



The Evangelical Review
of Theology and Politics

Vol. 10, 2022

ISSN : 2053-6763

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

www.evangelicalreview.net



www.evangelicalreview.net

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

ISSN: 2053-6763

Copyright © 2022 TER.

All material is copyright protected and may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted without written permission (except where a licence exists to do so).

Typesetting :: Ash Design (UK)

Minion Pro 10.5pt on 14.5pt



The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

Volume 10
2022

Edited by
Stephen M. Vantassel
& P. H. Brazier

Core Values

The *Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* subscribes to the historic decisions of the early church councils. We hold dearly to the deity of Christ, the virgin conception, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. We also believe in the unity of Scripture and consider the Bible as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. This high view of Scripture requires submissions to be underpinned by a thoughtful biblical and theological analysis. The Editors also welcome non-Evangelical contributors to submit critiques of Evangelical political and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values and beliefs, and that submissions are of interest and relevance to the aims and readership of the journal. Articles appearing in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editors.

Executive Editor

Dr Stephen M. Vantassel,
King's Evangelical Divinity School,
UK.

Consulting Editor

Prof. Gregory Hagg,
Director, Charles L. Feinberg Center,
Editor, Journal of Messianic Jewish
Studies

Assistant Editors

Anthony Royle,
Montana, USA

Matt Wong,
King's Evangelical Divinity School, UK

Book Review Editor

Anthony Royle,
Montana, USA

Design, Web, and Production Manager

Dr. P.H. Brazier (Ash Design),
Wimbledon, London, UK.

Consulting Editors

Dr Mark R. Amstutz, Wheaton College, USA

Dr. P.H. Brazier, Wimbledon, London, UK.

Dr Jonathan Chaplin, Kirby Laing Institute for
Christian Ethics, England

Dr David Cowan, University of St Andrew's and
King's Evangelical Divinity School

Dr Brian Edgar, Asbury Theological Seminary,
USA

Dr Paul Freston, Institute for Studies of Religion,
Baylor University, USA

Dr Douglas Petersen, Vanguard University, USA

Dr Timothy R.A. Sherratt, Gordon College, USA

Revd Dr David Smith, International Christian
College, Scotland

Dr Daniel Strange, Oak Hill College, England

Dr Michael Vlach, The Master's Seminary, USA

The *Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* is an online journal. All articles and reviews are published online as PDF files, and are downloadable by subscribers. All articles and reviews are published in real time. Once peer reviewed and typeset they are immediately published online and the subscribers notified by email. This takes the place of a printed journal. Subscribers can print-off articles and bind them in a folder for future reference. This means there is no delay between acceptance and publication of an article: the material becomes available immediately to the academic and Church communities. Periodically a selection of the articles/essays is published in book form. For subscriptions and submission guidelines and further information concerning the journal visit www.evangelicalreview.net and download our style sheet. Consideration begins immediately upon receipt.

Abstracts

This journal is abstracted in Religious and Theological Abstracts, 100 West Park Ave (Box 215), Myerstown PA 17067, USA. <http://rtabstracts.org>

www.evangelicalreview.net

Contents

Contributors	ix
--------------	----

Introduction	
Stephen M. Vantassel	xiii

Articles

Matthew Wong, 'A Critical Appraisal of Darryl G. Hart's Deconstruction of Evangelicalism.'	3
--	---

David C. Lewis, 'What is God Saying Through "Natural Disasters"?'	41
--	----

Sherene Khouri, 'The Concept of Miracles in Islam: A Case for the Resurrection of Jesus?'	63
---	----

Thorsten Prill, 'Missionary Affluence: A Question of Privilege and Sacrifice'	83
--	----

Review Articles

William B. Bowes Review Article From Marginal to Central: Carl Trueman's Analysis of Self and Society	107
--	-----

Book Reviews

- George A. Yancey & Ashlee Quosigk
*One Faith No Longer:
The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America*
Reviewed by, Luca Azuma 119
- Michael Graves
*How Scripture Interprets Scripture:
What Biblical Writers Can Teach Us About Reading the Bible*
Reviewed by, Stephen M. Vantassel 125
- Kenneth Nehrbass
*Advanced Missiology:
How to Study Missions in Credible and Useful Ways*
Reviewed by Martin Rodriguez 128
- Charles Marsh
Evangelical Anxiety
Noah R. Karger 133
- Matthew V. Novenson, Ed.
Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity
Reviewed by M.L. Volpp 137
- Martin Mosebach
*The 21: A Journey into the Land
of Coptic Martyrs*
Reviewed by Israel A. Kolade 142
- Notes 147

Contributors

Details of the authors/contributors are arranged according to the date of publication of their work on *The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* website.

Articles

MATTHEW WONG

Matthew Wong holds an M.A. in Theology from the University of Chester. He is an Associate Tutor in Theology at King's Evangelical Divinity School, UK.

(Published : March 6, 2022)

DAVID C. LEWIS.

Dr. David C. Lewis is a Social Anthropologist who has conducted research on the Anthropology of Religion in Japan, Britain, Russia and Central Asia. He is an Affiliated Researcher of the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit at the University of Cambridge and has taught at a number of universities, including the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge. His books include *After Atheism: Religion and Ethnicity in Russia and Central Asia*, *Religion in Japanese Daily Life* and *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact?*.

(Published : March 6, 2022)

SHERENE NICHOLAS KHOURI.

Sherene was born and raised in Damascus, Syria. She comes from a religiously mixed family (Eastern Orthodox, Catholics, Evangelicals, and Muslims). She and her husband were missionaries in the Middle East for 13 years. Sherene has BS in Biblical Studies from Moody Bible Institute, MA in Christian Apologetics and a PhD in Theology and Apologetics from Liberty University. She is also Assistant Professor of Arabic and Religion at Liberty University.

Email: cnkoula@liberty.edu

Liberty University

(Published : October 15, 2022)

REVD DR THORSTEN PRILL

The author is a minister of the Rhenish Church in Namibia and a Crosslinks mission partner. He has been seconded to teach at Edinburgh Bible College. Before coming to Scotland in 2017, he lectured in missiology, practical theology and systematic theology at Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary and served in pastoral ministry in Namibia, Germany and the UK.

