshops, conferences, boot camps, retreats, stadium events, camps and additional events to impart the NAR paradigm and to 'help reshape the face of Christianity'.[26] Apostle Ché Ahn, the successor to Wagner, likewise encourages young people to bypass conventional Bible colleges for what he calls 'power ministry' schools.[27]

Doug Geivett and Holly Pivec, recognized experts on the NAR, have described how many of the world's largest churches follow Wagner's apostolic paradigm, such as E. A. Adeboye's Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, which claims more than five million congregants. Likewise, Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Ukraine boasts 20,000 people. Another prominent church with 250,000 members is César Castellanos' International Charismatic Mission in Bogotá, Colombia. David Yonggi Cho, the founder of Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea, claims one million congregants. Cho embraced the NAR's apostolic paradigm, stating, 'God is restoring the powerful ministry of the apostle to His end-time Church.'[28]

In 2010, Ahn edited a book called *The Reformer's Pledge*, in which NAR leaders described their efforts to reform the church towards the theological leanings of this movement. He contended that apostolic networks encompassed 18 to 20 million people in Africa and Asia alone.[29] Radio host, author and apologist Michael Brown sometimes suggests that the claim of a cohesive NAR movement is a conspiracy theory comparable to common depictions of the Illuminati;[30] however, one clear evidence of the NAR's existence and maturation is the three-volume *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation*, written by Harold R. Eberle[31] with a foreword by Wagner. A movement certainly exists if it has its own systematic theology!

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23 'Wer wir sind', Schule der Erweckung, https://worldea.org/yourls/47231.

24 Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, 'Supporting a Global Community of School Leaders', https://worldea.org/yourls/47232.

25 BSSM Planting, 'School Planting Roadmap', 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/47233, 97–100.

26 C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 133; Wagner, 'The New Apostolic Reformation'; C. Peter Wagner, 'Goodbye, Theologians', *Ministry Today*, 31 December 2006, https://worldea.org/yourls/47234; Wagner, 'My Pilgrimage in Mission'.

27 Frank DeCenso, *God's Supernatural Power in You* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009), 80.

28 Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?* Kindle location 27.

29 Ahn. *Modern-Day Apostles*. 34–39. Ahn does not give numbers for the movement outside of Africa and Asia.

30 Michael Brown, 'Dispelling the Myths About NAR (the New Apostolic Reformation)', *Christian Post*, 3 May 2018, https://worldea.org/yourls/47235.

31 Harold R. Eberle, *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation: An Exposition in Father-Son Theology* (Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing, 2016).

After Wagner passed away in 2016, Ahn received Wagner's mantle, becoming chancellor of the Wagner Leadership Institute. Ahn is currently the leader of an apostolic network called Harvest International Ministry, which claims 'apostolic covering' for more than 25,000 affiliated ministries and organizations in over 65 nations.[32]

Wagner set up his leadership institute with no academic requirements for entrance, stating that the impartation of anointing, not the transmission of information, would be its main goal.[33] Wagner laid the foundation that Ahn continues to build on—namely, the teaching that the fundamental quality of an apostolic leader includes some mystical form of anointing with supernatural power.

Bill Johnson, the lead apostle at Bethel, seconds this approach to the transference of anointings and contends that Christ-like character can be developed only under some anointed leader, presumably an apostle.[34] Johnson directs his readers to come under a ministry like his or that of another NAR prophet or apostle, as the only way for Christ-like character to be fully developed. Furthermore, he takes an adversarial posture towards those who do not subscribe to this view of anointing. In one passage, he indicates that people have a religious spirit of the antichrist if they 'reject everything that has to do with the Holy Spirit's anointing'.[35]

The NAR's broad influence on evangelicals

This may sound like a fringe movement, but evangelicals should not underestimate its global influence. Much of the global growth in independent or 'postdenominational' churches has an NAR connection. Geivett and Pivec estimated that 66 million people have significant contact with NAR teachings, though only an estimated three million are part of NAR churches that explicitly embrace the apostolic paradigm.[36]

Bethel Church's musical endeavours are probably the NAR's leading global mouthpiece. Nearly every song released by Bethel Music has millions of YouTube views. Their channel has 4.5 million subscribers, and their more popular songs have 50 to 100 million views. When Bethel releases an album, it tops iTunes and other charts. These huge numbers testify to the church's following. Additionally, the NAR controls a large segment of video, music, radio and print media, such as Destiny Image, GOD TV and *Charisma* magazine, all of which have been purveyors of NAR content.

Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) is a global company that licenses Christian music for use by churches and other Christian organizations. As of September 2022, of the 10 songs most widely used through CCLI, eight were from NAR-related churches or artists.[37] Another just-completed study found that of 38 songs that made the top 25 for CCLI between 2010 and 2020, all but two had

32 'Harvest International Ministry—Changing Lives, Transforming Cities, Discipling Nations', https://worldea.org/yourls/47236.
33 Wagner, 'My Pilgrimage in Mission', 167.
34 Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), 108.
35 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 81.
36 Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?* Kindle location 31.
37 'CCLI—Christian Copyright Licensing International', https://worldea.org/yourls/47237.

originated from four NAR-oriented churches or organizations: Bethel, Hillsong, Passion City Church in Atlanta, and Elevation Church in North Carolina, USA. The researchers pointed out that only a few of the most popular songs talk about the cross or salvation, instead highlighting personal experience and blessing. They concluded that the theology of these four churches has deeply influenced the spiritual practices of many evangelical congregations.[38]

Out of respect for copyright law, I will not quote any Bethel or NAR lyrics directly here. However, Geivett and Pivec's book *Counterfeit Kingdom* commits a whole chapter to themes found in NAR music, such as 'calling down' prayer declarations, the idea that 'miracles start breaking out' by just opening your mouth, an imbalanced emphasis on miracles, modern-day resurrections, and 'open heavens'.[39] According to Geivett and Pivec, Bill Johnson instructs his worship leaders to write music anticipating what they want the church to believe and look like in five years, and to integrate those doctrinal perspectives so that the church will 'sing [their] way into it'.[40] The evangelical church, by singing Bethel and other NAR music, might inadvertently be singing their way into NAR beliefs.

Distinctives of NAR teaching, theology, and praxis

The most obvious distinctive of this movement, a heavy emphasis on apostolic and prophetic government, clearly dates back to Wagner, who taught courses in 2001 at Wagner Leadership Institute called 'Growth Dynamics of New Apostolic Churches'. The course revealed 'secrets of the fastest growing churches in all areas of the world, the New Apostolic Reformation churches. You will understand what the Bible means when it says that the foundation of the church is the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone.'[41] Numerous other courses at the institute addressed aspects of apostolic and prophetic ministry. Other common NAR themes covered in the institute's list of courses were deliverance, territorial spirits, spiritual mapping and generational curses.

The NAR tends to subscribe to the Seven Mountains Mandate (7MM), which teaches that the church should move into the seven spheres of culture and spread the dominion of Jesus by taking back territory that Satan usurped in the Fall. The seven mountains are government, media, family, business, education, church and

38 Bob Smietana, 'How Bethel and Hillsong Took Over Our Worship Sets', *Christianity Today*, 12 April 2023, https://worldea.org/yourls/47238; 'Study Methodology', *Worship Leader Research* (blog), version of 28 March 2023, https://worldea.org/yourls/47239.

39 R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom: The Dangers of New Revelation, New Prophets, and New Age Practices in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2022), 143–45. The NAR's 'open heavens' teaching refers to the idea that the heavens are opened and pouring the realities that exist in heaven onto earth. Bethel has a conference by this name each year. Bill Johnson has an eight-week online e-course also called 'Open Heavens'. A Hillsong composition called 'Open Heaven' promises signs, wonders, dreams, visions and revelations because Christians live under and are an open heaven.

40 Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 147.

41 Wagner Leadership Institute, 'WLI Tracks of Courses', 8 March 2001, https://worldea.org/yourls/47240.

the arts. Once these seven spheres are neatly controlled by the church, only then will Christ return to a victorious bride.[42]

NAR also retains Wagner's strong emphasis on the role of signs and wonders. Wagner initially teamed with John Wimber of the Vineyard movement to organize a December 1989 symposium at Fuller Seminary on how to integrate signs and wonders into missions curricula, thereby legitimizing 'power evangelism'.[43] Johnson claims, 'Without miracles, there can never be a full revelation of Jesus'[44] and 'Miracles provide the grace for repentance.'[45] According to Johnson and most NAR leaders, signs and wonders must accompany gospel proclamation or it is an incomplete gospel.

Extra-biblical revelation, primarily purported 'words of wisdom' from apostles and prophets, is frequent in NAR settings. Prophetic leaders in the NAR have come together to form 'prophetic councils', which assemble utterances accumulated from various sources within the broader movement that they deem prophetic in nature. The most influential of these councils worldwide is the Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders (ACPE), convened by Cindy Jacobs, which publishes a yearly compilation of prophetic utterances called the 'Word of the Lord'.[46]

A further example of NAR extra-biblical revelation is the commissioning of a new translation of the Bible called *The Passion Translation* (TPT). It was written by Brian Simmons and has been endorsed by NAR leaders Ahn and Johnson, among others.[47] The legitimacy of this one-person translation has been widely questioned, as unlike Eugene Peterson's *Message* paraphrase of the Bible, TPT introduces NAR theology into the biblical text. Respected biblical scholars have expressed the view that TPT should not be considered a faithful Bible translation.[48] Andrew G. Shead, a member of the New International Version's committee on Bible translation and head of the Old Testament and Hebrew department at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, commented:

> TPT is not just a new translation; it is a new text, and its authority derives solely from its creator. Like Joseph Smith and *The Book of Mormon*, Brian Simmons has created a new scripture with the potential to rule as canon over a new sect. ... TPT is not a Bible, and any church that treats it as such and receives it as canon will, by that very action, turn itself into an unorthodox sect. If the translation had been packaged as a commentary on Scripture I would not have needed to write this review; but to package it as Scripture is an offense against God. Every

42 Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?* Kindle location 196.

43 '"Signs and Wonders" Back in School?' *Christianity Today*, 13 January 1989, https://worldea.org/yourls/47241.

44 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 126.

45 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 127.

46 Generals International, 'Word of the Lord 2021', https://worldea.org/yourls/47242.

47 'A New Bible: The Passion Translation', https://worldea.org/yourls/47243.

48 BibleThinker, 'The Passion Project', https://worldea.org/yourls/47244. Academics who critiqued *The Passion Translation* included Tremper Longman, Nijay Gupta, Darrell L. Bock, Douglas Moo, Craig Blomberg and Bradley Bitner.

believer who is taught to treat it as the enscripturated words of God is in spiritual danger.[49]

Greek and Hebrew scholars have presented various examples of mistranslation in TPT that reflect NAR theology. In Galatians 2:14, TPT renders *aletheia* ('truth') as 'revelation of grace', consistent with the NAR belief that apostles and prophets can receive truth by revelation. Galatians 2:20 in TPT reads, 'My old identity has been co-crucified with Christ and no longer lives. And now the essence of this new life is no longer mine, for the Anointed One lives his life through me—*we live in union as one*! My new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves me so much that he gave himself for me, dispensing his life into mine!' Besides the verbosity of the translation, the emphasis on the believer and Christ being 'one' seems to be presented in such a way as to reduce the distinction between redeemed humans and the Son of God. Such an idea cannot be gleaned from the Greek or any other English translation.

The word 'activate' is not used in any of the main modern English translations of Romans 12:6, but Simmons inserts it there: 'God's marvelous grace imparts to each one of us varying gifts. So if God has given you the grace-gift of prophecy, *activate* your gift by using the proportion of faith you have to prophesy.' We have seen how a major tenet of the NAR is the activation of spiritual gifts at an apostolic center like Wagner's.

Simmons also incorporates other NAR buzzwords into his translation that do not appear in other modern English translations. The word 'realm' appears 196 times in TPT and none in the ESV. The word 'anointed' appears 223 times in TPT and only 15 times in the ESV. The word 'activate' appears 6 times in TPT and not at all in any other modern English translations. 'Supernatural' appears 37 times in TPT and not once in either the ESV, NKJV, NIV or NASB translations. Overall, Simmons inserts some 800 instances of NAR buzzwords that are not found in other English translations.

A theological response

One way to organize a theological critique of NAR and to grasp the extent to which it departs from evangelical orthodoxy is to apply the framework of evangelical historian and world-renowned scholar David Bebbington, who defines evangelical faith in terms of four distinctives: biblicism (authority and inspiration of the Bible), crucicentrism (priority of salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice), conversionism (priority of the Great Commission and personal conversion), and activism (priority of faith lived out in action).[50]

In the NAR, biblicism is undermined by the heavy emphasis on personal revelation, visions, dreams, impressions, impartations, manifestations and other novel

49 Andrew G. Shead, 'Burning Scripture with Passion: A Review of the Psalms (The Passion Translation)', *Themelios* 43, no. 1 (April 2018): 70.

50 David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–17.

means of receiving messages from God called 'downloads'.[51] Johnson hints at this shift from Scripture to other forms of revelation: 'None of us has a full grasp of scripture, but we all have the Holy Spirit. He is our common denominator who will always lead us into truth. But to follow him, we must be willing to follow off the map—to go beyond what we know.'[52] Johnson adds, 'When I treat the Bible as a road map, I live as though I can find my way through my own understanding of His book. I believe this perspective of scriptures actually describes living under the law, not living under grace.'[53] In another book he writes, 'Revelation is not something that you can dig out of a theological book or study guide. It's not even something you can unravel in the Bible all by yourself.'[54] Johnson expounds on what he calls 'greater revelation' that people can receive outside Scripture and suggests that those who do not seek such greater revelations might be deceived.[55] NAR leader Randy Clark likewise indicates that the canon of Scripture is not exclusively sufficient and that we need supernatural visitations for God to continue to communicate with man.[56]

Although Ahn acknowledges that the revelation modern-day apostles and prophets receive is not on a par with the biblical canon, he proceeds to treat them as practically equal to if not more authoritative than Scripture.[57] Ahn claims that God speaks directly to apostles and prophets regarding his will for the present or the future, by installing apostles over geographic areas and by releasing specific truths for apostolic strategies.[58]

Ahn's claims of a plethora of means by which God gives special revelation outside of his word do not align with the sufficiency of Scripture. In practice, NAR leaders make the Bible gratuitous and diminish Scripture's value in people's lives. The NAR's emphasis on new and special revelation displays that they disagree with the belief that the Scriptures alone are a sufficient source of God's revelation for faith and life. In Bebbington's description of biblicism, all essential spiritual truth is to be found in the pages of authoritative, inspired Scripture.

If asked, most NAR leaders would doubtless agree that the Bible is inspired and authoritative; however, this appears to be only lip service. Teachers cannot claim inerrancy or that the Bible is their ultimate authority while they teach mainly from revelations, visions, dreams, prophecies and other epistemological sources other than the Bible. For such a teacher, the Bible is neither inerrant nor an ultimate spiritual authority. Scripture must be the primary source of faith, teaching and practice for one to claim to be evangelical.

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51 Brian Simmons, interview with Sid Roth, https://worldea.org/yourls/47245. From 15:50 to 17:00, Simmons describes how Jesus gave him 'downloads', a 'computer chip' and the 'spirit of revelation' to help him translate the Bible and give him the secrets of Hebrew.

52 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*. 76.

53 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*. 93.

54 Bill Johnson, *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind: Access to a Life of Miracles* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005), 62–63.

55 Johnson, *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind*. 62.

56 Randy Clark, *There Is More: The Secret to Experiencing God's Power to Change Your Life* (Chosen Books, 2013), 84.

57 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 135.

58 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 136–37.

Bebbington's second characteristic, an emphasis on Christ's atonement for sin, similarly often seems to get little more than lip service. There are many NAR documentaries on street healings, such as 'Finger of God', that get millions of views on YouTube. Encounters in these films go something like this. An 'evangelist' approaches a stranger and asks him (or her) if he has some kind of pain. The person responds and says he has pain in his shoulder. The evangelist asks if he can pray for him. He lays his hands on the stranger and prays for him (making declarations for healing). The person indicates that he surprisingly feels better in some way. Then the evangelist says something to the effect of 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life', with nothing more of gospel substance to be said. This pattern of 'evangelism' is repeated by people in the NAR ad nauseam. I have yet to see one of these videos where the cross of Christ, repentance and faith in His name have been presented.

Again, if you would ask people of this movement whether they believe in Christ's death on the cross for our salvation, they would likely say yes, but it is not backed up in reality. One cannot claim that the cross is the centre of one's teaching and faith and yet never speak of it, nor call people to repent and put their faith in that atoning work.

As for Bebbington's third distinctive, the NAR seems to place high priority on conversion, but it is not converting people to faith in Christ to the degree that its leaders claim. In fact, they are undermining evangelical unity by intentionally subverting and taking over mainstream evangelical churches. For instance, a dozen churches in Germany, France and Switzerland have experienced hostile takeovers by this movement, along with countless others worldwide.[59] When a NAR takeover is enacted, the church leadership structures change, theology is altered, different practices are effectuated, and apostles and prophets are installed as leaders. Rather than conversion, the NAR tends to urge adherents to be 'swept up' into the kingdom. The NAR is drawing people to a wonderful, feelings-oriented experience, not to true conversion, and it is doing so in a divisive manner.

Activism is an area in which this movement takes great pride. NAR leaders claim that they are helping the poor, doing missions, going out into the street, doing good deeds and loving their neighbours. However, activism alone cannot identify evangelicalism. Many non-Christian sects are engaged in their communities, love their neighbours and give to the poor.

Turning to the NAR's key theological distinctive, its commitment to an apostolic and prophetic governmental paradigm, two critiques can be offered. First, there are no New Testament instructions regarding the qualifications or criteria for governing prophets and apostles, whereas explicit directions are given for the appointment and qualifications of pastors, elders, deacons and overseers (1 Tim 3:1–7; Tit 1:5–7; 1 Pet

59 Frank Liesen, 'Bethel Church: New Age Syncretism and the Quest for an Evangelical Response in Germany', July 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/47246. The German Free Evangelical Church issued an open letter condemning the takeover of G5/MeineKirche by Awakening Europe and Bethel missionary Ben Fitzgerald. G5/MeineKirche subsequently left the denomination in January 2023. I have had contact with at least a dozen churches across Europe where a NAR takeover of a church is being instigated. I have counselled some churches on avoiding such takeovers, but most takeover efforts appear to have been successful. See also Holly Pivec, 'Is Vineyard Anaheim Going NAR?' 11 April 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/47247.