(Published : October 26, 2022)

Review Articles

REVD. WILLIAM B. BOWES

Scholar, teacher, and mental health professional, William B. Bowes is a PhD Candidate in New Testament and Christian Origins at the University of Edinburgh.

(Published : July 30, 2022).

Book Reviews

LUCA AZUMA.

Luca Azuma. M.A., is a graduate of California State University, Fullerton.
(Published : March 8, 2022)

STEPHEN M. VANTASSEL.

Stephen M. Vantassel is a tutor of Biblical Studies and Theology at King's Evangelical Divinity School, Broadstairs, UK. He is also executive editor of *The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics*. In 2008, Stephen received his Doctorate in Theology from Trinity Theological Seminary (Newburgh, IN) for his dissertation, *A Biblical, Ethical, and Scientific Evaluation of the Christian Animal Rights Activists Movement's Opposition to Wildlife Trapping*. He works at Montana's Department of Agriculture as the Vertebrate Pest Specialist. Previously he was the Program Coordinator of Wildlife Damage Management at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He ran the Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management, based at the School of Natural Resources.
(Published : April 18, 2022)

MARTIN RODRIGUEZ.

Martin Rodriguez, PhD (Intercultural Studies) is a graduate of Azusa Pacific University, and Assistant Professor of Practical Theology.
(Published : July 12, 2022)

NOAH R. KARGER.

Noah R. Karger is an MDiv student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Research Assistant at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.
(Published : July 15, 2022)

M.L. VOLPP.

M.L. Volpp, Graduate Student at University of Chester.

(Published : October 14, 2022])

ISRAEL A. KOLADE.

Israel A. Kolade, Fuller Theological Seminary.

(Published : October 17, 2022])



Introduction

Stephen M. Vantassel

About

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is an online journal. All articles and reviews are published online as PDF files, and are downloadable.

All articles and reviews are published in real time. Once peer reviewed and typeset they are immediately published online. This takes the place of a printed journal. All material can be printed and bound in a folder for future reference. This means there is no delay between acceptance and publication of an article: the material becomes available immediately to the academic and Church communities.

What you have here are the articles, review articles, and reviews from 2020 collected together in a single edition for subscribers to print-off, or consult in electronic mode on Kindle or an e-Book reader.

In addition all past volumes of The Evangelical Review of Society and Politics are available for subscribers from the website: www.theevangelicalreview.net.

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is a peer-reviewed,

online journal exploring God's revelation to humanity in the form of Jesus Christ. Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical Christian tradition are welcomed and invited from across the disciplinary spectrum: Evangelical theology, biblical studies, biblical theology, politics, society, economics, missiology, homiletics, discipleship, preaching, conversion, salvation, atonement, redemption, the Church et al.

About...

The Evangelical Review of Society and Politics and *The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics*, are international peer-reviewed journals exploring Evangelical issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. The purpose of the journal is to bring an international and scholarly Evangelical analysis to bear upon various social and political issues of national and international interest. The Editors are committed to presenting the full spectrum of Evangelical thought to provide readers (whether Evangelical or those analysing Evangelical phenomena) with thoughtful, scholarly debate and original research that is biblically based and theologically sound.

Core Values

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics subscribes to the historic decisions of the early church councils. We hold dearly to the deity of Christ, the virgin conception, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. We also believe in the unity of Scripture and consider the Bible as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. This high view of Scripture requires submissions to be underpinned by a thoughtful biblical and theological analysis. The Editors also welcome non-Evangelical contributors to submit critiques of Evangelical political and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values and beliefs, and that submissions are of interest and relevance to the aims

and readership of the journal. Articles appearing in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editors.

Submissions

Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical tradition are invited from across the disciplinary spectrum. Given the broad and interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter covered by the journal, contributors should refer to our core values and submission instructions, which provide further details of material suitable for inclusion.

Intending authors should see our guidance notes for articles, review articles, and book reviews and use the electronic submission form:

https://www.evangelicalreview.net/ter_authors.html

Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

Articles





A Critical Appraisal of Darryl G. Hart's Deconstruction of Evangelicalism

Matthew Wong

KEYWORDS:

Evangelicalism	evangelical	neo-evangelicalism	post-evangelicalism
coherence	ecclesiology	18th Century	Protestantism
Modernism	Fundamentalism	Revivalism	

ABSTRACT:

How one interprets the evangelical movement varies widely. For many, Evangelicalism has come to denote a wacky and sometimes brazen, intellectually inferior strain of Christianity. For others the term 'evangelical' is laden with negative connotations suggesting ill-informed fervour and strident belief. However, for self-professing evangelicals, and those sympathetic to the movement, Evangelicalism represents an authentic and pure expression of time-honoured biblical truth, grounded in the Word of God and genuine religious experience.

But what does the term 'evangelical' mean? How many people would be comfortable defining the movement or even tracking its development through the ages? According to Hart and other sceptics of Evangelicalism, difficulty defining the movement's core beliefs and precise nature is unsurprising, for it is essentially a theological mirage, an amorphous and ill-conceived relic of historic orthodox Protestantism. This paper will examine attempts to deconstruct the evangelical project and assess whether the movement should be abandoned due to theological shallowness or cherished as a vibrant and adaptive vehicle for conveying and giving expression to timeless Christian dogma. It is argued that the answer is more complex than initially meets the eye and lies somewhere in between these two positions.

INTRODUCTION

Evangelicalism is a vast, highly complex and influential movement. Current estimates place the number of evangelicals in the world at circa 660 million (2020), representing one in every four Christians.¹ This figure groups Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical Christians together, whereas if counted separately, a more modest estimate would be circa 285.5 million (2011 Pew Forum data), representing 4.1% of the world's total population and 13.1% of the world's Christian population.² According to extensive research carried out by French researcher Sébastien Fath, Asia has the highest number of evangelical Christians (215 million), followed by Africa (185 million), South America (123 million), North America (107 million), Europe (23 million), and Oceania (7 million).³ A worldwide, trans-denominational theological movement within Protestant Christianity, Evangelicalism emphasises the authority of Scripture, salvation by grace through faith alone, the need for personal conversion and believers' responsibility to reach others with the Gospel. The movement derives its name from the English word 'evangelical' which originates from the Greek εὐαγγέλιον ('gospel' or 'glad tidings').