5:1–2; Acts 20:17, 28). Second, the church fathers did not claim such titles. For example, Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, but he did not identify himself as an apostle. The immediate generation after the apostles did not take unto themselves the governmental office of apostle or prophet; rather, they spurned such titles. If the office of apostle or prophet were meant to have been carried on as a governing role, then the generation immediately after the apostles would have done so. Therefore, the New Testament apostles were exclusive. These two arguments display that the office of apostle and prophet were not designed by God to be offices in perpetuity.

Another source of theological deviation within the NAR is the espousal of Open Theism, which teaches that humans (and angels) can be considered morally responsible only if they possess ultimate self-determination. This philosophy precludes God's ability to recognize or determine any of their future free actions. The most striking deviation of Open Theism from traditional Christianity is its rejection of the teaching that God possesses exhaustive and definitive foreknowledge.[60] Wagner claimed that he was 'theologically born again' when he read and embraced Open Theism.[61] Many evangelicals have perceived this perspective as a significant departure from evangelical orthodoxy, which holds that God is omniscient and possesses complete knowledge of past, present and future events. The Open Theists' rejection of God's exhaustive foreknowledge can have far-reaching implications for their understanding of theological concepts such as the nature of God's sovereignty and the other immutable characteristics of God's nature. This diminishing of the sovereignty of God in the NAR leads to an overemphasis on individual responsibility for the spread of the gospel and the introduction of God's kingdom. In my dealings with people who have left the NAR, this openness perspective has led to exhaustion, disillusionment and even despair when NAR adherents' efforts did not produce perceived or desired results.

Wagner's understanding and application of the Great Commission was driven by an emphasis on pragmatic results. He sought to create disciples by any means necessary, and Open Theism served those means. This theology provides the basis for teachers such as Bill Johnson to say such perplexing things like 'God doesn't control everything. He's in charge of everything.'[62]

Another theological aberration that is common in the NAR is dominionism, or Kingdom Now theology. Dominionism is the view that believers are to reestablish God's dominion by subduing the enemy. Because Adam and Eve did not correctly subdue Satan, supposedly that dominion was lost to Satan in the fall.[63] Apostles can

60 John Piper, Justin Taylor and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 11. Open Theism was hotly debated within the Evangelical Theological Society, and numerous prominent theologians contributed chapters to this book opposing it.

61 C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! Your Role in Bringing Heaven to Earth* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2022), 80–82.

62 Bill Johnson, 'The Sovereignty of God', 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/47248.

63 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 153. Ahn misrepresents the word *kabash* in Genesis 1:28 to mean 'subdue the enemy'. *Kabash* means to subdue, bring into bondage, violate or subjugate. Not once is

restore the dominion and authority that Satan seized by bringing the realities of heaven to earth.[64] Furthermore, dominionism teaches that only when we have ushered in the kingdom of God through reestablishing dominion will Christ return to a unified, mature and glorious bride.[65] If we take this teaching to its logical conclusion, then we should strive for a theocratic government before Jesus can return to earth. (Some NAR figures in the United States may have taken this step, as reflected in their 'prophetic' endorsements of Donald Trump and their apparent closeness to Christian nationalism.) NAR leaders frequently use the motto 'on earth as it is in heaven', by which they mean that the role of an apostle is to align the church so as to bring the realities and culture of heaven to earth and establish the dominion that God originally desired.[66]

But this view runs contrary to biblical convictions regarding God's sovereign rule. Christ has not relinquished his authority to Satan or any other created being. The Dutch Reformed philosopher and prime minister Abraham Kuyper said, 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!"'[67] NAR dominionists distort the biblical concepts of dominion and God's sovereignty, whereas Kuyper held a balanced view of dominion.[68]

Conclusion

In a 2006 article titled 'Goodbye, Theologians', Peter Wagner advocated for doing away with the term 'theologian'. He wrote:

> Let's stop submitting our theology and practice to the scrutiny of an office that isn't even biblical. Let's do away with the term 'theologian'. Why? The idea that certain members of the body of Christ are theologians while the rest are non-theologians is traditional thinking embedded in the old wineskins of the church. Those called to lead the church and to equip the saints for the work of ministry are called apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (see Eph. 4:11).

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it translated as 'subdue the enemy'. Ahn changes the meaning of the text to imply that God's creation mandate included subduing Satan. This then forms the basis for his whole view of dominionism, according to which we were meant to have dominion and authority over Satan but lost that dominion in the Fall, and the church and apostles are responsible for reclaiming it.

64 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 153–54.

65 Pietsch, 'The Impact of Open Theism on C. Peter Wagner's Philosophy of Discipleship', 107, 153. Pietsch describes how three NAR leaders, including Wagner and Eberle, taught a 'victorious eschatology', teaching that the church will rise in 'unity, maturity, and glory before the return of Jesus'.

66 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 23, 39.

67 Abraham Kuyper and James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 488.

68 For a more detailed understanding of Kuyper's view, especially on Christian engagement in politics, see Abraham Kuyper and Harry Van Dyke, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015). Kuyper was a founder of a political party, a university and a Reformed denomination; the Prime Minister of the Netherlands; and an incredibly prolific author on diverse subjects. Kuyper is a faithful source for Christians as we seek to understand and engage culture.

> Theologians are not on the list. In fact, the word 'theologian' isn't even in the concordance.[69]

These words should be provocative and problematic to the whole evangelical world, including the World Evangelical Alliance. Wagner wants to do away with the office of theologian, but I am not aware of anyone who advocates for an 'office of theologian'. Wagner's words are an appeal for the replacement of our indispensable theologians and teachers at institutions around the world by apostles and prophets.

Wagner continued to deconstruct the denominational structures that he thought did not belong to the 'new wineskins'. He wrote:

> Such is not true, however, among the churches moving in the stream of the New Apostolic Reformation. We do not have an ecclesiastical office of theologian, nor do we have recognized functional equivalents. We do not agree that an elite group of individuals who happen to have advanced academic degrees in theology should be recognized as our doctrinal police force. ... In an apostolic network the person in charge of maintaining the DNA of the network is the lead apostle, who consults with those he or she chooses and no one else. ... My point is that mature, distinguished, professional theologians can, and often will, quench the Holy Spirit if the Holy Spirit happens to pull them out of their comfort zones.[70]

Wagner concluded his article by advocating for the replacement of the term 'theologian' with the 'office of apostle-teacher' for the church to receive the new wine.

Evangelicals must ask themselves if they are willing to be replaced by the apostles and prophets of the NAR. If theologians and global evangelical leaders are not alert and responsive to the activities of this movement, they may discover one day that the NAR and its broad-reaching scope have subverted their institutions, churches, mission organizations and schools, just as has already happened to congregations in Europe. Do we wish to be supplanted by a deviant, non-evangelical in actual practice, and unscriptural movement?

This moment in church history is not unlike the threat posed by Arianism to the church around the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. It may be a threat to evangelical orthodoxy that could redefine us all. To preserve evangelical biblical orthodoxy, we must stay vigilant; otherwise, theological entropy takes hold. This has been the pattern across church history; it could happen to us too. Evangelicalism could wake up one day and discover that it is no longer what it once was.

69 Wagner, 'Goodbye, Theologians'.
70 Wagner, 'Goodbye, Theologians'.

ERT (2023) 47:2, 146–157

The Global Apostolic Movement and the Progress of the Gospel

Joseph Mattera

The controversy over the New Apostolic Reformation (see previous article) can overshadow a different, more biblically grounded approach to mobilizing 'apostles' and 'prophets' strategically in church planting in mission. These excerpts from apostolic leader Joseph Mattera's recent book present the biblical basis and positive potential of this approach, along with insightful distinctions between true and false apostles and challenges facing the church in Latin America, Africa and the USA.

The way of the apostles regarding the making of a disciple

Paul instructed his protégé, Timothy, regarding the attitudinal and capacity criteria for selecting a potential disciple to invest in (2 Tim 2:1–7). Discipleship is tough. Disciples have to have the attitude and diligence of a soldier, athlete, and hard-working farmer. They also have to be faithful, capable, and able to communicate the gospel clearly to others.

Paul did not initially set out to plant churches but to plant the gospel by making disciples. When he entered new territory, he either looked for disciples and/or made disciples (Acts 19:1).

Acts 14:21–23, 28 illustrates the methodology Paul used to plant churches by first making disciples. It seems that the basic pattern Paul used regarding the establishment of churches was as follows:

1. Whenever he entered a city, he preached the gospel and either found or made disciples.
2. He planted a church community, based on his discipleship pattern, from the disciples he made.
3. He chose certain mature men to be elders whom he set as overseers of the church.
4. He left the church in the care of these elders and planted another church in a new city (usually a key strategic city of influence).
5. The churches he founded partnered in the gospel with him by supporting him financially and sending key representatives to accompany him on his

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apostolic missions (Phil 1:5 and 4:14–19 regarding financial support; Phil 2:25–30 related to ministerial support).

6. He then visited these churches again to see how they were doing (Acts 15:36).

If he could not personally see them, he would send a member of his apostolic team to be with them and help strengthen them in their faith (1 Thess 3:1–6).

Generally, we see the Pauline pattern repeat itself in every city and in every one of his missionary trips. The Ephesian church planted other churches in Asia Minor (Acts 19; Rev 2–3). The Corinthian church was used by Paul as a hub of influence to reach the regions beyond (Acts 18:1–11; 2 Cor 10:12–18). The Thessalonian church sounded out the word of the Lord to all of Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 17:1–9; 1 Thess 1:7–8). This pattern—to evangelize cities, make disciples, plant new churches, set in elders to oversee each of the churches, and connect each of the churches through key churches in strategic cities (like Ephesus), who became hubs of influence and church planting throughout their region—was paramount in the continuation of the establishment of Christ's Kingdom.

This stands in stark contrast with many of today's church leaders, whose focus is on planning huge events, planting more churches divorced from the hard work of disciple-making. The fact is that when the goal is to merely plant a church, the main objective would be to gather a big crowd and build big buildings to house the masses. However, if the goal is to make disciples, then the focus would be to create a Jesus community whose goal would be to establish Christ's Kingdom and not man's. This community would inevitably become a significant church whose culture would be based on discipline, love, service, and missions.

The apostles brought together the kerygma [proclamation] and the didache [teaching]

[Editor's note: Mattera uses 'didache' to refer to the teachings contained in the New Testament epistles, not the non-canonical book commonly referred to by that name.]

Throughout the book of Acts, we see how the kerygma and the didache were necessary for the establishment of the churches. In Acts 10:34–38 Peter preached the gospel (kerygma) to a group of Gentiles gathered in the home of Cornelius. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and Paul's sermon in Acts 13 (both to Jewish people) were very similar in content. In Acts 11:26 we see that the apostles taught the believers for an entire year (didache). The apostles rigorously protected the gospel and its application in the didache, as well as the unity of their movement of churches. This was demonstrated in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The apostles and the first-century church were so successful in regard to spreading the gospel that Paul was able to say that it went to all of the known worlds in his lifetime (Col 1:6).

Some historians have estimated that by AD 100, the gospel had spread to nearly every Roman province and region. Up until AD 50, the focal point of the church was Jerusalem and Samaria; however, within the next 50 years, the major concentration of the church was in Rome and Ephesus. The primary way the gospel spread was no longer the synagogue or the temple (Acts 1–6), but through house churches (Col 4:15; Rom 16:5; Acts 20:20).

Regarding the apostle Paul, who was the focus of the Acts narrative (after chapter 11), he seemed to have a strategic plan of preaching the gospel to all the major cities and regions within his reach. We see this with a culmination of him reaching Rome through Spain (Rom 15:19–23). It is no accident that the book of Acts ends with Paul in a Roman prison, preaching the gospel unhindered (28:30–31).

In summary, the church that was founded on the day of Pentecost obeyed the mandate given by Jesus in Acts 1:8–9, by going into all the known world. They accomplished this impossible task of reaching the world. Their strategy was not to set up Bible colleges, mission agencies, and para-church organizations, but by making Spirit-empowered disciples who would form strong, established local churches. These local churches would unite and form complex apostolic networks with resourcing from stronger hub churches in strategic cities. The local churches would also remain connected with the founding apostles by financially supporting them and sending them men to serve as co-laborers on their missionary teams.

Through this pattern of apostolic connection, each congregation would always ensure that they would retain a global focus even though the church had a local focus. Vice versa, the apostolic leaders, like Paul, ensured that they retained their local influence by setting up church elders, while they continued their global missionary endeavours of spreading the gospel. As a result, the churches continued to exist after the earthly departure of the original apostles because they successfully passed the baton of leadership to the elders they chose from among the disciples (Acts 20:17–34). Also, Paul kept his legacy alive by instructing two of his primary apostolic protégés, as evidenced in his later epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus).

Debunking opposition to apostolic ministry today

Throughout the years there has been much opposition to the restoration of apostolic ministry. Having been educated in noncharismatic Bible institutes and universities, I have a very good understanding of those who misunderstand the global restoration of the fivefold ministry gifts as seen in Ephesians 4:11. As a result, the so-called New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) has received some critical analysis from various leaders in the body of Christ. Such a critique of the NAR is much needed and important.

One valuable resource that I recommend is a book written by two solid Christian scholars, R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec. The helpful book, *A New Apostolic Reformation?*[1] gives honest and scholarly insights into the high-profile NAR leaders, while examining their teachings. Whether a person agrees with the book's conclusions or not, it behooves all those related in some way to the so-called NAR to examine their critiques in light of Scripture. Such examination is necessary as any move, old or new, within the body of Christ should always seek to comport biblically and recalibrate when necessary.

1 R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014).

Is the apostolic an office or a function?

Some in the NAR are calling the ministry of apostle a present-day church office instead of a function. Geivett and Pivec agree with the official definition of the Assemblies of God:

> The AG governing body holds that many people in the church today fulfill the ongoing 'ministry functions' of apostles. It allows for individual Assemblies of God churches to identify certain leaders as 'Apostles' provided they recognize that those leaders are not equal in authority to the original 'foundational apostles'. It argues that the foundational apostles were commissioned directly by the risen Lord not only to preach the gospel, as present day apostles do, but also to perform specific, unique roles in founding the church, including overseeing the writing of Scripture. (Geivett and Pivec, 39)

I would agree with their perspective on this matter. Regarding the use of the word 'office' to describe the apostolic ministry, I would suggest that some clarification be brought to this. Those who are against the term 'office' are concerned because of the confusion it elicits as it seems to refer to Acts 1:20. The original group of 12 apostles' use of the term as an 'office' was understandable because they were the pillars of the body of Christ for the ensuing future (Eph 2:20). However, even if this particular passage in Acts (which is quoted from Psalms) referred to the apostolic as an 'office', I would argue that it should be used as a function and not an office, since that is how the New Testament seemed to define it. (Paul was referred to as an apostle, not the 'apostle Paul'. See Gal 1:1; Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1.)

Strategic-level spiritual warfare

Another area of agreement I have with Geivett and Pivec is their concern when it comes to the practice of strategic-level spiritual warfare within the NAR. 'Strategic level spiritual warfare is the act of confronting powerful evil spirits that are believed to rule specific geographical regions, cultural groups, and societal institutions. These spirits are called "territorial spirits" because they control different territories or cultural spheres' (Geivett and Pivec, 132). The belief is that these spirits must be demolished over a city or region in order to see a release of the power of God over the said location. It is common for many intercessors in the so-called NAR to identify and name principalities and powers ruling over a city. If this is accomplished through prayer, 'Then entire nations of people will respond en masse to the gospel and the church will reach the greatest harvest of souls in history' (Geivett and Pivec, 132). Practices such as spiritual mapping are also used. 'Spiritual mapping is the practice of researching a specific city or nation to discover the ways territorial spirits hinder the spread of the gospel in that particular geographical region' (Geivett and Pivec, 143).

Personally, I have never agreed with this teaching, even after reading numerous books and attending countless conferences where this was taught. For one, I have never read one instance in Scripture where any of the apostles prayed against a principality by name.

It is true that many instances of evil spirits being cast out were recorded in the Scriptures. Jesus and the apostles dealt with demonic entities that possessed

individuals. For instance, Jesus named a spirit of infirmity when he healed a lady as noted in Luke 13; Jesus also cast out a legion of demons as we see in Mark chapter 5; Paul the apostle cast out a spirit of divination as we see in Acts 16, etc. However, there are no New Testament Scriptures that indicate any of these demons were the kind of high-level principalities that influenced nations and empires, as we observe in Daniel chapters 10–12.

In the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles primarily focused on preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, planting churches and casting out demons. As a result, we observe that eventually, the whole city and surrounding regions were transformed. In the narrative shown in Acts 19:27, there is no indication that Paul focused on confronting the ruling principality (which seemed to be the goddess, Artemis) of the city.

Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the gospel door to door and heal the sick. Even when Jesus said he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven, there was not one commandment from Jesus to name demonic deities and pray against them. The practice of naming principalities and warring against them in intercession, as the so-called NAR teaches, was not employed by the disciples of Jesus, yet the power of the devil was broken over the cities as the disciples preached the Gospel (Lk 10:1–20).

Proponents of strategic-level spiritual warfare often cite Paul's statement in Ephesians 6:12, where he states that 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities.' They point to that as evidence that Paul engaged with high-level demonic entities directly. However, there is nothing in the text, nor in the letter to the Ephesians, nor in the Acts 19 narrative of the birth of the Ephesian church, that comports with their methodology of naming and resisting principalities and powers directly.

I tend to agree with the authors' conclusions that practicing strategic spiritual warfare the way their NAR brothers do is not something that the body of Christ needs to embrace. 'We see no indication that Christians have been given the authority or responsibility to engage territorial spirits directly. ... Since there is no biblical basis for confronting territorial spirits directly, there also is no basis for spiritual mapping projects that seek to aid such confrontations through the identification of territorial spirits' (Geivett and Pivec, 143).

It should be noted that the authors are not against spiritual mapping per se, or those who seek to only identify ruling spirits in a region. The task of spiritual mapping is a simple attempt to create spiritual profiles of cities and nations to provide a guide to pray.

Were there apostles after the original 12?

The fact of the matter is, in addition to the original 12 apostles of Jesus, there were numerous people either cited as apostles or who were sent as apostles in the New Testament.

During the days of the early church, the word 'apostle' was a common word used to denote a person sent on official business to represent another person, nation or government. Hence, when Jesus designated the original 12 disciples as apostles, the connotation was that they were being sent out to represent Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

We read in Luke 10:1 that Jesus sent out (*apesteilen*) another 70 people. Thus, apostolic ministry expanded to a total of 82 disciples. Furthermore, there were others recognized as apostles besides those already cited:

- Apollos (1 Cor 4:6–13)
- Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25; 'messenger' is *apostolos* in the Greek)
- James, the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19)
- Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor 9:5, 6)
- Andronicus (Rom 16:7)
- Junia (Rom 16:7)
- Titus (2 Cor 8:23; 'messenger' is *apostolos* in the Greek)
- An unnamed brother (2 Cor 8:18, 22, 23)
- Silas and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; 2:6)

Consequently, this indicates that the apostolic ministry was not only not limited to the original 12 apostles, but that the ministry was meant to continue until the fulness of time (when Christ returns bodily a second time). To this, the apostle Paul alludes in Ephesians 4:11–13. He says all five cluster gifts will continue until the unity of the faith and until the church comes to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, and to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. Obviously, since this has not happened yet, we can expect God to continue to manifest these ministry gifts on the earth.

Because Scripture says that the apostolic must continue until the fulness of time, it must be taken seriously. Paul's teachings in Ephesians anticipate the apostolic age to commence with, but not end with, the original 12 apostles.

Contrasts between true and false apostolic leaders

In the context of this writing, false apostles are ones who have wrong motives in ministry. It doesn't mean they are not Christians; rather, it could be that they may be immature or a carnal or ambitious leader.

1. True apostolic leaders edify the church and promote God's kingdom. The counterfeits use the church to build their own platform and enhance its own empire. All false leaders are only committed to that which benefits themselves.

2. True apostolic leaders live to serve others. Counterfeits have an entitlement mentality and use their ecclesial title to be served. True biblical leaders exhibit brokenness and humility; hence their primary function is as a servant leader. The false apostle attracts naive sycophants in his desire to get ahead in life by having people serve him. These sycophants are guilty of idolatry since they often tolerate it when their leader objectifies others for the sake of building their apostolic empire.

3. Mature, biblical apostolic leaders nurture Christ-followers. The counterfeits only point people back to themselves. The true apostolic leaders are motivated to guide people towards becoming mature saints who look like Jesus (Col 1:28, 29). The counterfeit seeks to draw masses to himself. This can be evidenced in their promotions and branding which orbits around them as an apostolic leader or man of God. Counterfeits are motivated to produce faithful, committed, loyal followers who will

live to serve them. They draw disciples onto themselves and not to Jesus (see Acts 20:30).

4. True apostolic leaders desire to have the influence to bring glory to Christ (Is 42:8). They often risk their own monetary stability in order to advance gospel movements. The counterfeits use their platform of ministry merely for monetary gain. The counterfeits don't even begin an endeavour if they calculate it will not turn a profit. They even endeavour to get 'spiritual sons' in the faith for the express purpose of getting their tithe (hence the primary motivation is finances rather than pouring into their lives).

5. True apostolic leaders sacrifice their life for the sheep. The counterfeits sacrifice the sheep for themselves since they only have one agenda—their own benefit! They will even hurt people to get ahead.

6. True apostolic leaders edify others. Christ-like apostolic leaders are committed to the success of others and make room for them to grow and flourish. The counterfeits use their authority to tear down others. This is contrary to the New Testament pattern (2 Cor 13:10). Those who get ahead by attacking and slandering their peers whom they deem their competition are false apostles.

7. True apostolic leaders uplift pastors and churches. The counterfeits usurp the authority of pastors and their churches. I know many apostolic leaders who live to serve and equip pastors and churches but I have also observed a small minority who work at undermining the authority of local pastors. Unfortunately, I have had firsthand experience with this. In the late 1980s, a false apostolic leader was brought in to help our church. He initially gained our trust but eventually attempted to undermine my authority as the lead pastor. He worked directly with our church elders behind my back to garner their allegiance to him, thereby compromising their loyalty to me. Eventually, the elders saw right through him and voted to distance ourselves from him.

8. True apostles are accountable. False apostles are unaccountable. Any apostolic leader who refuses to be accountable or be corrected regarding his life, ministry or questionable teachings is functioning as a false apostle.

9. True apostolic leaders work through teams and show apostolic fruit. The counterfeits usually work alone and lack fruit in their ministry.

Those who operate as a lone ranger without working through teams for maximum effect are either insecure, immature or, even worse, are functioning as a counterfeit apostle. Of course, there are many fine and sincere leaders who are not good at delegation and only have the capacity to operate a church like a mom-and-pop shop. However, those with true apostolic abilities usually are gifted in working through teams. Team leadership is exhibited in the Acts narrative and demonstrated by Paul. Hence, to be a true apostle, one must have a propensity to raise up and work through a community of leaders. Such leadership collectively bears much fruit and can be described as apostolic. A refusal to delegate and build teams can keep one from walking in their apostolic calling and gift.

10. True apostolic leaders point the church back to the original 12 apostles of Christ. The counterfeits posture themselves as equal to the New Testament apostles. Consequently, any time a person puts themselves or their teaching on the same level of any of the original 12 apostles, they are prone to heresy and are dangerous.

The original apostles of the Lamb became the plumbline, as well as the foundation for the rest of us, according to Ephesians 2:20. In light of this, all the saints throughout church history are called to point back to the original 12 (including Paul) as their primary reference point for ministry. It should be noted that some of the New Testament writers such as Luke, Mark, James, and Jude were never noted among the original 12 apostles of the Lamb but were close companions of those in proximity to them. For example, Luke was Paul's fellow worker (2 Tim 4:11); Mark was the spiritual son of the apostle Peter (1 Pet 4:13) and may have merely written the Gospel of Mark based on what Peter dictated to him. Jude was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus and the apostle James (Mt 13:55; Jude 1:1); James was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus (Mt 13:55). Apostolic leaders who describe themselves as equal to or lift themselves above the original apostles of Jesus are false apostles and not to be followed.

11. True apostolic leaders base their teaching on the Scriptures. Counterfeits either wrest the Scriptures exegetically or base their teaching on subjective experience. Thus, whenever a leader consistently bases their teachings solely on extra-biblical experiences (personal visions, dreams, writings, prophecies) instead of on the sacred writings of both the Old and New Testament, they are in dangerous territory; they are setting themselves up to be a counterfeit that will potentially deceive many. This is especially problematic when a so-called apostle gets 'revelation' from God that they claim is an extra chapter or book of the Bible or that they received instruction directly from one of the saints in heaven rather than from God. Such leaders are to be avoided because eventually these so-called extra-biblical revelations may contradict or be in competition with the Bible (e.g. the Book of Mormon). At the end of the day, only the Scriptures can be fully trusted as inspired by God.

12. True apostolic leaders nurture sons in the faith. The counterfeits produce orphans. Unfortunately, I have seen counterfeit apostles leave a path of destruction behind their ministry as they use, abuse and orphan their followers whom they refer to as their 'sons' and whom they abandon after they get what they wanted from them.

13. True apostolic leaders walk with God. The counterfeits walk in the flesh (Gal 5:16–23). A so-called apostle who consistently walks in the flesh by losing his temper, cursing, slandering, or berating staff lacks the fruit of the Spirit; he disqualifies himself according to the leadership standards set up by Paul the apostle in 1 Timothy 3:1–12 and Titus 1:2. Jesus said in regard to false prophets that you will know them by their fruit (Mt 7:20).

14. True apostolic leaders proclaim biblical doctrine. Counterfeits teach heretical doctrine. By heretical, I am referring to any doctrine or teaching condemned by the New Testament writers as well as the early church councils (e.g. Nicea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, Ephesus, etc.). Jude 3 speaks about the obligation we have as believers to earnestly contend for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints. True apostolic leaders uphold this biblical faith. The false apostles promote that which contradicts cardinal doctrines such as salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Christ; the deity and Lordship of Jesus over all; the need for all people to go through Jesus for eternal salvation; the reality of heaven, hell and eternity; and the triune Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When an apostolic leader deviates from any of the cardinal doctrines. they are a false apostle. Paul even said that if we or an angel preach any other gospel than the one they originally received, let them be eternally condemned (Gal 1:8). The church should have the courage to test those who claim to be apostles so we can discern between the true and the false, and thereby be able to bless, build and protect the body of Christ.

The challenge of adopting nuances of the prevailing cultural values of a nation that are anti-biblical

The apostolic movement is not exempt from making the same mistakes the rest of the body of Christ makes. It must not succumb to imposing upon the Scriptures, church practice or leadership style an interpretation that emanates from the surrounding culture. Instead, it must see through the lens of Scripture as the movement gains momentum. This is a great challenge as it relates to truly advancing the agenda of the Kingdom of God instead of perpetuating the agenda of a leader who may have certain cultural blind spots.

Challenges in Latin America

For example, in Latin America, I have observed within some apostolic leaders what I term 'the conquistador spirit'. This displays itself when an apostolic leader uses the message of the apostolic movement or the kingdom of God to build his own kingdom. This is historically in line with the conquistadors from Spain and Portugal who conquered and ruled with an iron fist what are known presently as the nations in South and Central America. Often their conquering was done in the service of the Roman Catholic Pope, which resulted in forced conversions to the Christian faith. Since Latin America is a continent that has a Catholic paradigm, this view of ruling in the name of a church of God can be easily accepted. This is because embedded in the culture are strong 'alpha male' type leaders who mimic this cultural construct, as opposed to the meek lowly servant approach of the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles.

Consequently, I have seen very strong autocratic leadership exhibited among many Latin American apostolic leaders who often rule like a Spanish or Portuguese general instead of an empowering servant leader, who pulls opinions from the bottom up while teaching their people the skill of critical thinking. This autocratic style of leadership tends to create followers rather than self-empowered leaders. Another unfortunate consequence of this kind of spirit among apostolic leaders is the tendency to become extremely territorial and competitive with other apostolic-type leaders. This makes any attempt at uniting the apostolic church in a nation or region very difficult, since many of the leaders of the largest and most influential churches and movements may not want to surrender any of their authority over to other leaders.

Thankfully, some significant developments with regard to apostolic unity have started taking place within Latin America. CoiCom, led by Arnold Enns, is an annual conference of apostolic leaders and pastors. It brings together several thousand people from various nations of Latin America for the purpose of education and edification. I have had the privilege of preaching in at least three of these conventions in

nations like Honduras and the Dominican Republic. There is another significant movement afoot in Colombia, with apostolic leaders like Hector Pardo. Within the past decade, he has been bringing together some of the top church and workplace leaders for the purpose of societal transformation. I have also heard of great movements of unity among apostolic leaders in the evangelical church in certain parts of Argentina which are being led by a great servant leader, Gustavo Lara. Apostle Gustavo galvanized over 60 movement leaders of networks with over 1,000 churches from all over Latin America.

These gatherings are held annually in Panama City, Panama as well as in Buenos Aires, Argentina and other parts of Latin America. In September 2019, I was privileged to speak at their Buenos Aires meetings to approximately 500 leaders. My friend, Yasser Rivas, who leads a megachurch in Santiago, Dominican Republic, also has tremendous influence. He convenes hundreds of leaders from all over the Spanish-speaking world. I once spoke at a stadium event he convened in Santiago that had approximately 7,000 people with hundreds of pastors in attendance. More can be mentioned about what God is doing in Latin America; there are definite signs of hope as more and more apostolic leaders are embracing the biblical pattern of the way of Christ and his apostles.

Challenges in the continent of Africa

In my travels and interactions with key African apostolic leaders in the International Council of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL), they tell me that the biggest challenge they have with regard to uniting the body of Christ in their regions is 'the tribal territorial spirit'. Of course, this refers to the tribalism embedded in their culture as is evident when a strong tribal leader claims a certain territory for him and his tribe, over and against other tribal leaders and their tribes. Unfortunately, this permeates the church, resulting in extreme autocratic leadership among many apostolic leaders who have not yet discerned the difference between the lens of worldly cultural leadership and the way of Jesus and his apostles.

Another huge challenge in Africa is syncretism. Numerous conversations with African apostolic leaders have revealed that it is common to mix tribal African cultural and religious practices with Christianity. Unfortunately, the practice of polygamy, magic, forms of witchcraft, ancestor worship and Judaism are sometimes found in rural, biblically illiterate churches and movements.

Another huge challenge in the apostolic church of Africa is the embrace of the so-called prosperity gospel, which many of their leaders copied from televangelists from the USA. The focus on wealth creation, equating financial prosperity with great faith, as well as viewing wealth as a blessing from God, has made many African preachers rich while their congregations remain relatively poor. However, some signs of hope are evident.

One of my apostolic leader friends, Bishop Arnold Muwange of Kampala, Uganda, gathers thousands of pastors together twice a year to feed them the Word of God and literally feeds them meat from a cow he slaughters just for this event. My local church was honored to partner with Bishop Muwange to help build an extension of an orphanage, Kampala Children's Home. This orphanage provides education for 300 children and houses approximately 150 orphans. Other African pastors,

like Apostle Joseph Adefarasin of Lagos, Nigeria, lead a large network of 500 pastors that reaches beyond Lagos to the city of Abujah. In 2014, I taught in both cities of Nigeria in 2014 to approximately 700 pastors and leaders from the church-place and marketplace.

Apostle Joseph Adefarasin is one of the humblest, Kingdom-focused leaders I have ever met. His approach to leadership is a great model for the entire continent of Africa. Additionally, apostles Thamo Naidoo and Sagie Govendar are two incredible servant leaders in South Africa. Naidoo conducts 'apostolic tables' in North America, Europe, Africa and Latin America where apostolic leaders and pastors are inculcated with a pure New Testament pattern of the way of Christ and his apostles. In 2015, I spoke for him in Johannesburg, to over 3,000 leaders from all over the continent of Africa.

Dr. Govendar, who is a medical doctor, convenes 500 pastors twice per week in the city of Durban, South Africa. It is the greatest example of 'one church/one city' I have ever witnessed in my life. His church never grows beyond 100 people because he is constantly sending out leaders to plant other churches in his city and nation.

Apostolic challenges in the USA

There are many challenges with apostolic leadership in North America, especially when measured against the New Testament pattern of the way of Christ and his apostles. I will mention just a few that I deal with all on a recurring basis:

1. The far-right nationalistic spirit or far-left-leaning apostolic leaders espousing the apostolic kingdom message. People who fall into this category tend to mix their faith with the conservative Republican Party or left-leaning Democratic party. This violates the concern of Jesus when He warned the disciples about the 'leaven of Herod' (Mk 8:15). The challenge with this position is that sometimes apostolic leaders can be exuberant over a political victory while at the same time neglecting to fulfill the Great Commission. Often, the churches they participate in are not reproducing disciples, planting churches or extending the mission of Jesus in accordance with the Acts narrative of Luke. Consequently, when we wrap Christianity in the flag of any nation, we tend to equate said nation with the Kingdom of God while at the same time alienating unchurched and churched people who may not agree with our political ideology. This was not the focus, nor the way of Christ as demonstrated in the Gospels.

When Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world (Jn 18:36, 37), he was making a clear distinction between the Kingdom of God and the nations of this world. The apostle Peter even states that the church is actually a 'holy nation' set apart for God (1 Pet 2:8, 9). Although I believe the church should speak prophetically to nations and cultures, I also do not believe that the focus or loyalty to a nation should transcend the focus towards edifying the body of Christ. I have seen this nationalistic spirit cause the body of Christ in the USA to ignore the global expression of the Church as well as the needs of the greater body of Christ. Many, if not most, apostolic leaders in the USA have no clue what is happening in the other continents of the world.

One reason for this is that the majority of American citizens are well provided for, and also because the US is so big, we tend to only care about what goes on in our

nation. This is why groups like ICAL are so important for church leaders in the USA as they help bring understanding to the global context of the apostolic movement. In contrast to the US, when I travel abroad to China, Malaysia, the Middle East, Eastern and Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Latin America and even Canada, most people are more informed about the major political and economic issues they face as a nation. In addition to this, most people in other parts of the world, especially Europe, speak more than one language, including English. At the same time, most living in the USA (unless they are recent immigrants) speak only English. This aids in the lack of global understanding most Americans have. This ignorance has also spilled over into much of the apostolic movement.

2. Another challenge for the North American apostolic movement is the 'CEO corporate' leadership culture, with an emphasis on church growth. This has resulted in apostolic leaders mimicking the leadership principles of men like Tony Robbins, Steve Jobs, Jack Welch, etc. The problem with this is that many of the principles of leadership are caricatures of the American cultural dream more than a Christocentric model. This has led to churches treating their congregation like a business instead of the New Testament model of the family (1 Tim 5:1–2). It objectifies people, as people are used just to further the vision and mission of the church, instead of being seen as a valuable image-bearer of Christ. It also focuses more on programs that would attract and keep people in their church, rather than focusing on doing life with people with the goal of maturing them into Christ-followers.

3. Another theological and cultural challenge with some in the American expression of the apostolic movement is the American view of happiness and success. This is prevalent in the churches (including the apostolic movements) emanating from the 'prosperity and self-fulfilment' genre replicated across the world. The US is a big exporter through its high-profile preachers across the globe.

4. Another challenge I see is that many conservative American evangelical Christians in the USA (including the apostolic) put a priority on protecting freedom of speech and religion (I agree that the First Amendment of the US Constitution should be upheld), while at the same time objecting to the immigration of Muslims and Latinos. Churches often object to immigration out of fear of losing safety and comfort. In my opinion, we should welcome immigrants from Muslim nations so we can love them and share the gospel with them. We have seen many Muslims come to Christ in our community through children's outreaches, which have been able to provide aid to their families.