Having its conception in the Reformation, Evangelicalism gained a distinct theological flavour and voice during the revivals that began in Britain and New England in the 1730s. Though the term 'evangelical' was used prior to the 18th century to refer to 'the gospel',⁴ it was not until Wesley and Whitefield that the movement assumed a level of maturity and coming of age. Though many consider Evangelicalism a

1 Sébastien Fath, 2020. [<https://evangelicalfocus.com/print/5119/660-million-evangelicals-in-the-world/>] [accessed 21.2.22]

2 Pew Forum, 2011. <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/> [accessed 21.2.22]

3 Sébastien Fath, 2020. [<http://blogdesebastienfath.hautetfort.com/archive/2020/01/21/660-millions-d-evangeliques-en-2020-estimation-6207073.html>] [accessed 21.2.22]. See also Aaron Earls, 2020, '3 in 5 Evangelicals Live in Asia or Africa,' *Lifeway Research* [<https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/03/02/3-in-5-evangelicals-live-in-asia-or-africa/>] [accessed 21.2.22]

4 Bebbington, 2004, 1.

distinct theological movement with discernible emphases and mission goals, Evangelicalism's internal coherence has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years due to the emergence of new iterations embracing postmodern tendencies. Hart, who focuses on conservative Protestantism in the age of Billy Graham, rejects the mainstream consensus that regards contemporary Evangelicalism as a revivalistic, theologically conservative and richly historical movement. He provocatively writes "Evangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist. In fact, it is the wax nose of 20th Century American Protestantism. Behind this proboscis, which has been nipped and tucked by savvy religious leaders, academics and pollsters, is a face void of any discernible features."⁵

Hart has made a controversial and audacious claim, but is it true? This article begins by examining some attempts at defining Evangelicalism and outlines the complexities of this task. The arguments underpinning Hart's claim are first presented then discussed and evaluated under the headings 'incoherence', 'artificial construction' and 'ecclesiological deficiency'. It is argued that Hart fails to provide an adequate biblical and sociological definition of Evangelicalism and instead deconstructs the movement using a partisan framework. In so doing, he judges the theological validity of a vast and complex movement according to whether it aligns with a reformed outlook on doctrine and ecclesiology. Though Hart makes several compelling arguments against aberrative evangelical theology, it is also concluded that he needlessly dispenses the evangelical baby with the bathwater by failing to distinguish classical/orthodox from neo- and post-evangelical variants.

Incoherence

Hart's first line of evidence against the unity of evangelical identity is that Evangelicalism lacks conceptual clarity and internal coherence. He

5 Hart, 2004, 16-17.

employs statements made by several scholars who have adopted a critical outlook towards contemporary Evangelicalism. For example, he cites Wells' assertion that "the only semblance of cohesion that now remains [in Evangelicalism] is simply tactical, never theological."⁶ Hart and Wells are not alone in regarding Evangelicalism to be an insipid and theologically indistinct entity. Murray contends that much of Anglo-American Evangelicalism is biblically illiterate,⁷ ditto McLoughlin who argues that revivalists have reduced Christianity "to a hard core of universally acknowledged fundamentals ... [and] in the course of explaining these truths they either reduced Christianity to banalities or inflated it to vagaries."⁸ Hart also cites Noll's statement that traditional definitions of Evangelicalism lack "conceptual clarity"⁹ so that "the pieces... never fit together exactly..."¹⁰ and Brown's assertion that Evangelicalism is willing to overlook doctrinal differences by building the movement upon a "common denominator of pietistic tendencies and revivalist fervor."¹¹ Hart therefore concludes that Evangelicalism is in the midst of an identity crisis that stems from the movement's lack of "an institutional centre, intellectual coherence, and devotional direction."¹²

Artificial Construction

An artificial construction may be defined as an engineered, reactionary entity that ultimately has its origins with human design, will and intellect.

6 Wells, David F. *No Place for Truth: Or whatever happened to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 133 in Hart, 2004, 14.

7 Murray, Iain H. *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000*. Banner of Truth Trust, 2000 in Hart, 2004, 15.

8 McLoughlin, Jr., William G. *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham*. New York: Ronald Press, 1959, 524 in Hart, 2004, 45.

9 Noll, Mark A. *Between faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986, 2 in Hart, 2004, 50.

10 Noll, M.A. *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 5 in Hart, 2004, 50.

11 Brown, Harold O.J. 'Evangelicalism in America', *Dialog*, 24 (1986) 1986, 191 in McCune, 2003, 89.

12 Hart, 2004, 176.

In stark contrast to the Church, which was organically birthed at Pentecost as a corporate and spiritual entity through the work of the Holy Spirit and God's redemptive plan, Hart maintains that contemporary Evangelicalism was constructed by post-WWII neo-evangelicals and subsequently heralded as a conservative alternative to mainline liberal Protestantism following the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of the 1920s-30s.¹³ Key underpinnings of this 'artificial construction' included the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), Fuller Theological Seminary (1947) and 'Christianity Today' (1956).¹⁴ By 1976, Hart writes "the renovation was complete";¹⁵ Evangelicalism – whilst "tapping conservative Protestantism's devotion and faith" – was now branded *anti-fundamentalist*.¹⁶ Hart identifies the chief architects of this evangelical construction¹⁷ as "the historians, sociologists and pollsters of American religion"¹⁸ who helped forge an insipid, amorphous and nondescript brand of Evangelicalism. The scholar also contends that prior to this 'artificial' construction in the mid-20th Century, orthodox Protestantism was essentially evangelical Protestantism.¹⁹ He writes "To be a member or officer in one of the largest and oldest American Protestant denominations was to be an evangelical."²⁰

Ecclesiological Deficiency

Simply put, ecclesiology is the theological study of the nature and structure of the Christian Church. As theology is largely drawn along denominational lines, it is unsurprising that evangelicals belonging to various denominational traditions should have differing theological

13 Ibid.,190; McCune, 1998, 22.

14 Hart, 2004, 13.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.,18.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 20.