ERT (2023) 47:2, 158–176

The Weight of Sin: Islam, Anselm and Barth

Brent Neely

Muslim thinkers have often criticized Christians for a morbid view of sin, for a limited view of human capacity, and for insisting that only the death of Jesus could solve humanity's sin problem. This article scrutinizes and affirms Christians' penchant for taking sin very seriously, against the background of the challenges posed by a group of prominent Muslim thinkers.

The filial monotheisms of Christianity and Islam coexist within a sometimes uncomfortable proximity. Overlapping lineage occasionally produces more divergence than harmony. This essay examines an aspect of the Christian-Muslim soteriological argument, namely, doctrines of sin. The aim is to engage, from a Christian point of view, with the differing assumptions about the human condition and how God has acted to rectify it.

I begin by summarizing the critiques of Christian hamartiology (the doctrine of sin) and atonement theology by five Muslim thinkers of the 20th and 21st centuries: Muhammad Rashid Rida, a Syro-Egyptian anti-colonial activist and prominent Islamic exegete; Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai, a renowned Iranian Shi'a scholar; Isma'il al-Faruqi, a prolific Sunni Muslim scholar; Fazlur Rahman, a Pakistani scholar who taught Islamic studies at the University of Chicago; and Shabbir Akhtar, a contemporary Pakistan-born scholar now teaching at Oxford. Of course, Islam is vast and diverse, so no five individuals represent all Muslim views, but these are influential modern authors, clerics and intellectuals who have presented provocative critiques of Christianity. Two major themes characterize their objections: (1) the doctrine of original sin is unjust, morally arbitrary and ethically retrograde, and (2) Christian reflection on sin more generally is portrayed as obsessive, disproportionate and even nihilistic.

Against this background, I consider the teaching on sin by two great Christian theologians, Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) and Karl Barth (d. 1968), supplemented by some references to Augustine and contemporary scholars. I have selected Anselm and Barth because they are widely recognized as key figures in the

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development of Christian doctrines of sin and atonement.[1] They are also major contributors to theological streams regarding salvation and sin to which many evangelicals subscribe, and which have attracted some of the most fervent Muslim criticisms. Finally, I conclude with an attempt to synthesize the key results of this interconfessional foray into matters of sin.

Islamic soteriology: revelation as knowledge[2]

The Islamic critique of Christian hamartiology tacitly presumes that Islam offers a better account of judgement, reward and eschatological beatitude. I can profile the Islamic view of salvation only briefly here, risking oversimplification for the sake of brevity and clarity. Advocates commonly portray the Islamic soteriological model as rational, just and knowledge-based, correlated with Islam's self-image as the 'natural religion'. The irreducible core of Islamic proclamation is the radical unity of God (*tawhid*) which overthrows all idolatry, polytheism or infidelity. Salvation or damnation is contingent upon God's straightforward and just judgement of one's deeds at the terrible Day of Reckoning—beginning with the question of one's submission (*islam*) to the one God. One's fate as 'winner' in Paradise or 'loser' in the Fire is contingent on the preponderance of works, good or ill (cf. Qur'an [hereafter Q] 3:85; 7:8; 28:67).[3]

Whence then divine grace?[4] It is found in the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad. Revelation is not personal apocalypse, but imparted guidance. 'Whereas the God of Christianity *acts* in man's salvation, the God of Islam *commands* him to do that which brings that salvation about.'[5] Therefore, the Islamic soteriological mode is enlightenment, not redemption; law, not atonement; information, not incarnation. Salvation requires the twin inputs of revelation (knowledge) and moral exertion.[6]

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1 For example, Fleming Rutledge, in *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 146, states, 'Anselm's momentous work, *Cur Deus Homo* ... has been so influential that it is impossible to study the history of Christian doctrine without it.'

2 The appropriateness of the term 'soteriology' as a category in Islamic theology is disputed. It is used here provisionally, for the sake of concision and convenience. See Marcia Hermansen, 'Acts of Salvation: Agency, Others, and Prayer Beyond the Grave in Islam', in *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, ed. Mohammad Hassan Khalil (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 283; Gordon Nickel, 'Islam and Salvation: Some on-Site Observations', *Direction* 23, no. 1 (1994): 3–16; Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 106. Also, Qur'an (hereafter Q) 2:286; 3:185; 19:72; 29:64; 39:61; 40:41; 61:10-14; 70:14; 81:1–14.

3 Cf. Q 2:25; 3:180–82; 8:50–51; 13:35; 80:33–37; 99:6–8; Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, trans. Adil Salahi, e-pub, 18 vols. (Markfield, UK: Islamic Foundation, 2009), 1:57–58; Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 146.

4 See Shabbir Akhtar, *The New Testament in Muslim Eyes* (London: Routledge, 2018), 105; cf. 64, 251, 258–59.

5 Ismaʿil R. al-Faruqi, 'Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or Dialogue', in *Routledge Reader in Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Mona Siddiqui (London: Routledge, 2013), 205.

6 See Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, vol. 6 (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1948), 6:29–30; Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, 'The Beginning of Guidance (*Bidayat al-Hidaya*)', in *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 113.

Islam generally teaches a native human capacity for obedience and commonly construes sin under categories such as weakness and ignorance.[7] It presumes a supposedly more realistic, less overwrought understanding of sin; a milder assessment of human depravity; and thus a more rational and ethical response to the human condition in comparison to Christianity.[8] God is just, merciful and also 'reasonable' in his judgement of weak humans.[9]

As a correlate of this perspective, Muslims reject Jesus as Saviour, crucified and risen. Historically, they have rejected the reality and theological validity of Jesus's death on the cross.[10] Cragg speaks of 'an Islamic consensus' that the crucifixion 'did not, historically, it need not redemptively, and it should not morally, happen to Jesus'.[11]

While God's decision to forgive or condemn must remain somewhat inscrutable, his capacity to do so is entirely unconstrained and without mediation.[12] There is neither intercession nor 'saviourship' in the divine economy.[13] For the sake of theological purity and ethical credibility, the entire apparatus of the atonement—cross, suffering substitute, redemption, and so on—must be expunged. With respect to ultimate benediction, no vicarious intervention is needed for the morally industrious if

7 See Q 2:233, 286; 29:69. Cf. Akhtar, *New Testament*, 64; *Sahih Muslim* 125 (available at https://worldea.org/yourls/47249); Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Principles of the Creed: Book 2 of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. Khalid Williams (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2016), 27.

8 For example, Akhtar, *New Testament*, 105, describes Islam as 'a practical law-centered faith requiring human effort albeit aided by grace'. Compare Qutb, *Shade,* 3:256; 5:392, 431; Rahman, *Major Themes*, 30.

9 Compare Rahman, *Major Themes*, 32–35; Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar*, 6:30; cf. Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity, A Critical Reading of the Works of Muhammad Rashid Rida and His Associates (1898–1935)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 289; Ahmad Muhammad al-Tayyib, 'The Quran as Source of Islamic Law', in *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1714; Akhtar, *New Testament*, 261–62.

10 Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 95; Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, 'Sin and Redemption in Christianity and Islam', in *Theological Issues in Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, ed. Charles Tieszen (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 78. On the pivotal verses, Q 4:157–58, considered in parallel with Q 3:55; 5:117, and others, see Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), chapter 6; Joseph Cumming, 'Did Jesus Die on the Cross? Reflections from Muslim Commentaries', in *Muslim and Christian Reflections on Peace: Divine and Human Dimensions*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry, O. Zümrüt, and M. Köylü (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 32–50; Maria Massi Dakake, 'Commentary on and Translation of Select Suras', in *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 262–63; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*, trans. Ali Quli Qarai (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 181.

11 Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 178. Cf. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 19; cf. Q 7:179; 8:53; 13:11; 23:115.

12 See James W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology, Part I*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2002), 53; Matthew Aaron Bennett, *Narratives in Conflict: Atonement in Hebrews and the Qur'an*, Kindle ed. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019).

13 Cf. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 31–32; Isma'il R. al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, ed. Ataullah Siddiqui (Leicester, UK: Islamic Foundation, 1998), 15.

they will only follow 'the path of the *fitra* [discussed below] and the order of creation'.[14]

Islam and original sin

In the standard Islamic conception, humans are born with a relatively unproblematic orientation towards God, as 'true monotheists'; it is environmental distortions that lead to the straying of persons and societies.[15] The Arabic term for this 'innate innocence' and orientation towards God is *fitra*. Reading Isma'il al-Faruqi, one would infer that potentially saving knowledge of God is innate to humans as a sort of steady state of creation, diverted or distorted at times by historical contingency, but always accessible 'in a state of nature'.[16]

Although there is a notion of an Adamic fall in the Qur'an, its scope does not imply the emergence of original sin or a redemption narrative.[17] Al-Faruqi is among the sharpest critics of the doctrine. He holds the concept to be execrable in its irrationality and ethical derogation; it is fundamentally dehumanizing, denying that anything good remains in humans as created. For him, the Christian construal of humanity in sin is practically nihilist.[18]

Al-Faruqi opines that given the centrality of redemption to the Christian faith, 'sin' serious enough to warrant the radical extremes of the redemption mechanism had to be invented.[19] Original sin is a sort of centrepiece of Christianity's 'soteriological farce' of the Fall with its hereditary and universal consequences. Al-Faruqi lays the lion's share of the blame on the apostle Paul, who—with his conflicted posture towards the law—conjured the concept of original universal depravity,

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14 Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar*, 6:31; cf. 29–30. Cf. Muhammad Rashid Rida, *The Muhammadan Revelation*, trans. Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo (Alexandria, VA: al-Saadawi Publications, 1996), 10, 80–103, 106; also see Rida in Simon Wood, *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍā's Modernist Defence of Islam*, trans. Simon Wood (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 142; Qutb, *Shade* 15:192–93; Q 4:17; 7:201.

15 A famous prophetic saying holds that every child is born into *fitra* and then the parents turn the child into errant paths (Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian). See Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh Min al-Dalal)*, trans. R. J. McCarthy, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000), 19–20; *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Qadar 46:40, https://worldea.org/yourls/47250; Q 30:30.

16 See Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, 1:2:184; Harold G. Coward, *Sin and Salvation in the World Religions: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 63; A. H. Mathias Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 232–33.

17 Cf. Ayman Shabana, 'The Concept of Sin in the Qur'an in Light of the Story of Adam', in *Sin, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 40–65; Emmanuelle Stefanidis, 'QS2 Q2:30–39', in *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary / Le Qur'an Seminar: A Collaborative Study of 50 Qur'anic Passages / Commentaire collaboratif de 50 passages coraniques* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 64. On the other hand, an intriguing prophetic hadith reports that Satan somehow 'touches' every child entering the world, with the exception of Jesus and Mary (e.g., Bukhari 6:60:71, https://worldea.org/yourls/47251).

18 Isma'il R. al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas* (Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Noordeen, 1999), 118, 188.

19 Al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics,* 144, 188.

retroactively supplying the missing datum that required redemption by a saviour.[20] In other words, original sin had to be contrived after the fact to justify the need for an atonement.

In rebutting Christian assertions, al-Faruqi insists that sin 'is ... a moral category; it is not ontological.'[21] Christian anthropology in its dour pessimism is guilty of massive overreaction, for 'there is ... in the world ... far more virtue than sin.'[22]

Countering Christian 'error' regarding sin

As noted above, in an Islamic ethos, sin is commonly taken to be a matter of 'weakness', 'forgetfulness', or simply 'ignorance' and 'erring' (cf. Q 4:28; 6:54, 68).[23] No person can rightly redeem another, and given a right assessment of human nature, there is no need for such redemption. Human capacity for the good—especially when instructed by the gift of revealed law—must be enough.[24]

Muslim thinkers construe their view of sin as moderate relative to supposed Christian preoccupation with human depravity, a broken *imago Dei*, and indelible guilt.[25] Muslim scholars have persistently rejected the portrayal of sin's weight and ontological depth reflected in Christian anthropologies.[26]

Tabatabai harangues Christian theology's failure to account for legal nuance and varying severity of sin. He holds that 'irrational' Christian soteriology—from the Genesis story onward—pronounces all infractions, including the most trivial, to be catastrophic iniquity meriting perdition.[27] He chidingly observes that the entire scenario of 'forbidden fruit' in the Garden simply does not merit 'sovereign-level' punishment, let alone imply universal human guilt or corruption.[28]

A parallel Islamic motif here is that sin simply could not be so serious as to *require* the artifice of Christ's death. In Shabbir Akhtar's poignant words:

> For Paul, the cross was a necessary event. For the Qur'an, it is an avoidable tragedy, though not anathema. ... Muslims dismiss the cross as suffering that is pointless or, in the nomenclature of theodicy, 'dysteleological'. The Qur'an would not see it as the necessary precursor of the salvific victory of the resurrection. Does

20 See al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 128. He sees Pauline portrayals of sin as entailing 'utterly powerless' humanity; a thoroughly corrupted world; and a universe full of evil spirits. Such a schema is for him 'sheer contrivance' (*Christian Ethics*, 145).

21 Al-Faruqi, 'Islam and Christianity', 208.

22 Al-Faruqi, 'Islam and Christianity', 209; cf. 198, 206, 213; *Islam and Other Faiths*, 15; Sarbah, 'Sin and Redemption', 85–86.

23 Cf. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 20–30; Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, vol. 5 (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1910), 420.

24 Cf. Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai, *Tafsir al-Mizan* (English: Discourse on 'Jesus and Christianity'), trans. Tawheed Institute Australia (2020), https://worldea.org/yourls/47252, 161–62 / *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mu'asasa al-'alami lil-Matbu'at, 1997), 3:345–46.

25 This disjunction is a commonplace and, I would argue, roughly accurate. However, the divide can be exaggerated. See Rahman, *Major Themes*, 20–30 and 128; Q 7:175–76.

26 Paul, Augustine and the Reformers all come in for blame. See al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 148–53. Not surprisingly, al-Faruqi is quite happy to align 'the real Jesus' with Pelagian ethics (*Christian Ethics*, 149–50).

27 Cf. Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* 3:339 / 'Jesus and Christianity,' 154–55; Q 4:31, 48.

28 See Tabatabai, 'Jesus and Christianity,' 152–53 / *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* 3:337; cf. Q 2:35–39.

> sin possess us? Does sin possess such ontological integrity that only the death of God's only son on the cross could redeem us from its power? Is not God's fiat sufficient? For Muslims, God forgives whomsoever he wills. It is not in vain that he is God![29]

In Islam's pure salvific grammar, no elaborate mechanisms such as the cross are permitted or needed to mediate, validate or instantiate God's forgiveness.[30] His capacity to save, forgive and judge must remain utterly unqualified.[31] Again, in contrast, Christianity is portrayed as having fallen victim to a deleterious, mutually reinforcing interplay between ideas of sin as a rapacious self-propelling force and of salvation as radical redemption.

Negative consequences of Christian concepts of sin and salvation

Muslim intellectuals often charge that Christian atonement theory exacts a punishing cost in terms of individual virtue and social uplift; if one's hopes are suspended on a vicarious redeemer, the restorative energies of God's law are passed over.[32] Tragically, it seems, atonement theology leads to a 'bleak', privatized, individualistic ethics and worship that negate moral effort and the virtues of life in this world.[33] So al-Faruqi would warn us that humans need a divine 'education' far more than they need 'justification'.[34]

According to Rida, Christian proclamation tells those ready to 'extinguish the light of [their] mind' that they are saved by this (Christian) faith even if they 'kill, commit adultery, drink alcohol ... and [are] the bane of civilization.' In contrast, he continues, Muslims' 'faith in God and his angels, books, and messengers ... [and] disciplining of moral character and reform of actions' are treated by Christians as of no benefit.[35]

On this Islamic reckoning, Christian hamartiology is a creaking infrastructure of unworkable contradictions: sin is exaggeratedly dark but also, outlandishly, an essential ingredient of the divine plan. Furthermore, Christians intend to take sin with utter seriousness—even overweighting its impact—yet they cannot cope with it

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29 Akhtar, *New Testament*, 110; cf. 93; see also, Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar* 6:31.

30 Rida is acerbic in his caricature of the Christian God's 'stumbling' into the problem of Adam's sin and labouring over a solution for vexatious eons—until he finally contrives the implausible solution of the cross (see Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar* 6:25). Cf. Ryad, *Islamic Reformism*, 266–68; Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, ed. Irfan A. Omar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 174–75.

31 Cf. Q 57:15; al-Azhar Islamic Research Group, *Tafsir al-Wasit lil-Qur'an al-Karim*, vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Matba'at al-Mashaf al-Sharif, 1992), 2:968; Tabatabai, 'Jesus and Christianity', 166; Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar*, 6:55.

32 Cf. Rida, *Muhammadan Revelation,* 124–35; Tabatabai, 'Jesus and Christianity', 159–62; Akhtar, *New Testament*, 65–66.

33 See al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 220. Al-Faruqi claims that upon conversion, a Muslim is 'conscious mainly of the fact that the greatest task lies ahead in the test of ethical conduct, [but] the Christian comes out ... satisfied, relieved that the greatest task is behind him ... reassured that [his] new status will favorably affect anything he may do' (*Christian Ethics*, 159). See his critique of Barth on 195–96.

34 Cf. al-Faruqi, 'Islam and Christianity', 208–9, 210, 213.

35 Rida in Wood, *Christian Criticisms*, 136–37. I have adjusted the generic 'he' in this quote to 'they'. See *Christian Criticisms,* 141–42; Ryad, *Islamic Reformism*, 202–3.

because they have abandoned the requisite resource (divine law) in favor of an implausible atonement theory.[36]

Christians on original sin: an arbitrary doctrine?

Of course, the range of Christian views of sin and original sin has numerous variations. For example, Thomas McCall elaborates at least six major typologies of original sin.[37] A typical opening claim might be 'that, in sinning, Adam and Eve lost original righteousness, that state of moral uprightness with which they were created. ... Adam and Eve incurred a ... deformity of soul as a result of sin, which disordered their moral natures.'[38] These consequences are interpreted as affecting not only Adam and Eve individually but the whole human family. For H. Blocher:

> The heart of the matter is the interrelatedness of primeval event and present condition. ... Precisely, traditional theology distinguishes ... *peccatum originale originans*, the primeval catastrophe that caused the rest, identified with Adam's disobedience, and *peccatum originale originatum*, the innate condition caused by the former event and constituting the seedbed of 'actual' sins.[39]

Clearly, for many Muslims (and others) this notion of the paradigmatic primal sin provokes multivalent worries, not least over questions of justice and human agency—the idea that accountability is peremptorily transferred between subjects. Does the doctrine drown us in fatalism's waters?

Barth, original sin and salvation

Karl Barth's discourse on the implications of original sin is in vigorous contrast to the Islamic positions presented above. For him, there is no possibility of relying on any human capacity for salvation, no residual hope in a 'natural theology'.[40] Barth positions 'the sinner [as] a radically and extensively and comprehensively corrupt being determined by its totally evil history and activities. This total determination of human existence from below by the unity of the Adamic history of fallenness is the true meaning of "original sin".'[41] The imprint of original sin seems quite indelible and universal.

However, Barth does not endorse the idea of transmitted guilt or inherited blame coming from Adam. For Barth, original sin is a matter of universal fact, paradigm or comprehensive reality. He is much less interested in sin's 'literal history' or any

36 Cf. al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 138–39, 156.

37 See Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin*, Kindle ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), chapter 4.

38 O. D. Crisp and M. Jenson, 'Sin', in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 841.

39 Henri A. G. Blocher, 'Original Sin', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 553.

40 Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 5 vols., multiple parts (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 4:2:101. Hereafter *CD*.

41 Shao Kai Tseng, '"Non Potest Non Peccare": Karl Barth on Original Sin and the Bondage of the Will', *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 60, no. 2 (2018): 200.

mechanistic explications.[42] 'Barth's anthropology betrays a deep-seated instinct to hold together agency, responsibility, and guilt, and to refuse all forms of fatalism in which sin is viewed as anything other than what we both will and do.'[43]

Adam's relation to human sin is framed as universal instantiation rather than straightforward cause.[44] Barth says:

> No one has to be Adam. We are so freely and on our own responsibility. Although the guilt of Adam is like ours, it is just as little our excuse as our guilt is his. We and he are reached by the same Word and judgment of God in the same direct way. The only difference is that what we all are and do he was and did at the very gateway of history.[45]

In Barth's *Dogmatics*, rather than being an explanation of ethical or historical quandaries, original sin seems primarily to be a visceral, exhaustive indictment. Sin persists as a basic reality, a reality reenacted from Adam onward in the biblical drama.[46] The unified chorus of the stories of Adam, the wider Old Testament, and the Messiah intone our categorical shared culpability.[47]

Christ is Barth's metric for both our demise and our restoration. From the beginning, humanity has continually arrogated judgement to itself, usurping the role proper to Jesus, the Creator-Word.[48] But in the self-giving of the Messiah, the 'Judge judged in our stead', the sinner is deposed, and the risen Lord assumes authority, culminating in 'a new eon' and the lifting of anxiety and despair in our liberation.[49]

Sin's consequences are indeed severe, but they are always subject to undoing by the covenant-keeping Redeemer. Being antithetical to God himself, sin cannot ultimately triumph.[50] Although Barth firmly rejects natural theology, original sin does not, even for him, denote the annihilation of all creational goods.[51] Sin is a stringent and encompassing condition, but not a sovereign, hopeless and all-determining one. Nor is it a state arbitrarily foisted upon otherwise innocent beings. In the desperation of fallenness, the redeemable remains and redemption happens.

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42 John Webster, 'The Firmest Grasp of the Real: Barth on Original Sin', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 4, no. 1 (1988): 21; cf. 25–26.

43 Webster, 'The Firmest Grasp': 21; cf. 28. See also Tseng, 'Non Potest Non Peccare', 201–3.

44 'Adam is not a fate which God has suspended over us. Adam is the truth concerning us as it is known to God and told to us. The relationship between him and us, and us and him, is not ... one which can be explained in terms of a transmission between him and us' (Barth, *CD* 4:1:511).

45 Barth, *CD* 4:1:509–10.

46 Barth's development of 'recurrent' original sin in the Old Testament (e.g. the golden calf of Exodus 32) displays a narrative sensitivity congruent with contemporary OT scholarship and also traditional Jewish reflection. See Gary A. Anderson, *Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament: Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 73; Barth, *CD* 4:1:427–28.

47 Cf. Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*, 73.

48 Cf. Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 518–20.

49 Barth, *CD* 4:1:254; cf. 4:1:234.

50 Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:1:139–41, 408–9.

51 Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:2:491.

Original sin and authentic agency

The Pauline theology of all humanity being grounded 'in Adam' is the canonical fountainhead for original sin doctrine. Certainly, in Paul's anthropology, the enslaving power of sin and the sovereignty of God are crucial motifs. But, in Paul's ethic, humans are hardly volitionally inert, subject to a suffocating determinism.[52] In Romans 5:12–21, Paul's assertion that death is universal 'because all sinned' must not be dismissed as mere perfunctory flourish.[53] As Keener notes, 'For Paul, it is apparently behavior or choices, more than genetics, that identifies one's solidarity; he addresses those who believe like Abraham, who sin like Adam, or who are baptized into Christ.'[54]

A proper theological reading of the Adam story does not indict Adam while exculpating his heirs. Neither is this a construct in which humans are innocent but inexplicably forced to labour under external constraints arbitrarily imposed on them. Whatever else original sin may signify, we must still confront the truth that our failings are authentically our own.

Augustinian realism

Thus, the basic claim that 'all persons are culpable, for all are sinners' is a reasonable vantage point from which to begin considering original sin. But clearly, many tensions and mysteries persist. Questions of justice, historical etiology, and the Adam-humanity distinctions/solidarities continue to press us. Here, I suggest turning to Oliver Crisp's defence of what is commonly called 'Augustinian realism' on original sin (in contrast to representative or federal models).[55] For Crisp, 'Augustinian realism provides a response to this injustice problem by claiming that all human beings were somehow metaphysically present with Adam at the moment of Adam's sin.'[56]

For these 'realists', all humanity was present in some way at the Fall, such that God is not simply imputing or transferring guilt onto innocent non-participants. The productive impulse here is to reduce the distance between the Adam-event and the rest of us, to mitigate the extrinsic and arbitrary. We all authentically participate in the same nature as *ha-adam* ('the human'). Thus, we were somehow 'present' at the Fall. But how? Perhaps 'as a whole entity rather than as individual human beings. In a similar fashion, we might say that the beauty of the fully developed daffodil is

52 For an alternative to those readings of Romans 9:20–23 which major on an apparently arbitrary divine sovereignty, see Jason A. Staples, 'Vessels of Wrath and God's Pathos: Potter/Clay Imagery in Rom 9:20–23', *Harvard Theological Review* 115, no. 2 (2022): 197–218.

53 Craig S. Keener notes that commentators do 'debate the grammar in the last clause of the verse; most, however, conclude that it says that death pervaded humanity "because" all sinned.' Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 74. On Romans 5:12–21, see also McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 223–33.

54 Keener, *Romans*, 74.

55 Oliver D. Crisp, 'On Behalf of Augustinian Realism', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 35, no. 2 (2019): 124–33; Crisp, *Saving Calvinism: Expanding the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 69–70. Cf. McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 210–15. For al-Faruqi's attack on Augustine, see his *Christian Ethics*, 150–51.

56 Crisp, 'On Behalf', 125. See Augustine, *City of God* 13:3, 21:12.

present in the bulb that is planted in the earth months beforehand.'[57] We too fell, *in what can be justly considered our own nature*.[58]

If we are to posit a 'corporate solidarity' of humanity with Adam's sin, divine fiat and forensic transfer of accountability are inadequate categories; the import of universal original sin must be 'real', 'authentic', ontological.[59] In this quasi-Athanasian approach, the accent is on the organic link and empirical solidarity between us and Adam, and between believers and the latter Adam, the incarnate Son. We all 'authentically' share in the Adamic nature. Redemption occurs when Jesus, the ultimate Human, extends a sort of vicarious therapy to Adam's universally sin-sickened family.[60]

Anselm takes a similar view. He holds that ever since Adam, human nature—*our* nature—is twisted and accountable for how it is and what it does (see Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* [hereafter *CDH*], 1:18; cf. *On the Virgin Conception* [hereafter *OVC*], 10, 23). But contrary to the suspicious assumptions of many moderns, in Anselm's theological imaginary, this is not a question of God's peremptory imputation of a guilt burden onto the innocent. For Anselm, the story of Eden is not only about the original pair; rather, it involves a humanity which was quite able not to sin yet fell under the devil's persuasion (*CDH* 1:22).

One may certainly query Anselm's metaphysical assumptions, but he clearly rejects the idea that God is a tyrant inexplicably foisting the conundrum of sin and the pains of human existence on passive innocents. Rather, we are all genuine participants in a shared nature, one that, with culpable agency, opposes the good. Granted that Anselm's cosmological assumptions are not theology's last word, surely some genuine virtues inform his argument. I would suggest that a faith seeking understanding engages these persisting mysteries less with the cry of 'Why did God do this to us?' and more with 'Why, O Lord, are reality's givens what they are?'

Crisp argues that original sin is supported by both biblical theology and empirical observation; original guilt, however, is not.[61] All need salvation in Christ because we are guilty of our own sins, not Adam's. This is, for him, the 'dogmatic priority'.[62]

Original sin is a faithful commentary on the painful but redeemable human condition. It is not a slick juridical shell game, a divine con job in which guilt is shifted about by sleight of hand. We are all guilty, for we are all in reality sinners.

On the weightiness of sin

We have seen above the complaints that in traditional Christian thought sin's seriousness is overblown, and that thus both judgement and remedy are exaggerated.

57 Crisp, 'On Behalf', 127.

58 Crisp is not defending a claim of the *biological* presence of every discreet individual 'in Adam'. See Crisp, 'On Behalf', 128.

59 Crisp, 'On Behalf,' 131–32.

60 See Oliver D. Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 174. For an otherwise very different theology which also emphasizes the incarnation's redemptive energy as such, see Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

61 Oliver D. Crisp, 'On Original Sin', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 3 (1 July 2015): 252–66; Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement*, 174.

62 See Crisp, 'On Original Sin', 264–65.

Sometimes Anselm is taken as the poster boy for these distortions, particularly in view of his famous admonition on the weightiness of sin and the damnation incumbent on the most fleeting act of rebellion (*CDH* 1:21). On this line of reckoning, a further Anselmian extremity is that satisfying the judgement due for sin required the death of the innocent incarnate Son (*CDH* 2:4, 8, 11). Sin appears so serious that even God's freedom to exonerate is called into question. According to Vidu, the notion 'that God could not gratuitously forgive becomes a major assumption of atonement theories only after Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*'.[63] And indeed, across the modern horizon, criticisms have been directed at Anselm for his embrace of purportedly oppressive and violent notions of divine honour; for abstracted and mechanistic justice; and for construing sin as unpayable debt.

Sin, justice and God's goodness

However, failure to bridge the gap between Anselm's world and ours may blind us to shared convictions and constructive insights where he helpfully hones in on matters of ultimate consequence. Consider, for example, the theme of justice and its resonance in contemporary theological debate. Dismissing Anselm as fastidious and remote in his fixation on sin and divine honour may result in missing his conceptual linkage between honour and justice.[64] As Anselm tells us elsewhere, 'All sin is injustice' (*OVC* 3).

Anselm warns gravely that because we have not considered God rightly, we 'have not yet considered how heavy the weight of sin is' (*CDH* 1:21). The seriousness with which sin is taken is no indication of idiosyncratic fastidiousness, ego or malice on the part of the Judge. The issue is justice (and balance or fittingness) in the universe. Furthermore, the proper metric for sin is the contrasting goodness and worth of the Creator—a worthiness calling for our exhaustive devotion. But tragically, sinful humanity does not have the resources to compensate for our failures, rejections and lapses in worship.

God is wholly good. But this happy truth may have rather unhappy consequences for less-than-wholly-good humanity. These concepts are no tardy medieval innovation; they are clearly presented even in the Old Testament. Sin's measure is God—not his irascible harshness but his goodness, his true-ness, his searing incompatibility with all wrong—yes, his glory (cf. Ex. 33:19–20; 34:6–7; Lev. 16:1–3 and following; Hab 1:13).[65] In the absence of remedy, the intersection of his being and our sinful beings entails outcomes both dire and drastic.

Rather than cavil against Anselm's supposed petty brooding and austere overweighting of sin, we would do better to understand his claims as congruent with the world's darkness, depravity and destruction set over against the overwhelming goodness and unrelenting purity of God. At stake in Anselm's worries about sin are

63 Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2. For a concise overview of the logic of *CDH*, see D. Bentley Hart, 'A Gift Exceeding Every Debt: An Eastern Orthodox Appreciation of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*', *Pro Ecclesia* (Northfield, MN) 7, no. 3 (1998): 336–37.

64 Cf. Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 156–57.

65 Compare Khaled Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 307, 313–16.

sensitivities to God's greatness and to justice in an unjust world—agendas amply present, we might add, in Islamic theologizing.

On Anselm's terms, given God's limitless worth, we ought already and always to love, adore and serve the One on whom our existence hangs without remainder (cf. *CDH* 1:20–23).[66] This obligation to the 'highest good' (i.e. God) is ultimately and simultaneously a blessing for humankind (cf. Anselm *CDH* 2:1). Such comprehensive worship is the joy-filled end of human existence in a universe that is ordered and beautiful (*CDH* 1:23–24; 2:1, 19–20). In short, Anselm's vision need not lead to a dour assessment of life in this fallen creation. However distasteful the sin miasma putatively hovering over Anselm's thought, sin is not his starting point. God is.

Anselm's trajectory is more constructive than his harshest critics allow. The dark shadows are generated by the brightness of the light. In all this, we affirm God's aseity (as would Muslim interlocutors): we are dependent and owe him *all*.[67] What do we have that is not a gift (1 Cor 4:7)? Anselm is right: human sin is a debt we cannot satisfy. Thankfully, God is unwilling to leave matters there and let his good designs fail.

Even the little sins?

Even so, at face value, objections to the application of judgement and chastisement equally without gradation to both mundane moral stumbles and horribly malign crimes would seem warranted. In this respect, Anselm, with his infamous warning about the 'single sinful glance' (*CDH* 1:21), has at times been styled a theological neurotic for overweighting trivial infractions.

Barth is hardly less severe in insisting that *all* sin is a very weighty matter. Not surprisingly, even Barth's hamartiology is nested within his Christology.[68] For him, the incarnation of the Son is the free expression of God's saving goodness.[69] As we behold the God-Man, the light of his radiance confirms by contrast the plight of sinful humanity. Furthermore, in Christ's suffering and degradation a mirror is held before us, exposing us as 'inescapably accused and irrevocably condemned'.[70] The Messiah suspended on the grisly gibbet under the weight of sin represents the 'verdict [as to] ... what God knows about us, and therefore how it really is with us'.[71]

Barth presents an unvarnished exposé of sin along its continuum from prosaic failing to dramatic obscenity. Thus, the seeming extremeness of God's response to sin at Golgotha does not signal limits on his power and capacity to forgive, nor an allegedly incendiary temper, nor the vulnerability of his honour. It is, rather, a measure of humanity's misery—a measure of the fate to which God will not abandon us. Sin is a deadly serious matter requiring a deadly serious response:

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66 'If, in order that I may not sin, I owe to him my own being and all that I am capable of, even when I do not sin, I have nothing to give him in recompense for sin' (*CDH* 1:20).

67 Cf. Job 41:11; Ps 24:1; 50:10; Lk 17:10; Rom 11:33-36; Acts 17:25. Compare Q 47:38.

68 Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:1:131, 135, 142, 389.

69 Barth's framing of the incarnation is more properly constructive than that in *CDH*, where incarnation is presented primarily as a necessary precondition to satisfaction. Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:1:487.

70 Barth, *CD* 4:1:390.

71 Barth, *CD* 4:1:391; cf. 358f., 403–7, 512–14. For the suffering Christ as foil to prideful human self-aggrandizement, see *CD* 4:1:143.

> [In humanity's] sin there obviously takes place a menacing of the whole work of God, the whole world as created by Him, a menacing which in its impotence is quite intolerable to God Himself. *It is now clear that the contradiction and opposition of man, his godlessness and inhumanity, his sin against himself, are not a little absurdity but one which is incommensurably great*, provoking God Himself to direct action. ... [The absurdity of sin] cannot encroach upon Him ... because He is the high and majestic God even in His mercy; but all the same He takes it to heart. He does not will to be God, high and majestic, without us who have fallen victim to it. ... Evil is not an element in the orderly course of the world, but ... *the* element ... which absolutely threatens and obscures it.[72]

Sin as 'mere' sloth

But one might object, 'Are there not *some* virtuous and exemplary individuals? Or at least some who are not all that bad?' Yes, sin may be universal, but is its 'badness' always so terrible? What about mundane or merely slothful peccadillos? Isn't it extreme moralism to insist that these too are subject to God's ultimate and comprehensive judgement? 'After all, isn't it simply human to err?' Should not an enlightened ethic direct its focus away from petty human foibles and turn, perhaps exclusively, towards massive and systemic evil? Isn't Christian thought in the Anselmian tradition rightly indicted for its sin obsession?

No, it is not. Of course, I am not endorsing disproportionate punishment or the idea that God delights in tormenting people. But neither do I acknowledge the legitimacy of excluding 'small' failures or fleeting indiscretions from the arena of divine judgement and accountability.

We 'common' sinners cannot justly deflect the searchlight of accountability away from ourselves and onto the canvas of 'epic sin'. Though great atrocities are also tragically present in our world, the same dark substructure underlies even our much smaller moral slips. Katherine Sonderegger warns, 'As it is our most common and heedless gestures that most vividly characterize us, so our smallest acts of rebellion reveal the grand design that tempts and feeds our pride.'[73] At whatever scale, when the human soul curves idolatrously in on itself, we reject the One who loves us and upon whom we depend, and typically, when that happens, other image-bearers are harmed in the process.