20 Ibid.

outlooks. Hart, as a reformed Presbyterian, attaches much importance to the denominational life of the church and views denominations as superstructures that support and provide theological coherence to the rich tapestry of orthodox Protestant belief. In voicing a healthy respect for and seeking to preserve robust denominationalism, Hart regards parachurch influences and pan-denominationalism as constituting an affront on the ecclesiological integrity of orthodox Christianity. He therefore equates non-denominationalism with an insipid, watered-down strain of Christianity; one that advocates a lowest-common-denominator faith predicated on overlooking theological differences instead of uniting over biblical distinctives.

Hart argues that Evangelicalism's ecclesiology has been severely weakened by the movement's propensity to "take members from diverse denominations and independent congregations and stitch them together into a recognizable quilt."²¹ According to Hart, this act of denominational pilfering is "a parasite on historic Christian communions"²² and creates a false impression of church growth. Hart accuses the parachurch movement of falsely regarding "ecclesial expressions of Protestantism as synonymous with nominal Christianity."²³ According to Hart, the growth of the parachurch movement "made plausible a faith that relied on voluntary assent and entrepreneurial genius";²⁴ one that considered orthodox Protestantism to be "too formal, cumbersome and elitist."²⁵ By eschewing "creeds", "structures of governance", "accountability, liturgy, discipleship and diaconal assistance,"²⁶ Evangelicalism embraced "pious individualism, mass appeal, religious experience and pragmatic techniques for communicating the Gospel."²⁷ Hart thus concludes that contemporary Evangelicalism "leans toward abstraction" rather than embracing

21 Ibid., 30.

22 Hart, 2004, 32.

23 Ibid., 117.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Hart, 2004, 124.

27 Ibid., 118.

“the concrete forms of give-and-take involved in congregational and denominational life.”²⁸

WHAT IS EVANGELICALISM?

Evangelicalism is a term derived from the word ‘evangelical’ which originates from the Greek εὐαγγέλιον meaning ‘gospel’ or ‘glad tidings’ (Luke 2:10).²⁹ The Gospel, according to 1 Corinthians 15:3b-4, is that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,” thereby providing sinful mankind with a way of redemption.³⁰ As such, Evangelicalism derives its theological mandate from Scriptures that exhort believers to proclaim Christ’s atoning sacrifice at Calvary (Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; 4:10-12).

According to Bebbington and Noll, Evangelicalism originated amongst Moravians and Wesley due to a preoccupation with assurance³¹ and zeal for a dynamic, heartfelt religion.³² Its supporters eschewed the stale traditionalism and formalism of contemporary/established Protestantism³³ by embracing pietistic passion, missionary vigour, and spiritual fervour. A mix of pietism, Puritanism and ‘holy living’ in Germany, Europe and the Anglosphere paved the way for the likes of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. Emphasised was the pressing need for personal conversion and genuine repentance which led to missionary zeal both within and outside denominational confines. Such qualities were embodied in the 18th century Great Awakening in British America, sowing the seeds for the 19th century Second Great Awakening in America which provides the historical background to Hart’s thesis.

Tidball likens the task of propositionally defining evangelical theology

28 Ibid., 125.

29 Sweeney, 2005, 17.

30 Elwell, 2001, 406.

31 Bebbington, 2004, 42.

32 Noll, 2001, 9.

33 Ibid.

to attempting to pick up a slippery bar of soap.³⁴ As a living and ‘lived out’ theology, Evangelicalism lends itself to analysis via what it proclaims and not by internal systematisation of its beliefs. This sentiment is reflected in Holmes’ contention: “There is no British, still less any European, evangelical theology, if by that is meant an identifiable commonly held and distinctive position; instead there is an on-going conversation...”³⁵

According to church historian and professing evangelical David Bebbington, however, evangelical theology has traditionally placed an emphasis on ‘biblicism’, ‘conversionism’, ‘crucicentrism’, and ‘activism’.³⁶ He defines ‘biblicism’ as Evangelicalism’s “devotion to the Bible... their [evangelicals’] belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages”;³⁷ ‘conversionism’ or ‘the call to conversion’ as “the content of the gospel”, namely the belief that human beings need to be converted;³⁸ ‘crucicentrism’ as the doctrine of the cross, specifically the preeminent importance assigned to the atonement by evangelicals;³⁹ and ‘activism’ as the desire to see the “conversion of others.”⁴⁰

Tidball argues that Bebbington’s ‘Quadrilateral’ is the closest we have to a consensus definition⁴¹ whilst Knowles lauds its brevity and succinctness,⁴² declaring it to be the “yardstick by which Evangelicalism can be measured.”⁴³ The definition’s acceptance is not universal however, and though it has been widely praised for sidestepping controversial theological specifics,⁴⁴ it is derided by McCune who laments its propensity to reduce Evangelicalism

34 Tidball, 1994, 12.

35 Holmes, Stephen. “British (and European) Evangelical Theologies,” in Larsen and Treier (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) 256.

36 Bebbington, 2005, 2-3.

37 Ibid., 12.

38 Ibid., 5.

39 Ibid., 14.

40 Ibid., 10.

41 Tidball, 1994, 14.

42 Knowles, 2010, 1.

43 Ibid.

44 Hutchinson, 2012, 17.

to “an amorphous blob of religion” by consigning doctrinal details to the periphery of irrelevance.⁴⁵ Similarly, Carson writes “because the four points of the Quadrilateral are so general, the precise nature of evangelical conflict with theological alternatives is sometimes obscured”.⁴⁶

Larsen, whilst acknowledging the Quadrilateral’s popularity, also criticises what he perceives to be its excessive doctrinal latitude. He argues that the Quadrilateral must be ‘fleshed out’ and contextualised if the evangelical label is to maintain its theological distinctiveness.⁴⁷ To illustrate his point, Larsen observes how the Catholic friar and preacher St. Francis of Assisi is an ‘evangelical’ under the Quadrilateral’s rubric.⁴⁸ His ‘Rule’, for example, is derived from Scripture quotations (‘biblicism’); he claimed to have a dramatic conversion experience (‘conversionism’); he commissioned fellow friars to preach amongst the people and attend to their physical needs (‘activism’); and he affirmed belief in stigmata (‘crucicentrism’).⁴⁹