Barth rightly cautions against a 'moderating' theology which would treat minor sins as a mundane and partially acceptable component of a natural theology.[74] When it comes to human failings, whatever the variations from person to person, the benchmark is Jesus, 'abandoned' at the cross in shame and devastation.[75] When it comes to rightly framing human sinfulness, the fundamental gap is not between

72 Barth, *CD* 4:1:411, emphasis added. See also *CD* 4:1:533.

73 Katherine Sonderegger, 'Anselm, Defensor Fidei', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 3 (July 2007): 357; cf. 357–59; Sonderegger, 'Anselmian Atonement', in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 181.

74 Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:1:487–88; 4:2:380.

75 See Barth, *CD* 4:2:380–81.

more and less virtuous sinners, but between humanity 'in Adam' and Jesus the latter Adam.[76] That gap is too great for anyone to bridge. As Barth states, even the merely

> slothful man is and exists in ... this sinister history. It is the history of his impotent ignoring of the grace of God present to him. It is the history of the opportunities continually offered to him and continually let slip by him. It is his history under the judgments of God. His being in this history is his misery. As he is in this history, he is the *miser* [wretch] who will inevitably be lost and in death without the *misericordia Dei*.[77]

Humanity lost in sin includes within its scope the unremarkable, merely slothful, shrugging decision to 'go my own way'.[78] One need not be a grotesquely voracious violator to stand in painful, unpayable deficit before God.[79] Petty acts that deny God our full love and allegiance enact harm as they reverberate out into the universe.[80] It is not that God, delighting to trip us up, wantonly contrives before us an unrealistic moral obstacle course. No, the standards we violate in our slothful state are the good givens of existence, structures proceeding from God who is good, true and beautiful (cf. Eph. 5:9).[81] Our smallest wilful rebellions are directed against this very God.[82]

Does sin lay necessity on God?

For Muslim critics of traditional Christian soteriology, a serious stumbling block is the 'necessity' of the cross, its apparent irreducibility in Christian theology. If such a shameful mechanism for forgiveness (rather than a simple declaration) is somehow made obligatory, then haven't we inappropriately placed limits upon God's freedom, sovereignty and authority?[83] Muslim polemicists and others have derided the Passion story's 'soteriology of divine dilemma', which supposedly positions God as struggling to resolve the contrary impulses of his own justice and mercy, stumbling his way to the 'solution' of the cross.[84]

As in many disputes over sin and atonement, Anselm is the inception point of this necessity problem. According to him, God's designs for human beatitude 'could only happen through the agency of a Man-God; and ... it is from necessity that all the things which we believe about Christ have come to pass.'[85] However, in Anselm's

76 See Barth, *CD* 4:2:381; cf. 385–90.

77 Barth, *CD* 4:2:488–89.

78 Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:2:487–88.

79 Cf. *CD* 4:2:493.

80 Barth's position is not that God's judgement is homogeneous and without nuance. God's judgement is justly universal, for sin is; but it is also specific, calibrated and personal as we all fail with a particular 'shade of darkness' (Barth, *CD* 4:2:492).

81 Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:2:378f., 'The Sloth and Misery of Man'.

82 Cf. Barth, *CD* 4:2:400–401.

83 See Tabatabai, 'Jesus and Christianity', 153–54, 164–66; al-Azhar, *Tafsir al-Wasit lil-Qur'an al-Karim*, 2:968; Mohammad Hassan Khalil, 'Divine Forgiveness in Islamic Scripture and Thought', in *Sin, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 84. Christians have asked similar questions (cf. Sonderegger, 'Anselmian Atonement', 187).

84 See for example Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar*, 6:25, 27. Granted, vivid Christian rhetoric of reconciliation can at times evoke such antinomies (see even Barth, *CD* 2:1:401).

85 Anselm, *CDH*, preface.

ontology, the necessity of the Passion does not dent God's stature; it is simply a function of that which is real. God's justice/honour imperative ensures his fidelity to good ends and precludes a universe of moral impunity.[86] Absolution and healing cannot be achieved by a cartoonish 'wave of the wand.'[87] Such are the theological and ontological givens (cf. *CDH* 1:19).

For Barth too, no one has placed God on the horns of a dilemma. Whatever the tensions of human experience, goodness, justice, mercy, retribution and honour are not requirements placed upon God, the One who acts and elects in Christ in freedom.[88] God, Barth asserts, acts as he does because of who he is, not because he stands 'under any alien law, any general truth ... conditioning and limiting both himself and the world and man.'[89] Anselm's view is similar:

> Why did God become man? Because, Anselm says, it was required by God's perfect being. But this is not necessity in the normal sense of external compulsion. Rather, this is an act of 'free will', which is to say it has the necessity of grace—a necessity contingent upon, and only upon, God's perfection. This internal compulsion of grace described in *Cur Deus Homo* is ... the intentionality [God] has to put his own honor, his own perfect being, on the line in the first place. This internal compulsion denoted by Anselm, the intentionality of grace that simply is the divine being—this is the bedrock theological mystery.[90]

Any 'necessity' is neither arbitrary nor external to God. It is rather reflective *of* him—the One who loves too much to allow moral rot and human depredation to snowball unimpeded.[91] The shame of crucifixion is no function of external coercion. In the final analysis, God's glory, power, love and even honour stand undiminished as he bears our shame. Anselm understood that the issue at hand is not any need in or constraint on God, but rather *our* need (cf. Anselm *CDH* 2:5, 16-17; also 1:6, 8). Anselm's 'satisfaction architecture' manifests a grace-infused realism.[92] Necessity ultimately reveals that the good God is *for us*.

Pain, shame, hope and victory seamlessly interweave in the life of Jesus, laid down and taken up again. Thus, believers participate in the gift of life, a soteriological initiative sourced freely in the divine counsel.[93] The seeming travesty of the Passion *is* commensurate with divine justice, for it is commensurate with God's infinite worth, a worth inexcusably disavowed by sin. Since God is so good, sin is indeed *so* bad; its remedy could hardly be a light matter. In denying, with Anselm, that God might simply 'wave sin off' and forgive by decree, we do not limit or diminish the greatness of God—we insist on it.

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86 See Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, 57.

87 Cf. Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 159.

88 Cf. *CD* 4:2:32–35.

89 Barth, *CD* 4:1:529; cf. 2:1:402.

90 Matthew A. Wilcoxen, *Divine Humility: God's Morally Perfect Being* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 188.

91 Gunton, *Actuality*, 159.

92 Cf. Sonderegger, 'Anselmian Atonement', 189.

93 Cf. *CD* 4:1:213–14, 221–22.

Conclusions

Giving serious attention and reflection to Islamic objections urges greater refinement and circumspection in Christian expositions of sin and salvation. First, concerns for *justice and rationality* can productively pressure our thinking in three ways.

1. A call to proportionality in our 'sin talk'. Yes, all sin is an affront to God, but not all infractions are equal. God's response to rebellion is calibrated and just; we would do well, then, to fortify our theologizing against explications of sin and judgement which are extreme, arbitrary or melodramatically morbid.

2. Justice matters with regard to sin and original sin. Very briefly, we must not construe saving grace as providing the believer with ethical indemnity; *a salvation that overcomes sin must change us*. Further, the Islamic remonstrances enjoin us to avoid framing original sin in terms of a desiccating determinism or arbitrary guilt transfer. In this vein, (a) I have demurred from the notion of inherited guilt; (b) I have tentatively commended efforts (such as Crisp's) to articulate original sin as metaphysical reality rather than mere juridical decree; and (c) I have declined to offer a mechanistic or genetic schema for original sin.

3. In partial agreement with the Muslim objectors, I too reject sin as the centre of gravity for the Christian vision. Sin is not the *raison d'être* of our redemptive faith. Although it is true that we must not downplay humanity's predicament, soteriology's aim cannot be exclusively negative, as in the expunging of a deficit; it must finally be the positive realization of God's purposes for creation. A Christian hamartiology ought not to be world-denying. As for the Islamic complaint that, for Christians, sin lies at the centre of everything, I would contend that their critique is problematic mainly because it is directed at a *misapprehension* of the Christian metanarrative. (Undoubtedly. there are skewed presentations of the Christian message that are rightly subject to Muslim objections; let us disavow any such distortions.) I would agree that a sin-centered religion would be nugatory and deficient, but I deny that the Christian faith is in fact grounded in a sin fixation.

Of course, consequential differences between us and our Muslim interlocutors remain, including these two:

1. To put matters colloquially, 'sin *is* that bad.' If we intend to take God seriously, we must take sin seriously. To do so is not a sin obsession. Sin is no mere infraction of regulations which God can choose to either enforce or overlook. Anselm is right—sin is metaphysically potent. Moreover, it is a tangible, terrible, ubiquitous and undeniable fact of human nature from inception onward; *it is original.* We are all sin-sick.

2. On a related note, the seriousness of God's dealing with sin, particularly in the Passion of the Saviour, is no shame or blot upon the Christian faith and its view of God. The means of our redemption are rather a function of the truth about the human condition and of God's justice, greatness, love and goodness. The gravity of the cross does not reflect something extorted from God; it is a reflection of his character, love and purity, and paradoxically of his power too.

Incidentally, even though I differ from Muslim critics on this point, I share their concern for God's reputation. Christians must not articulate the gospel of the Suffering Servant in a way that seems to leave King Jesus passive, petty and diminished. He had the authority to lay down his life and to take it up again. Certainly, the

incarnation and atonement have unanticipated, humble and subversive features, but all this is a revelation of the love, wisdom and power of God whose 'weakness' gloriously overthrows worldly strength (cf. 1 Cor. 1:25; Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration* 24).

The weight of sin

Granting, then, the need for justice, care and prudence in our talk of sin and punishment, we nevertheless must not soft-pedal sin's significance. In the wake of the Christ-event, our salvation must be worked out with fear and trembling. God is not satisfied with anything less than our sanctification. Having been forgiven much, we must love much. Sin is the dark foil to Christian hope, for ironically, it has been the scourge in the face of which grace has increased all the more (cf. Phil 2:12–13; 1 Pet 1:15–21; 2 Pet 1:3–11; 1 Thess 4:3; Lk 7:47; Rom 5:20). We must face up to sin's daunting ubiquity, gravity and immediacy so that, driven to the Physician of our souls and dependent on the grace and power of the triune God, we might find hope (cf. Eph 2:4–10). The Christian life can have no commerce with cheap grace.

This weighty concern over sin contrasts with some Islamic construals, which seem attenuated and insufficiently consequential in diagnosing sin as mainly weakness, forgetfulness or ignorance.

It is no slight of God's law to insist that a full-orbed understanding of sin extends beyond simple 'violation of ordinances'. Sin is manifested in a distorted will, in diverted loves (Ps 14:2–3; Isa 53:6; Jn 3:19–20; Rom 1:28–32; 3:10–18; 6:15–23; 8:4–7).[94] The sin pathogen is no mere deficit of information or cognition. Therefore, saving revelation must be personal, ontological and transformative; the corrupting, enslaving power of sin requires it.[95]

Sin's cost and God's goodness

To take sin seriously is not to deny the victory of grace, nor to depict God as a fiend, nor to paint punishment with garish gruesomeness. It is to assume that justice requires a final and complete expungement of all that is harmful, destructive, arrogant and oppressive. It is to assume that unrepentant rebellion must not be left unaccountable, and that—as it comes into contact with God's searing mercy, white-hot love and zealous purity—sin *is* judged.

Against this reality, it may be less important for us to explain comprehensively why God had to use the cross than to respond transparently to the fact that he did so. As Barth emphasized, at Golgotha we encounter the unvarnished apocalypse, the unveiling of sin, the decay and despair that haunt humanity (cf. Rom 1:18).

94 'Augustine followed the Neoplatonic tradition in understanding all evil as a privation of good; but he sees the evil of human nature in the consent which the will gives to evil, a consent prior to because presupposed in every particular explicit set of choices. Evil is somehow or other such and the human will is somehow or other such that the will can delight in evil. This evil is expressed in defiance of divine law and of human law insofar as it is the mirror of divine law; for to consent to evil is precisely to will to offend against the law.' Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 175.

95 See the diametrically opposed perspectives on solving the human predicament in R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 32, versus al-Faruqi, 'Islam and Christianity', 198, 208–10, 213.

'Humanity at its worst is at home there: jeering and cursing, brutalizing and violating, fickle and arrogant, as the gospels attest. There humanity does its worst, but its worst is not enough to vanquish divine love.'[96] Driven back to the verity, offence, glory and hope of the cross, empty tomb and occupied throne, we find healing and life.

Furthermore, redemption's cost is not only a matter of how bad sin is, but also of how good and glorious God is. When humans offend against the good, true and beautiful in head-on collision with their Maker, the stakes are high.[97] Satisfaction is necessary—and it is not within our capacity (cf. *CDH* 1:20). Restitution exceeds the value of everything that exists besides God (*CDH* 2:6).[98]

Again, this measure of God's dignity also addresses the issue of 'small' sins. Perhaps Anselm's stolen glance or Augustine's stolen pear (*Confessions* 2:9) is more loadbearing than is often supposed. Similarly, the archetypal tragedy of Genesis 3 must not be diminished in its significance. The tree from which Adam and Eve ate was tied to *knowing good and evil* (Gen 2:17). In this primal revolt, humanity is seduced into seeking knowledge *without reference to its Source*, so as to be 'like' him *and* independent of his authority (Gen 3:5).[99] The subsequent narrative reveals humanity's would-be autonomy, idolatry and consequent ethical breakdown (cf. Gen 4). Such considerations cannot be minor for any monotheist, can they?

Sin does not get the last word

The Christian faith is not all about sin. Soteriology must not be reduced to an algorithm for the attainment of pardon, but must also positively inform the life of the 'saved'. As serious as sin is, the disruption it represents is neither definitive nor constitutive of the Christian story. A strong view of sin, correlated with salvation by grace, should by no means lead to the devaluation of life lived here and now before God, nor to ethical capitulation and libertinism (cf. Mt 5:2–20; 25:1-46; Acts 5:32; 17:31; 24:24–25; Rom 2:1–11; 6:1–4; 1 Cor 6:9–11; 2 Cor 5:9–11). Thus, at the corporate level, we must struggle theologically and existentially with the church's calling to be 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic', in the face of the historical reality of its brokenness and failings. But even ongoing struggle is a signpost of hope indicating that Christ's people refuse to wink at evil or grant sin the final word.

I conclude by highlighting an important conviction that is not so much argued for in this essay but which implicitly underlies my thinking on sin and salvation: Salvation is not narrowly and only about sin but, rather, about the construction and reconstruction of the cosmos. If creation is understood as a purposive project of the Trinity and, as Khaled Anatolios admonishes us, if 'humanity is thus "represented" by the Son within the Trinity beginning with the very act of creation ... [then] when the Son becomes incarnate and goes to the cross on behalf of humanity, he is

96 Daniel A. Madigan, 'Who Needs It? Atonement in Muslim-Christian Theological Engagement', in *Atonement and Comparative Theology: The Cross in Dialogue with Other Religions*, ed. Catherine Cornille (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 30.

97 Cf. Sonderegger, 'Anselmian Atonement', 182.

98 Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice,* 55, 61.

99 See R. W. L. Moberly, *From Eden to Golgotha: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 24.

therefore doing nothing more than following through, in the face of human sin, with faithfulness to that original representation.'[100]

As sin itself is more than merely a problem of guilt and juridical status but extends to the malformation of the human person and will, so too redemption must extend beyond a surface and formal justification; it extends to a dawning new creation wherein we are renewed according to the divine image (Col. 3:10). The Fall, original sin and the corruption of Adam are not the heart of the Christian metanarrative; the incarnate Christ and God's cosmic restoration are. Therefore, the hope that does not disappoint assures us that sin, though still pervasive in this world, has been overcome.

100 Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross*, 300.

ERT (2023) 47:2, 177–188

What Is Redeemed in Redemption? An Argument for Unconditional Redemption

Daniel Kirkpatrick

This article engages recent literature regarding the doctrine of redemption, the person and role of the redeemer, and the object that is redeemed. It argues for a solely divine redeemer and faith as a response to, not a cause of, redemption.

Imagine a coupon that could be redeemed at a store for something of great value. The coupon is dispersed widely to all people at no charge, through all means possible. To redeem your gift, you just have to show up at the store and turn in the coupon. But if you don't turn it in, you remain empty-handed forever.

This is how some people view salvation. Eternal life is available; to receive it, one must simply ask God for it in faith. It is all of grace, because the coupon (the gospel message) and the gift (salvation) are both free, not earned. It is universally offered to all people, but it is not universally accepted, nor may one obtain it other than through the means that the Giver has stipulated.

In this framework, the gift is merely presented for the taking, not bestowed on anyone. No one is under obligation to take the gift, for someone must choose to accept the gift in order to receive it. The act of accepting the gift could be construed as expressing faith. Those who do not accept the gift in faith will not receive eternal life.

This view has had many evangelical adherents, from those who identify themselves as Reformed (Timothy George) to card-carrying Arminians such as Roger Olson and the late Thomas Oden. For these theologians, to be redeemed, a person must first believe.[1]

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1 Here, I am discussing redemption in a narrow sense as what happens to set a sinner free from sin, separate from such issues as election, justification or regeneration. Redemption is an aspect of salvation which concerns spiritual enslavement to sin, death and Satan. For more on this matter, see Daniel Kirkpatrick *Monergism or Synergism: Is Salvation Cooperative or the Work of God Alone?* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 13–15. Relatedly, all traditions mentioned in this article believe in some form of prevenient grace (though they disagree on to what extent God must prevene upon a person). All these traditions recognize, however, that an additional work of redemption is necessary for a person to be set free spiritually, because prevenient grace (as understood in the non-Reformed or Arminian sense) is insufficient in and of itself.

What are we to make of this view? Must one first believe to be redeemed, or is someone redeemed first and then believes? Does faith function like a coupon that redeems eternal life? This article discusses such a conditional notion of redemption. It analyses the various uses of redemption throughout Scripture and considers the unique role of the redeemer. I will conclude that redemption is unconditional in nature and performed solely by a divine redeemer, such that our faith does not cause our redemption.

Defining redemption

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew noun *gō'ēl* is often translated into English as 'redeemer' (Job 19:25; Ps 19:14; Isa 41:14) or 'kinsman redeemer' (Ru 2:20; 3:9–12; 4:4–6).[2] The *gō'ēl* has due right of *ge'ullāh*, often translated as 'redemption' (Lev 25:24; 25:32; Ru 4:6).[3] The verb *gā'al* is often translated as 'to redeem', 'buy back' or 'recover'.[4] William Dumbrell provides a helpful summary: 'The term *gā'al* refers to the recovery of something that once belonged to an individual or family but that became alienated, and thus beyond the power of the owner to reclaim. Its use suggests the return of persons or things to their normal position.'[5]

As Dumbrell notes, either people or property could be redeemed. In Israelite family law (Lev 25), should a piece of property (such as land or a house) become available (perhaps due to economic hardships, a death in the family or simply a desire to sell it), a kinsman had the first right of redemption (Ru 4:6–7; Jer 32:8). Israelites could repurchase the land they previously sold should they acquire the funds to buy it back (Lev 25:26–28). A price would need to be set for the property, adjusted according to the Jubilee year, and upon redemption, the property would be released (*gā'al*) into the possession of the *gō'ēl*. This redemption is derived from the Jewish belief that the land ultimately belonged to Yahweh and that Israel merely had stewardship over it.[6] The land was a promise from the Lord, and it should not be taken away from the families of Israel.

The term *ge'ullāh* also had sociological usages, particularly concerning slavery and levirate marriage. Israelites were forced into slavery in Egypt, where the Lord accomplished a mighty redemption, liberating the people from their yoke of bondage (Ex 6:6; 15:13). Israelites enslaved one another (with some Israelites even selling themselves as slaves due to poverty; Lev 25:47–49), yet a family member could pay the price of redemption to set the slave free.[7] As in the case of Ruth and Boaz, redemption of persons and property could occur simultaneously (Ru 4:4–6).

Given the rich imagery of physical redemption, the motif is used throughout the Old Testament to describe spiritual redemption. In poetic literature, particularly the

2 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT), ed. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), s.v. *gō'ēl*.

3 Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB; Oxford: Clarendon Press), s.v. *ge'ullāh*.

4 HALOT s.v. *gā'al* and BDB s.v. *gā'al*.

5 William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 36.

6 Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 1 (NIDOT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. *gō'ēl*.

7 NIDOT, ibid.

Psalms, the authors longed for redemption of the soul (Ps 49:7–8, 15; 69:18). The physical redemption from Egypt had spiritual undertones. God liberated Israel, releasing them from physical servitude into spiritual Sabbath rest so that Israel would know their God (Deut 5:12–15).[8] Spiritual redemption is further seen when the Lord, the compassionate husband, redeems his unfaithful wife (Isa 54:5, 8; cf. Hos 3:1–5). Additionally, the redemption accomplished in Babylon was more than physical, for it was meant to showcase the glory and goodness of the Lord whose steadfast love endures forever (Isa 49:26; 60:16).[9]

Although Greek verbs such as *exagorazō* translate into English as 'redeem', the more common term is *lutroō*, used for *gā'al* in the Septuagint and commonly translated as 'redeem', 'set free' or 'rescue'.[10] The noun form, *lutrōsis*, is translated as 'ransoming', 'releasing' or 'redemption', implying the 'experience of being liberated from an oppressive situation'.[11] Found often in Rabbinic Judaism to refer to Israel's redemption from Egypt or Babylon, *lutroō* in New Testament usage denotes the redeeming of sinners through the work of Christ (1 Pet 1:18; Tit 2:14).[12]

The thought of redemption (*apolutrōsis*) of the land is not foreign to the New Testament, given the eschatological hope of the kingdom of heaven (Lk 21:28; Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14), yet such hope is predicated upon the redemption of the sinner who is spiritually enslaved.[13] George E. Ladd helpfully summarizes: 'In both classical and Hellenistic Greek, this word group is used of the price paid to redeem something that is in pawn, of the money paid to ransom prisoners of war, and of money paid to purchase the freedom of a slave.'[14] I. Howard Marshall highlights the soteriological nature of the term: 'Redemption means deliverance achieved at a cost, and it is most naturally understood as delivering people from the curse or judgment that they are under because they have not kept the law.'[15]

Modern applications

Not surprisingly, the doctrine of redemption has particular associations (both historically and today) with the doctrine of the atonement. In modern application, the term 'singular redemption' has been used for conditional redemption in conjunction with the atonement. This term was coined by Timothy George in his book *Amazing*

8 See Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 422.

9 NIDOT, s.v. *gō'ēl.*

10 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* ed. and trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (BDAG; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. *lutroō.*

11 BDAG, s.v. *lutrōsis.*

12 Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), s.v. *lutroō*, 350; see also s.v. *lutrōsis*, 351.

13 TDNT, s.v. *apolutrōsis.*

14 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1993), 474.

15 I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 224.

Grace.[16] Such a view is proposed often as an alternative to the view of limited atonement contained in traditional 'TULIP' Calvinism.

The debate between 'singular redemption' (which its backers prefer to 'unlimited atonement') and limited atonement highlights the *scope* or reach of Christ's work—whether Christ died for all persons or the elect only. Singular redemption also considers the *application* of the atonement. Both elements (scope and application) must be held together lest unlimited atonement slip into universalism.

Kenneth Keathley, in defining singular redemption, highlights these two aspects as follows: 'The singular redemption position understands Christ's death to *provide* salvation for all humanity, but the benefits of the atonement are secured only for those who believe, and those benefits are applied at the time of their conversion.'[17] George likewise states:

> Jesus' death is *sufficient* to save all, but it is *efficient* to save only those who repent and believe the gospel. Thus the Reformed position is better described as *definite atonement* or *singular redemption*—singular in the sense of having to do with specific individuals, not just with a general class or group of people.[18]

Here we see the intersection between the atonement and redemption. As Thomas Oden says, 'Redemption is what happens to humanity as a result of the atonement. ... Redemption is the state of having been repurchased, or bought back. ... The price is the cross.'[19] Robert E. Picirilli, another Arminian, defines redemption exegetically and concludes, 'The sacrificial death of Jesus was the instrument or price by which the deliverance was accomplished. ... Redemption was by means of the sacrificial death of Jesus, whose death was both the means and the "price" required.'[20] Reformed and non-Reformed theologians alike affirm the correlation between atonement and redemption. The atonement serves as the payment for the sinner, and redemption is the application of that payment, leading to the freedom of the sinner.

Other theologians who do not use the term 'singular redemption' also hold to a conditional form of redemption. Although the specifics vary, the common thread among them is that a condition—namely, faith—must be met for redemption to occur. David L. Allen states, 'The *application* of the atonement answers the question, When is the atonement applied to the sinner? ... It is applied at the moment the sinner exercises faith in Christ.'[21] Similarly, Arminian theologian F. Leroy Forlines says,

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16 Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative—Our Response* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2000), 80–83. See also James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 698.

17 Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010), 193, emphasis in original.

18 George, *Amazing Grace*, 81, emphasis in original.

19 Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology: Life in the Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 248.

20 Robert E. Picirilli, 'The Intent and Extent of Christ's Atonement', in *Grace for All: The Arminian Dynamics of Salvation*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock and John D. Wagner (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2015), 53.

21 David L. Allen, 'The Atonement', in Allen (ed.), *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 65, emphasis in original.

'Atonement is provisionary until it is applied ... Provisionary atonement [is] applied on the condition of faith and on the grounds of a union with Christ.'[22]

Unconditional redemption

One might assume that the opposite of singular redemption is limited atonement, according to which Christ died only for the sins of the elect, yet this need not be the case. One can believe that Christ died for the sins of the world even if such atonement is applied in a non-conditional way. Again, the atonement's application is just as critical to the issue as is its scope. We saw earlier that either people or possessions can be redeemed. The important question here is whether, in terms of soteriology, the item being redeemed is a possession or a person.

In light of the lexical survey above, notwithstanding the numerous references to the cosmological redemption which will occur at the eschaton, redemption in the personal sense primarily concerns the deliverance of sinners from the bondage of sin, death and the devil.[23] Though there appears to have been some confusion in the first century as to what type of redemption the Messiah would bring upon his arrival (Lk 1:68; 2:38; 24:21), there is little argument amongst modern theologians that Christ came primarily to redeem sinners from their sin. In light of this focus of redemption, we are brought to the thesis of this article. Redemption in the soteriological sense concerns persons, not possessions in pawn, and those under such bondage cannot serve in the capacity of a *gō'ēl.* In other words, eternal life is not the thing needing redemption (like a possession in pawn) through the efforts of a sinner coming to redeem it. Rather, the sinner is in need of redemption, in which case the sinner cannot serve as his or her own *gō'ēl.*

This appears to have been Paul's theology, though his use of redemption terminology is rare.[24] In Romans 6:7, 18 and 22, Paul speaks of Christians being freed (*eleutheroō*) from the sin that once enslaved them (v. 6) and condemned them to death (v. 23). Though all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, they can be redeemed through the propitiatory work of Christ on the cross (Rom 3:23–25). Paul additionally affirms that Christ gave himself to redeem sinners from every lawless deed (Tit 2:14) and paid the price on the cross to secure their salvation (1 Cor 6:20). In Christ, in whom is redemption and the forgiveness of sins, Christians have been rescued from the domain of darkness (Col 1:13–14, cf. Eph 1:7).[25]

Peter, likewise, wrote that Christians are redeemed from a futile way of life with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18–19). The author of Hebrews speaks of Christ obtaining an eternal redemption through his own blood to cleanse sinners from dead works and transgressions (Heb 9:12–15).

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22 F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2011), 193.

23 See TDNT, s.v. *lutrōsis*, 351: 'At root we have here the same ideas of redemption of Israel by God's pardoning grace. ... Here, *lutrōsis* has the general sense of redemption, naturally from sin.' Additionally, it is significant to note that when eschatological redemption is in view, the more common term is *apolutrōsis*.

24 For a thorough examination of Paul's use of redemption, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 476–79.

25 See Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 194–95.

Note in all these passages the consistent use of the divine subject and the absence of a human cause. In all soteriological passages in the Bible, God or Christ is said to be the *gō'ēl*. Humans can redeem enslaved humans or property, but only God can redeem sinners (that which is spiritual). Thus, we should not frame a soteriology in which eternal life is held by God, a figurative merchant, until someone turns in the proverbial coupon of faith leading to its redemption. If such were the case, we would be acting as if God's good gift of eternal life, not sinners, were the item in bondage. On the contrary, people (not eternal life) are held captive and God alone can redeem them.

Theologians on both sides of the divide between conditional and unconditional redemption would agree that a sinner cannot be his or her own *gō'ēl*. However, there may be good reason to hold to the unconditional nature of redemption whereby faith is not a condition of but a response to the freedom purchased by Christ.

The spiritual state of the sinner

We find a rationale for unconditional redemption in light of the spiritual state of the sinner. In line with Old Testament precedent and indicative of New Testament testimony, a person in need of redemption is a slave. Jesus stated that all who sin are slaves of sin, and the Son alone can make sinners free (Jn 8:34–36). In the Old Testament, slaves could acquire enough money to set themselves or someone else free, but this is impossible with spiritual enslavement because of the egregious debt owed to God (Mt 18:23–25). Such an infinite debt must be paid by a *gō'ēl* on behalf of the sinner. No one can do that except a fully divine *gō'ēl* who does not owe any debt himself and also has the means to pay it on behalf of another.

Here, there is a direct correlation to the atonement and redemption, for Christ's work on the cross was the payment that secured redemption for Christians. This does not assume we must reject the penal substitutionary view of the atonement in favour of the ransom view, nor does it mandate an explanation of to whom the debt was paid (though God himself could be considered the recipient of payment). The New Testament does not mention the recipient of the ransom price, only that it came at infinite cost through the propitiatory work of Christ on the cross. Yet do those who hold to conditional redemption indirectly (albeit unintentionally) attribute actions of a *gō'ēl* to the sinner?

Under a conditional view of redemption, salvation works like a transaction between a consumer and a store clerk. Eternal life is available if someone comes to God and asks for it. God asks for faith; the sinner asks for life. God releases the free gift of eternal life to the person who turned in the proverbial coupon of faith, to the joy of the sinner now redeemed. But Scripture does not depict God as holding a gift up and waiting for a sinner to come and take it. If such were the case, humanity would never be saved. As it is, God has no desire to hold back what he graciously desires to give to all people.

On the contrary, God is fully cognizant that humanity cannot render him what is due for their redemption. The condition to be met for the captive's release is not faith but payment. However, the sinner, bound by an infinite weight of guilt, cannot remit such payment and remains in the debt and servitude of sin (Rom 6:20; Tit 3:3;

2 Pet 2:19).[26] Naturally, all would agree, the payment for soteriological redemption was made by Christ (not the sinner); the sinner lacks the capacity to render to God what is due. If the sinner could give God what is due for his or her redemption, then the sinner would be serving as a *gō'ēl*, which cannot be.

Those who hold to a conditional view of redemption affirm that sinners are enslaved and cannot pay the price for spiritual freedom, yet they also affirm that humanity has the ability to cooperate in the redemption process. The sinner must do his or her part to be redeemed. In their view, God's redemption is conditional in nature; it requires faith prior to redemption. Though no accusation of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism is warranted in this case (for all hold to some form of prevenient grace, though the extent of such grace varies), such a view still affirms that a person can exercise such an activity while being spiritually enslaved. In other words, for the atonement to apply in the life of a sinner, the *sinner* must apply the atonement (by exercising faith for redemption). To be redeemed, a person must (in a sense) redeem the eternal life being offered by the means of faith, as represented in the passages from Allen and Forlines quoted earlier.

To explore how such an endeavour is possible in light of the many views of prevenient grace would sidetrack this study.[27] Suffice it to say that in this view, for Christ's atoning work to apply to the life of an individual (resulting in redemption), one must exercise faith as a condition for reception. Such a view stretches the image of enslaved sinners incapable of giving God what is required. Instead, it assumes synergistic activity where humanity does their part by believing and God pays the price.

Yet attention to the various verbs used for redemption shows a stative aspect.[28] The redemptive work was accomplished by Christ for the sinner, whereby he or she is now free to do what God expects (namely, to believe in his Son Jesus). If one's redemption was predicated in any way on what the sinner has done (even his or her ability to meet God's conditions), then such would be grounds for pride, which would rob God of the glory he deserves.[29]

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26 Should one argue here that faith (as a non-meritorious action) does not 'pay' the spiritual debt to God but merely withdraws Christ's 'payment' (atonement) from the cross, this still assumes that such an enslaved sinner could go to heaven's bank and make such a withdrawal while under the yoke and mastery of sin and Satan. A cruel master would not allow a slave to seek freedom, and a sinner has no ability to do so. An enslaved sinner cannot switch masters based upon his or her own will or choice. That decision is made between the owners and the *gō'ēl*.

27 For a review and critique of historic and modern uses of prevenient grace, see Kirkpatrick, *Monergism or Synergism?* 116–25, 150–53.

28 For a thorough treatment, see Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 11–64. After thorough analysis of the Hebrew and Greek terms, Morris concludes that humanity is so enslaved that they cannot pay the price for redemption. Christ paid that price on the cross, and only after that price is paid can the redeemed enjoy the freedom found in God (61–62).

29 D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 121–22. See also Greg Welty, 'Election and Calling: A Biblical Theological Study', in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008), 226–27. Welty shows that there is ground for human boasting before God (Eph. 2:8–9) if the sinner independently exercises faith, because then the sinner makes the difference between salvation and damnation.

To summarize, although various biblical texts show that property can be redeemed, in a soteriological context people, not possessions, need redemption. Eternal life is not something the sinner can redeem; rather, the sinner is redeemed. If a sinner is indeed in such desperate condition, it would make sense that redemption is not predicated on what the sinner does but on what the *gō'ēl* has done for the enslaved sinner. Such is the position of those who hold to an unconditional view of redemption, for all that is required for the sinner's redemption is accomplished by Christ alone.

Non-causative faith

A second rationale for holding to unconditional election is the complications of causative faith. I am not claiming that anyone can receive eternal life without faith or that someone may enter into eternal life apart from faith. To the contrary, only those who exercise authentic faith in Jesus Christ will be saved and receive eternal life. The question is not whether faith is required of the redeemed (it is) but whether faith causes someone's redemption. There is a relation between faith and redemption, as all sides would admit. But does faith precede and cause redemption or follow it?[30]

As mentioned above, we should distinguish between the atonement's extent and application. How is Christ's work on the cross (regardless of its extent) applied to sinners? Conditional redemption affirms that faith is the condition to be met.[31] Unquestionably, in this view, repentance and faith are human activities (even if divinely enabled), and without these conditions being met, there will be no redemption.[32]

Those holding to unconditional redemption, on the other hand, see the sinner as entirely passive in the application of the atonement. The biblical survey above found verbs of past, completed action ('Jesus has set you free', 'You were redeemed', 'Christ redeemed us'). No human subject is found in this process.[33] God redeems in

30 My arguments for regeneration preceding faith also apply to redemption preceding faith. See Daniel Kirkpatrick, 'An Exegetical and Theological Argument for the Priority of Regeneration in Conversion', *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 31 (Fall 2020): 89–101.

31 Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 196–97, 202.

32 Most who hold to a conditional view of redemption would not state that faith causes redemption, but this is a natural conclusion of their position, because the person must meet the conditions by his or her activities before the effect can occur. Faith is thus causative in their view and may rightly be viewed as a contributing work; it is not a response or outcome of redemption (or regeneration) but a necessary human activity prior to the actualization of that result. Thomas Nettles makes this observation as well: 'If belief arises from the unregenerate heart and distinguishes one man from another while all had the same natural or bestowed capacity, then the exercising of that capacity must be better than not exercising it. If it is better (and arises from a capability of the unregenerate), then the believer has contributed to his own salvation.' Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 287. One could substitute 'unredeemed heart' for 'unregenerate heart' with similar meanings. For additional difficulties with such synergistic activity, see Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013), 276–80.

33 See John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 175–82.

Christ by applying the work of the cross to helpless sinners.[34] The spiritual chains are loosed, the walls of enslavement are broken down, and the price is paid apart from any work or activity by the sinner. This is God's gracious gift to sinners, doing for them what they could not do themselves.