Similarly, Carson expresses dissatisfaction with the Quadrilateral’s exclusive focus on what is distinctive as opposed to what is of crucial importance.⁵⁰ He argues that because the Quadrilateral does not specifically mention Christology or the Trinity, one might gain the impression that evangelicals do not care for such matters.⁵¹ Larsen⁵² attempts to rectify these deficiencies and defines an evangelical as: an orthodox Protestant; one who accords with the 18th Century revivalist movements; one who submits to the Bible’s inspired and divine truth as the sole authority for all aspects of faith and practice; one who regards Christ’s atonement as the only way in which sinful man can be reconciled to God; and one who stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion, sanctification and evangelism.⁵³

45 McCune, 2003, 99.

46 Carson, 2002, 450.

47 Larsen, 2007, 2.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Carson, 2002, 450.

51 Ibid.

52 Larsen, 2007, 1.

53 Ibid., 3-10.

Larsen's 'Pentagon' thus touches on three additional elements omitted by Bebbington: Trinitarian Nicene orthodoxy, 18th Century revivalism and an emphasis on Pneumatology; the latter being a key distinctive of evangelical Christianity that asserts the importance of the Holy Spirit in conversion and the subsequent life of faith.⁵⁴

For the purpose of this article, neo-evangelicalism or 'new Evangelicalism' – the subject of Hart's critique – is taken to refer to the evangelical wing that resulted from the anti-fundamentalist movement in early-mid 20th century America, and which stressed direct engagement with culture and in some instances, theological cooperation with liberal Christian groups. Though neo-evangelicals held to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, they nonetheless sought to steer a middle course between the separatist dogmatism of the Fundamentalists and the rejection of doctrinal and biblical authority espoused by the Modernists. Neo-evangelicals began to embrace modern scholarship to engage the prevailing culture directly, constructively, and in an intellectually credible manner. Today, however, the term neo-evangelical/neo-evangelicalism is largely defunct, having served its historical purpose, and has been replaced by the umbrella term 'evangelical'. Neo-evangelicalism is still used by critics of the movement to distinguish between a credible (classical 18th century evangelicalism) and 'lite' (neo-evangelical) version of Evangelicalism; the latter epitomising, in the eyes of its critics, a 'lowest common denominator' faith riddled with reductionist tendencies.

IS EVANGELICALISM INCOHERENT?

Scholars have long since observed Evangelicalism's theological diversity; in particular the way in which the term 'evangelical' is employed. Noll notes how 'evangelical' may refer to: someone who believes the good news of the gospel; a Protestant during the Reformation; the nexus of Protestant movements established in 18th century Britain and its empire;

54 Ibid., 10.

18th century revival movements associated with Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards that paved the way for 19th – 20th century revivalists such as Finney, Moody and Graham; and one who adheres to certain doctrinal convictions and exhibits particular religious outlooks.⁵⁵

Because Evangelicalism was never a unified, much less monolithic movement,⁵⁶ some scholars are reluctant to define evangelical theology in creedal/confessional⁵⁷ or propositional terms. Instead, there is a trend towards defining Evangelicalism using qualitative terms to capture the movement's essential character.⁵⁸ Gillie typifies this qualitative approach when he writes "Our bond is a common experience, not a unanimous interpretation of that experience; a common devotion to our Lord, not an exact statement concerning His mysterious yet all-sufficient work."⁵⁹ Johnston also circumnavigates Evangelicalism's 'definitional impasse'⁶⁰ by observing how the movement should be likened to "a large, extended family."⁶¹ Still others such as Webber have attempted to define Evangelicalism *taxonomically* by identifying sixteen American "evangelical species",⁶² whilst Smith and Tidball have defined the movement *metaphorically* by employing such terms as "evangelical mosaic"⁶³, "evangelical kaleidoscope"⁶⁴, "an extended family; a twelve ring circus in which various different acts are performed; a coat of many

55 Noll, 2001, 13.

56 Elwell, 2001 407.

57 McCune, 2003, 95.

58 Lints, Richard. *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 30-31 in Carson, 2002, 454.

59 Gillie, R.C. *Evangelicalism: Has it a future?* London, Cassel, 1912, 11-24 in Hutchinson, 2012, 10.

60 Johnston, Robert. "American Evangelicalism: An Extended Family," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (ed. Donald Dayton and Robert Johnston), Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991, 252-72 in Sweeney, 2005, 21.

61 Ibid. Johnston overlooks the fact that many of the world's religions and cults display strong family resemblances.

62 Webber, Robert E. *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 31-33 in Sweeney, 2005, 20.

63 Smith, Timothy L. "The Evangelical Kaleidoscope and the Call to Christian Unity," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15 (1986), 125-140 in Sweeney, 2005, 21.

64 Ibid.

colours; a family tree with different branches drawing from the same roots; ... a patchwork quilt.”⁶⁵

Rather than employing a set of narrow definitional terms,⁶⁶ Lints argues that Evangelicalism must instead be defined as a diversity of theological frameworks⁶⁷ governed by “cultural, institutional and personal factors.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Greggs comments that Evangelicalism is less about theological statements and propositional truth, and more about a pious theological framework.⁶⁹ The difficulty in propositionally defining evangelical theology has led Dayton to call for a moratorium on the evangelical label which he considers “theologically incoherent, sociologically confusing, and ecumenically harmful.”⁷⁰ His sentiment is echoed by Horton and Hart, the former arguing that debates over evangelical identity are a waste of time and energy,⁷¹ the latter concluding that Evangelicalism lacks any distinctive characteristics.⁷²

Tidball maintains, however, that theological diversity does not necessarily imply incoherency, the scholar observing how different varieties of Evangelicalism often adhere to a central core of evangelical dogma. Noll reaches a similar conclusion, noting that “evangelical traits have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, or clearly demarcated groups of Christians. But they do serve to identify a large family of churches and religious enterprises.”⁷³

But can metaphors *explain* the diversity that exists within

65 Tidball, 1994, 19-20.

66 Lints, Richard. *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 30 in Carson, 2002, 454.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Grenz, S.J. *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IL: IVP, 1993), 62 in Greggs, 2010, 6.

70 Dayton, Donald. *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (ed. Donald Dayton and Robert Johnston), Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991, 251 in Sweeney, 2005, 21.