Does this mean that unconditional redemption implies complete passivity in the redemption process, or in all of salvation as a whole? Some critics claim this,[35] but they are far from accurate. Rather, redemption (a corollary of regeneration) makes faith possible, for freedom purchased by Christ (much like the new nature wrought by the Spirit) enables the formerly dead and enslaved sinner to believe. Belief in Christ is not attempted out of a spiritually enslaved and dead nature but rather a liberated and vivacious one.[36] Thomas Nettles helpfully draws this conclusion out through analysis of Romans 6. There, humanity is shown to be helplessly captive to its master, sin. Faith in Christ does not reside in a spiritually dead heart but is the product of a new heart.[37] Concerning redemption, the slave could not serve as a *gō'ēl*, for he lacks the capacity to give his master what is due. A divine *gō'ēl* is needed to accomplish this redemption.

Consistent, then, with the Reformed tradition, the unconditional redemption view posits a non-causative faith. Redemption is not conditioned on what the slave does for (or to) God but on what God has done for the slave. Just as God redeemed Israel from Pharaoh, leading to their subsequent exodus from Egypt, so too God purchases the freedom of spiritually enslaved sinners, leading them to walk in freedom. As Boaz exercised his right of *gᵉ'ullāh* to redeem both widow and land (saving them from peril and leading to a new covenant of marriage), so too Christ purchases the slave's freedom and permits the individual to enter into a new covenant as the Bride of Christ. Faith is a response to what the Redeemer has done, not a cause of it.

Redemption's application and universal atonement

If Christ has made universal atonement, exactly when is redemption applied? David Allen claims there are three possible alternatives: as an eternal decree from eternity past, when Christ died on the cross, or when a sinner puts his or her faith in Christ (what has been described here as conditional redemption).[38] The first two views are criticized because they assume that redemption has occurred prior to the birth and sin of an individual. In that case, the person would always have been redeemed. Yet

34 Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 74–75, provides a helpful analysis of how redemption may be found in Christ in light of Romans 3:24. According to him, redemption has accomplished emancipation for those in bondage to sin in Christ, whether 'in Christ' is understood as *locative* (in the sphere of Christ), *instrumental* (achieved through Christ), *agency* (the redemption achieved by Christ), or *causal* (the existing redemption established because of Christ).

35 Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 192. Geisler states that monergists believe humans are 'completely passive' prior to the event of salvation. But monergists believe simply that any activity done by a person before salvation is accomplished is non-causative and non-meritorious.

36 See Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 481. He observes that redemption (in the spiritual sense) results in a new state for believers. Only after they are set free from sin do they switch to God's mastery.

37 Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 287–93.

38 Allen, 'The Atonement', 65.

this essay also has rejected the third view, conditional redemption. Is there another alternative?

Discourse on this matter in recent years has concerned effectual calling and regeneration, though specific mention of redemption therein has been minimal. Effectual calling may be defined as 'an act of triune rhetoric in which God the Father appropriates human witness to Christ the Son in order to convince and transform a particular person by ministering, through the presence of God the Spirit, understanding and love of Christ'.[39] As a general call of the gospel goes to all people, a special call of salvation brings about converting change in the life of the elect. This change breaks the spiritual chains of the sinner, opens the spiritually blinded eyes, and enables a person to respond in faith.[40] Though closely associated with election, effectual calling does not negate the authenticity of the response of faith; it rather enables it to be most free.[41] Michael Horton (though holding to a limited scope of the atonement) makes this observation in light of effectual calling and redemption:

> The gospel is not an experience we have, much less one that we can bring about. It is an announcement that creates faith in the Redeemer who makes it. It comes to us from the outside. It *creates* new experiences and inner transformation that yields good works, but the gospel itself—and the Spirit's effectual calling through that gospel—remain distinct from anything done by us or within us.[42]

In other words, redemption was accomplished upon the cross but is applied through effectual calling. Faith is summoned out of nothing (similar to the creation account of Genesis 1–2) as the general call of the gospel takes effect. The person is redeemed, thereby enabling genuine faith.

Not far removed from effectual calling is regeneration (which, in this view, also precedes faith). Being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), one must be made alive in the spirit. In this process, one passes from spiritual death into spiritual life, is removed from spiritual blindness and deafness to receptivity to the things of God, and is instantaneously made dead to the former way of life and alive in Christ.[43] Here, the Spirit regenerates the heart prior to or upon the sinner's hearing of the gospel message. From this new nature, a person can believe in Christ unto salvation. It is along these lines that we can argue for the role of authentic faith in redemption. As enslaved people, we cannot pay the redemption price or give God what is due. God's work, however, precedes the human action of faith, pays the price through Christ's atonement to redeem the sinner, and allows that person to respond freely in faith.

Whether we hold to effectual calling or regeneration as the means of applying the work of Christ on the cross, we can see how the atonement is sufficient to pay for the sins of the whole world yet applicable only to the elect. Only the elect are effectually called, regenerated and redeemed. God applies Christ's work on the cross

39 Jonathan Hoglund, *Called by Triune Grace: Divine Rhetoric and the Effectual Call* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 4.

40 Ibid., 79, 86–87.

41 Barrett, *Salvation by Grace*, 121–22.

42 Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 102.

43 Barrett, *Salvation by Grace*, 126–35, Kirkpatrick, *Monergism or Synergism?* 89–99.

to sinners who hear the gospel, enabling them to respond freely in faith. Such divine activity does not negate human freedom; it enables it.[44]

Practical considerations

Thus far, I have argued that redemption is solely a divine activity, and the object of that redemption is sinners. This model contrasts with the model prevalent within evangelicalism according to which sinners, in some capacity, serve as redeemers of eternal life which God is offering them, asking only for faith in return. I will consider two practical ramifications of this view.

First, a common (and appropriate) practice within evangelicalism is to invite sinners to respond to the gospel. Typically, the evangelist asks people to pray the sinner's prayer or come to the altar to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. While the altar call and sinner's prayer approaches have been criticized,[45] I will address the broader matter of inviting someone to repent and believe (regardless of the approach).

In affirming a solely divine *gō'ēl* and non-causative faith, I do not mean to suggest there is passivity or a lack of genuine response on behalf of the repentant sinner.[46] Rather, I contend that someone's act of repenting and believing is not merely a human act. A person did not come to faith purely because he or she thought it would be a good idea or in their best interest. God must first work in the hearts and lives of sinners before they ever come to Christ for salvation. When we invite a sinner to repentance and faith in Christ and they in turn respond favorably, we are witnessing a true divine miracle—something no person on earth could ever have accomplished. The response of faith is genuine, but human wills bound to sin could never be truly free in Christ until redemption was first made for them. Through Christ's redemption of a sinner, his or her response is nothing but free. Moreover, God receives all the glory for it, for here a sinner has responded to grace rather than grace responding to the sinner. Everything is owed to God's grace.

A second practical implication concerns the matter of good works, in the lives of both Christians and non-Christians. Sinners are incapable of good works that would merit salvation (Is 64:6). Our enslavement to sin means we cannot naturally produce righteousness. That does not mean we are as bad as we could possibly be, or that God denies general grace to all people (non-Christians alike). It does mean that the good fruit (John 15:2) that comes by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) is brought about by grace, not human efforts. Good works (much like faith) are a response to, not a cause of, our redemption in Christ. Christians grow in sanctification by the Spirit into the likeness of the Son who redeemed them (Jn 8:36; Rom 8:2), meaning that any good works that they do are because of God's grace and for his glory. Non-Christians, on the other hand, remain in their wilful state of sin and bondage and are incapable of producing holiness and works pleasing to God; however, they are still capable of

44 For more on this issue, see my forthcoming *40 Questions About Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic), Question 18.

45 See Iain H. Murray, *The Invitation System* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998).

46 I address how the human will is involved in matters of monergism, divine election and depravity in *40 Questions About Divine Election*, particularly Questions 12, 14, 15, and 30.

charity and good works (albeit not in the salvific sense) because of God's general grace and sovereignty over all humanity.

Conclusion

This article has explored the relation between faith and redemption. Many evangelicals, Reformed and non-Reformed alike, believe that faith precedes redemption, a view called conditional redemption. But we have seen that eternal life is not held in pawn, nor is the enslaved sinner in a position to assume any function of a *gō'ēl*. Having no rights of *gᵉ'ullāh* and being in a helpless estate, the spiritually enslaved require a solely divine *gō'ēl* who alone can redeem the sinner. Faith is not an instrumental cause of such redemption, for then faith would become a synergistic work which effects a soteriological aspect (thereby nullifying the fulness of grace). Affirming unconditional redemption, I have argued that faith follows (not precedes) redemption. Mastery over the sinner is transferred from sin to the Saviour as the atonement is applied (passively) upon the sinner, for Christ holds due right of *gᵉ'ullāh*. As a response to this redemption, an individual freely does what he or she was incapable of doing beforehand, namely believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith, then, is noncausative, and redemption is all by grace.

ERT (2023) 47:1, 189–192

Book Reviews

Benjamin Chicka, *Playing as Others: Theology and Ethical Responsibility in Video Games*

Lorenzo C. Bautista, Aldrin M. Peñamora, and Federico G. Villanueva (eds.), *Faith and Bayan: Evangelical Christian Engagement in the Philippine Context*

Playing as Others: Theology and Ethical Responsibility in Video Games
Benjamin Chicka

Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021
Hb., xv + 235 pp., endnotes, bibliography, index

Reviewed by Israel A. Kolade, Director of Faith Formation, Holy Trinity Church, Costa Mesa, CA, USA; Graduate Student, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, USA

Benjamin Chicka is a lecturer in philosophy and religion at Curry College (Massachusetts, USA). As a revised and updated version of his PhD thesis, Chicka's *Playing as Others: Theology and Ethical Responsibility in Video Games* is a significant contribution to emerging scholarship at the intersection of theology and video games. Chicka applies Paul Tillich's theology of culture and Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of responsibility to the phenomenology of video games, arguing for the cultural capacity of video games to shape the individual's encounter with the Other.

The book's structure is creatively encoded in the language of video games. For instance, the preface is called 'Loading … ', the introduction is named 'Tutorial' and the chapters are 'levels'. Levels one to three outline Chicka's philosophical theology, rooted in Tillich and Levinas, and levels four to seven apply their insights to the experience of video games and their positive potential for marginalized groups.

In level one, Chicka outlines key features of Tillich's philosophical theology: his metaphysics of God as the Ground-of-Being, the categories of form, content, and import in his theology of culture, and his distinct conception of 'theonomy', which offers the capacity to overcome estrangement. In level two, Chicka turns to Levinas, applying his centering of the experience of the Other directly to the encounter with the virtual Other in the context of gaming interplay. Next, he describes the overlap in thought he finds between Tillich and Levinas, despite their perceived differences as modern and postmodern thinkers, respectively. Chicka then draws on recent neuroscience research to show the embodied significance of the individual's encounter with the virtual Other.

In level four, Chicka examines the impact of video games for the individual's encounter with LGBTQ+ Others. Through games such as *Gone Home* and *Mass*

Effect, players increase their awareness of the marginalization common to the LGBTQ+ community. The next chapter takes a similar approach to immigrant Others, exploring how games such as *Paper, Please* and *Bury Me, My Love* invite players to contend with the existential risks faced by and the courage required of immigrants crossing geopolitical borders.

Level six considers racial and religious representation in games and among game developers. Non-tokenized representation provides the context for racial and religious minorities to call out bias within the gaming industry, as Rami Ismail did regarding *Battlefield 3*. Additionally, developers can tell the often-unheard stories of minorities through game play, as was successfully done with *1979 Revolution: Black Friday*.

Finally, level seven, 'Economic and Social Polarities', looks at the economic realities of the gaming industry, which is often hugely lucrative for corporations but not for their employees. These economic disparities, among other forms of social injustice, are encoded in games such as *Cart Life*, which introduces players to the experience of living in poverty.

The conclusion (called 'Remaining Missions') restates and defends Chicka's claim regarding the positive cultural potential of video games to function as a site of religious encounter and support individuals' positive ethical formation.

Chicka's concise and detailed grasp of Tillich and Levinas, combined with his application of their ideas to the phenomenology of video games, is a clear display of theological and philosophical scholarship at its best. However, his limited and (when he mentions them at all) negative engagement with more traditional video games could give the impression that traditional games bear no positive cultural potential. Since many readers may have only more traditional games in mind before starting this book, Chicka could strengthen his case for the overall cultural potential of video games by offering at least a brief indication of the similar potential of traditional games.

In the early portions of his book, Chicka describes his argument as stemming from a non-confessional philosophical theology. For him, confessional theology has hindered the capacity for theological creativity that is necessary for meaningful theological engagement with the phenomenology of video games. However, this claim seems unnecessarily presumptuous. Given the lacuna that exists at the intersection of video games and theology, it would seem more reasonable to remain open to the possibility that other theological methodologies can also engage in this field of enquiry.

Playing as Others has a unique capacity to serve as an entryway into conversations around the relationship between the church and emerging subcultures. The themes and issues addressed herein could open up pathways of theological dialogue for ministry leaders seeking to establish relationships with video game enthusiasts. For example, several of the video games that Chicka mentions take seriously the formative potential of empathy for the individual. This virtue could be connected to biblical themes such as the *imago dei*. Chicka's work can help us connect meaningfully with a subculture that the church has largely ignored thus far.

Playing as Others is a masterful contribution to philosophical theology, as well as a sign of the potential that remains to be mined through theological reflections on

video games. The book will be of interest to students and scholars who work at the intersection of philosophy, theology and technology. Additionally, those interested in the field of cultural analysis will find it a helpful example of such work.

Faith and Bayan: Evangelical Christian Engagement in the Philippine Context
Lorenzo C. Bautista, Aldrin M. Peñamora, and Federico G. Villanueva (eds.)

Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham, 2022
Pb., 183 pp.

Reviewed by Bruce Barron, ERT executive editor

In recent years, lovers of democracy have observed with alarm the tendency of relatively stable democracies to turn to tough, no-nonsense, even authoritarian leaders: Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orban in Hungary. A similar dynamic occurred in the Philippines, which in 2016 elected Rodrigo Duterte, who promised to ruthlessly stamp out crime and corruption, as its president.

A few months after taking office, Duterte compared himself to Hitler when touting his readiness to slaughter drug addicts. His tenure featured thousands of extrajudicial killings, the forcible removal of an evangelical chief justice who opposed him, and the shutdown of a major media outlet. Nevertheless, large numbers of Christians continued to support Duterte.

In 2020, Aldrin Peñamora called evangelical scholars together to discuss how to 'address the tyranny and injustices of the Duterte administration'. This remarkable book is the result. In eight chapters plus an introduction and epilogue, the contributors dismantle—through detailed biblical analysis, supported by some political theory and practical experience—arguments for escapist non-involvement or uncritical obedience to government. They are to Duterte what Bonhoeffer was to Hitler. Happily, these authors are all still alive.

In chapter 1, Federico Villanueva writes, 'We cannot worship God if we do not practice justice.' He exegetes Psalm 82:3–5 on the foundational need for justice, reviews Jesus's concerns for justice (Lk 4:18; Mt 25:40; Mk 11:15–17), and concludes, 'Filipino Christians do not experience persecution because they do not engage with issues of justice. Their understanding of worship is limited to the confines of the church.'

Annelle Sanabal examines the Old Testament prophetic tradition of social and political engagement, arguing that the OT, long predating modern democratic systems, viewed the ruler as legitimate only if he was dispensing justice. Junette Galagala-Nacion interprets Romans 13:7 (in Paul's passage on civil government) as alluding to Mark 12:17 ('Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's') and thus implying that if submitting to government contradicts our call to love God and neighbour, we should not submit.

Chapters 4 (by Villanueva) and 5 (Roberto Barredo) cover the biblical basis for complaint and dissent. Villanueva recalls great men of faith who complained to or

even argued with God (Moses in Exodus 32, Abraham in Genesis 15 and 18, Jeremiah, Habakkuk) and decries Christians who passively respond, 'Trust in God', when action against injustice is needed. Against the background of Duterte's stifling of dissent, Barredo discusses how the OT limits the power of kings, concluding, 'This biblical insistence on the rule of law accords and somehow anticipates the modern democratic constitutionalism whose guiding principle is the subordination of all power to legal constraints.'

Aldrin Peñamora poignantly introduces his essay on *malasakit* (deep concern and compassion) by pointing out that before his conversion to Christ, he was a drug addict who could have been subject to Duterte's extermination tactics. Peñamora argues that Duterte's dehumanization of the murdered parallels Cain's violence toward Abel, calling this 'ethic of indifference … a blatant disregard and denial of Jesus's way for sinful humanity'.

Christopher Sabanal tackles eschatology and its implications, forcefully rejecting the otherworldly emphasis that can discourage Christians from seeking justice in this world, although his suggestion that Luke and John adjusted Jesus's message about the end times when the *parousia* did not arrive may trouble some evangelical readers. Chapter 8 shifts to practical activism, as Carlo Diño relates his experience of bringing together a wide range of disparate groups, both faith-based and secular, to oppose Duterte and what he learned from it.

Some of the themes in this compelling book—such as Galagala-Nacion's argument that Romans 13 tells us how to deal with good governments and Revelation 13 shows us how to deal with bad ones, or Borredo's justification of dissent—sounded strikingly like those of WEA senior theological advisor Thomas K. Johnson. So I had an 'about time' feeling when Diño quoted a lengthy passage from Johnson (in the November 2020 *ERT*) on why 'the biblical message pushes us to be radicals.' (Anyone who quotes *ERT* gets a good review from me.)

For me, the only crucial component missing from *Faith and Bayan* is social and political analysis. The authors contend frequently that Duterte's war on drugs is contrary to Filipinos' collective spirit. Then why did Filipinos elect him, and why did they vote for more of the same in 2022 with Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who has vowed to continue the war on drugs and to ignore rulings from the International Criminal Court? If a majority of Filipinos are voting for inhumanity, that does not make it morally right, but those who want justice must grapple with how to change their neighbours' minds. One step towards this goal, notably absent from this book, would be to articulate a credible policy alternative that would satisfy those who think Duterte and Marcos's abrogations of human rights are better than living in fear of criminal elements.

In the introduction, the editors express the hope that their work, though it emerges from painful realities in the Philippines, will be relevant to readers in other countries, 'particularly those from the Majority World'. This US reviewer responds, 'What about the Minority World? We need it too.'