71 Horton, Michael. “The Battle over the Label ‘Evangelical,’” *Modern Reformation* 10, no. 2 (March/April 2001):16 in Sweeney, 2005, 23.

72 Hart, 2004, 17 in Pettegrew, 2006, 161.

73 Noll, 2001, 13.

Evangelicalism and show whether the movement is coherent or not? Stone argues that attempts to encapsulate the essence of evangelical diversity via metaphors are futile as figurative language is purely descriptive, not explanatory.⁷⁴ Specifically, he notes how the “mosaic” and “kaleidoscope” metaphors are incapable of explaining *why* evangelical diversity exists.⁷⁵ Though metaphors may help draw attention to similar observed features, the important questions of why and how these features function remain unanswered.⁷⁶ According to Stone, evangelicals’ reliance upon metaphors to define their movement reveals a deep uncertainty over what they believe; the scholar adopting a similar position to Hart by affirming that Evangelicalism is a fiction that cannot withstand analytical scrutiny.⁷⁷

The rise of ecumenism and postmodernism within the evangelical church – particularly in the realms of apologetics, homiletics, ecclesiology, and missiology – has undoubtedly done much to precipitate a destructive theological inclusivity. Though Hart does not refer to the rise of post-evangelicalism, a brief discussion of its rationale and guiding principles are herewith included to exemplify a movement that, unlike classical and neo-evangelical strains, is *truly* incoherent and lacking conceptual clarity. For all its shortfalls and propensity to engage in reductionist oversimplification, neo-evangelical belief largely cohered around key orthodox tenets and espoused evangelistic zeal, albeit in new and innovative ways via engagement with culture, the academy and wider society. A willingness to rally around key biblical principles in a coherent manner is conspicuously absent in the post-evangelicalism of the late 20th century; and it is to this iteration our focus now turns.

74 Stone, 1997, 4.

75 Ibid., 5.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid., 2-3.

‘EVANGELICAL’ POSTMODERNISM/POST- EVANGELICALISM: AN EXCURSUS

Famously defined by Jean-François Lyotard as “incredulity towards meta-narratives”;⁷⁸ postmodernism constitutes a pervasive attack on the epistemological foundations of Evangelicalism. By embracing experientialism and doubt,⁷⁹ Wilkin observes how evangelical postmoderns are increasingly abandoning the Bible’s teachings on everlasting life, justification by faith alone, the immortality of the soul, and Jesus’ substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection.⁸⁰ Postmoderns, such as Brian McLaren, exhibit few *sine qua nons*;⁸¹ their insistence that “systems mean nothing and only exist in order to perpetuate the belief systems of those who created them”⁸² reveals an entrenched disillusionment with attempts to systematise biblical truth, leading to perspectivism and relativism. By spurning the concept of propositional/absolute truth in favour of pluralistic relativism and deconstructionism, ‘evangelical’ postmodernism can never constitute a theologically coherent movement; indeed, it proudly revels in this fact.

The Emergent Church Movement is a prime example of ‘evangelical’ postmodernism. Gaining ascendancy in the early 1990s as a reaction to America’s conservative Christian subculture,⁸³ it has since been embraced by much of North America, the United Kingdom, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.⁸⁴ Specifically targeting the younger generation, most ‘emergents’ exhibit what King describes as “postmodern views on truth and epistemology.”⁸⁵ According to Kimball,

78 Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. In Theory and History of Literature* (vol. 10). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 24.

79 Wilkin, 2007, 3.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Pettegrew, 2006, 164.

83 Bielo, 2011, 5, 197.

84 Asumang, 2010, 114.

85 King, 2005, 27.

they are questioning traditional conservative understandings of biblical community and social justice in attempts to postmodernise the Gospel message for today's society.⁸⁶

Bielo and Payne attribute the rise of emergent theology to a white, male, well-educated middle-class,⁸⁷ one that surpassed its parents' educational achievements in the 1960s, leading to a mass relocation to the cities and suburbs.⁸⁸ As the affluence and social status of these evangelicals increased, they began to embrace political activity and social concerns.⁸⁹ A nascent emergent theology is evident in *"The Chicago Call: An Appeal to Evangelicals"* (1977) which expressed a desire to "recapture the mystery of worship, the power of symbols, and the continuity with tradition";⁹⁰ and the 1994 publication *"Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium"* which stressed a "more inclusive and ultimately more historic Christianity"⁹¹ alongside a pledge to reinstate a sense of mystery that ought, in the authors' words, to accompany worship.⁹²

Emergent theology is notoriously hard to define; its diversity and ideological pluralism has led some scholars to regard it as a conversation.⁹³ Its nebulous nature is embodied by one of its leading figures, Brian McLaren, who identifies himself, amongst other things, as "Missional", "Evangelical" [my emphasis], "Liberal/Conservative", "Mystical/Poetic", "Catholic", "Green" and "Emergent."⁹⁴ Beneath the evangelical facade of the Emerging Church lies, according to Pettegrew, eight themes:

86 Kimball, D. *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 18 in King, 2005, 27.

87 Bielo, 2011, 5.

88 Payne, 2003, 47.

89 Ibid. It must be noted, however, that Evangelicalism has a distinguished and longstanding interest in social issues e.g., the Abolitionist movement in the 18th -19th century.

90 Shelton, 2004, 45.

91 Ibid. 47.

92 Ibid.

93 Pettegrew, 2006, 165.

94 McLaren, B.D. (2004). *A Generous Orthodoxy...* Zondervan.

a “friendly attitude towards science”; a “willingness to re-examine beliefs concerning the work of the Holy Spirit”; a “more ‘tolerant’ attitude toward varying views on eschatology”; “a shift away from so-called extreme Dispensationalism”; “an increased emphasis on scholarship”; “a more definite recognition of social responsibility”; “a re-opening of the subject of biblical inspiration” and “a growing willingness of evangelical theologians to converse with liberal theologians.”⁹⁵

According to King, these eight themes fall into three categories: methodological, philosophical and theological.⁹⁶ Methodologically, Emerging Churches often reject traditional orders of service in favour of a more ‘organic’ approach that includes times of quiet contemplation, visual presentations, thoroughly modern worship, open sharing and freedom of movement.⁹⁷ Carson and McCune also observe the Emerging Church’s obsession with consumer and marketing mentality, seeker-sensitive approaches,⁹⁸ church growth strategies, Christian self-esteemism, and psychotherapeutic techniques.⁹⁹ Unhappiness becomes the new theodicy for modern evangelicals; an approach that grants a teaching/practice legitimacy based on whether it meets the perceived needs of the congregation (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3-4).¹⁰⁰

Philosophically, the Emerging Church adopts multisensory worship¹⁰¹ that combines freedom of movement with icons, props and symbols, candles, incense, prayer labyrinths, prayer stations, liturgy, meditative and contemplative techniques and dimmed lighting to blend both ancient and future expressions of faith.¹⁰² To achieve its objective of creating

95 Pettegrew, 2006, 160.

96 King, 2005, 31-32.

97 King, 2005, 44.

98 Carson, 2002, 467.

99 McCune, 1999, 92; Carson, 2002, 465.

100 Carson, 2002, 467.

101 King, 2005, 44.

102 Webber, R.E. (1999). *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, Baker Academic.

'sacred spaces' that radiate a sense of "awe, wonder and transcendence,"¹⁰³ Bader-Saye observes how emergent theology has appropriated images and sacramentalism from the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican traditions,¹⁰⁴ reversing the efforts of the Reformers who sought to rid the Church of Romanism.¹⁰⁵ In line with postmodern thought, many "emergents" espouse relativism, pluralism and experientialism at the expense of biblical exegesis. McLaren writes "The ultimate Bible study or sermon in recent decades yielded clarity. That clarity, unfortunately, was often boring – and probably not that accurate, either, since reality is seldom clear, but usually fuzzy and mysterious ... How about a congregation who may not have 'captured the meaning' of the text, but a text that captured the imagination and curiosity of the congregation?"¹⁰⁶ McLaren's hermeneutic may thus be described as 'textually autonomous', 'eisegetical' and 'relativistic', declaring that meaning no longer resides in the text itself but in the reader's imagination.

Though seeking to engage with contemporary culture and unchurched youth, emergent theology contravenes Evangelicalism's 'theological blueprint' by downplaying the importance of biblical exegesis in favour of experientialism and eisegesis (contra 'biblicism' and Larsen's '18th Century Revivalism'). Its emphasis on church growth techniques rather than biblical conversion, and its pluralistic attitude towards other religions, shows scant regard for 'conversionism' and the message of the cross ('crucicentrism'). Additionally, in attempting to reach the unchurched through seeker-friendly dialogue, the importance of biblical evangelism is further undermined. Evangelical missiologist David Hesselgrave notes that ecumenical dialogue is predicated on syncretistic and debased views of revelation, Christology and Soteriology.¹⁰⁷ He asserts that dialogue

103 King, 2005, 44.

104 Bader-Saye, Scott. "The Emergent Matrix," *Christian Century* 121/24 (November 2004): 21 in Pettegrew, 2006, 168.

105 Pettegrew, 2006, 168.

106 McLaren, B. in Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (El Cajon, California: Youth Specialties, 2003), 73 in Pettegrew, 2006, 171.

107 Hesselgrave, D. "Interreligious Dialogue – Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives,"

should seek to demonstrate the superiority of the biblical worldview over and against others, respond to unbelievers' questions/objections, proclaim the atoning sacrifice and resurrection of Christ as the answer to man's separation from God, and thus exhort men to repent and exercise faith in Christ.¹⁰⁸ Ecumenical dialogue contravenes Evangelicalism's 'theological blueprint' by advocating dialogue that seeks to 'change' or 'find truth'; conversing without any appeal to absolute truth or any intent to evangelise (contra 'activism'). The Gospel is thus compromised and made more palatable to a postmodern worldview; a far cry from the burning evangelistic zeal of Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards (contra Larsen).

REVISITING HART'S CLAIM THAT EVANGELICALISM IS THEOLOGICALLY INCOHERENT

The case for theological incoherence is undoubtedly strong in a post-evangelical (and hyper-charismatic¹⁰⁹) context; demonstrated by a

Theology and Mission (ed. D. Hesselgrave; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 229 in Muck, 1993, 520.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Whilst not all evangelicals affirm a Pentecostal or Charismatic Pneumatology, most renewalists would classify themselves as evangelical. Moreover, whereas 'hyper-charismaticism' tends to be a predominantly renewalist phenomenon, not all renewalists are 'hyper-charismatic'. Caveats aside, the unprecedented growth of Pentecostalism has undoubtedly been accompanied by much spiritual abuse, grandstanding and hype within the modern evangelical church. Though seeking to redress the theological barrenness of a dry, purely intellectual faith, the Word of Faith movement, which is particularly prevalent within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, contravenes Evangelicalism's 'theological blueprint' by rejecting Scripture's authority as the sole plumbline for faith and practice. Proponents typically de-emphasise the traditional evangelical approach to evangelism, that of accurately expounding and proclaiming the Scriptures (Acts 18:28; 28:23-24) in favour of anti-intellectualism, experientialism and 'signs and wonders' that can be counterfeited by Satan (Matt. 7:22-23; 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15; 1 Tim. 4:1) (contra 'conversionism' and 'activism'). This often results in believers being exposed to transcendental, occultic and metaphysical influences. Passages such as Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:7-9, 11-14 are often exploited to teach material prosperity rather than soteriological blessing (contra 'biblicism' and 'conversionism'), resulting in believers' financial, emotional and spiritual exploitation. Blasphemous and heretical views on the atonement further contravene 'crucicentrism' and taken collectively pose a grave challenge to the evangelical movement today.

rejection of key distinctives encapsulated in both Bebbington and Larsen's definitions of Evangelicalism. But what about the focus of Hart's critique, that neo-evangelicalism is theologically incoherent? Up until the rise of 'evangelical' postmodernism, Tidball contends that classical Western Evangelicalism enjoyed a rich historical and theological pedigree. He likens Evangelicalism to a growing boy who matures into an adult whilst observing that it is the same person throughout this developmental period.¹¹⁰ Similarly, though McGrath regards the Fundamentalist era in North America as a period of intellectual shallowness,¹¹¹ he nonetheless concurs with Tidball that Evangelicalism exhibits a high degree of intellectual coherence.¹¹² He warns against the dangers of anti-intellectualism by denouncing the "pompous posturing"¹¹³ and "élitism of academic theology"¹¹⁴ whilst extolling the merits of an intellectually-grounded yet thoroughly practical evangelical theology.¹¹⁵

Whereas classical, pietistic and fundamentalist variants of Evangelicalism¹¹⁶ all exhibited diversity, they nonetheless centred on the innate sinfulness of unredeemed humanity, justification by faith alone, the unique redemptive work of Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.¹¹⁷ That some quarters of Evangelicalism have displayed a profound disregard for such doctrinal bedrock¹¹⁸ should not tarnish the reputation of historical or classical Evangelicalism. The focus of Hart's denouncement is modern Evangelicalism in the age of Billy Graham, and yet it has been shown that accusations of theological incoherence

110 Tidball, 1994, 31.

111 McGrath, 1996, 10. Marsden (1980, 7) disagrees, noting how Fundamentalists "stood in an intellectual tradition that had the highest regard for understanding of true scientific method and proper rationality."

112 McGrath, 1996, 242.

113 Ibid., 17.

114 Ibid., 18.

115 McGrath, 1996, 20.

116 Dorrien, Gary. *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1998, 2-3 in Pettegrew, 2006, 162, 159.

117 Hutchinson, 2012, 10.

118 See for example "Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment."

and even vacuity can only be fairly levelled at post-evangelicalism with its antagonism towards propositional truth, notwithstanding the fact that neo-evangelicalism precipitated some, if not much, of contemporary Evangelicalism's theological decline.

Hart is correct to draw attention to many shortfalls in the neo-evangelical movement, including rampant heteropraxis. He observes how American pollsters, such as Barna, Gallup and Christianity Today,¹¹⁹ were guilty of breaking down profound religious truth into bite-size, sound-bite questions.¹²⁰ Consequently, American citizens were all too easily encouraged to identify themselves as 'evangelical.'¹²¹ One U.S. poll for example found that more than 80% of respondents believed that Jesus Christ is divine, and 84% believed that the Ten Commandments must be observed today.¹²² Such statistics, however, were accompanied by rapidly declining standards of morality amongst professing evangelicals.¹²³

Traditionally, evangelicals have expressed a pious desire to live their lives in conformity with the written Word of God. Collins terms this commitment 'orthokardia',¹²⁴ denoting the close relationship between orthodoxy ('ortho') and orthopraxy ('kardia'). Sider, however, argues that this is simply no longer the case and accuses American Christianity of being committed to mammon, sex and self-ambition.¹²⁵ A similar observation is made by Horton who states that evangelical Christians are just as likely to pursue a lifestyle every bit as hedonistic as the general populace.¹²⁶

119 Hart, 2004, 99, 85-106.

120 Ibid., 106.

121 Ibid.

122 "The Christianity Today-Gallup Poll: An Overview," *Christianity Today*, 21 December 1979, 1668. However, Hart (2004, 94) observes how the same poll reveals that only five out of ten respondents could identify as many as five of the Ten Commandments.

123 See Sider, 2005.

124 Collins, 2005, 91.

125 Sider, 2005, 13.

126 Horton, M. "Beyond Culture Wars," *Modern Reformation* (May-June 1993), 3 in Ibid., 13.

According to Barna's data, American evangelicals have the same divorce rate as the rest of the population;¹²⁷ are cohabiting more frequently in the Bible Belt than in surrounding areas;¹²⁸ are failing *en masse* to abstain from pre-marital sex;¹²⁹ and are frequently subjecting their wives to physical and sexual abuse.¹³⁰ Sider concludes that this scandalous behaviour, committed by professing evangelicals, is a festering sore on the reputation of the American evangelical movement.¹³¹ It therefore comes as little surprise that a Barna poll should reveal that only 22% of non-Christians have a positive view of evangelicals.¹³² Whilst Sider is correct in observing how statistics on evangelicals' behaviour improve significantly once the term 'evangelical' is more rigorously defined, the enormity of this 'scandal of the evangelical conscience' remains.¹³³

Carnal evangelicals who flagrantly sin undermine Evangelicalism's 'theological blueprint' by demonstrating a profound disregard for the authority of Scripture, tarnishing the witness and reputation of the Church (contra 'biblicism') by failing to take Scripture's command to live a holy and sanctified life seriously (contra Larsen's emphasis on Nicene orthodoxy and Pneumatology). Additionally, evangelicals who choose to live in conformity with the world are the inverse of 18th Century revivalists who chose to live holy, zealous and pious lives (contra Larsen). Whilst such statistics noted in the paragraph above are shocking, polling itself should not be regarded as the acid test of whether coherent, orthodox

127 According to Sider, a 1999 Barna poll revealed that US evangelicals had the same divorce rate (25%) as the national average (The Barna Group in Sider, 2005, 19).

128 1990s census data revealed that increased rates of people cohabiting in Oklahoma (97%), Arkansas (125%) and Tennessee (123%) were substantially higher than the nationwide increase of 72% (New York Times, May 21, 2001, A14 in Sider, 2005, 22).

129 Only 12% of teenagers who pledged to abstain from pre-marital sex in the True Love Waits programme in 1993 (12,000 people) had kept their pledge seven years later (Altman, Lawrence K. "Study Finds That Teenage Virginity Pledges Are Rarely Kept," *New York Times*, March 10, 2004, A20 in Sider, 2005, 22-3).

130 Sider, 2005, 26.

131 Ibid., 28.

132 The Barna Group, The Barna Update, "Surprisingly Few Adults Outside of Christianity Have Positive Views of Christians," December 3, 2002 in Sider, 2005, 28.

133 Sider, 2005, 28.

evangelical belief exists. Rather, polling (when employing rigorously defined terms) may indicate a lack of obedience to traditional evangelical belief but cannot itself be used as evidence against the movement's coherence. The fact that many Catholics do not follow their faith in belief or moral behaviour does not, in theory, mean that Catholicism lacks internal coherence. Rather, the issue is one of personal adherence, namely a disconnect between belief and practice.

CONDITIONAL COHERENCE

According to Tidball, accusations of theological 'fuzziness' are unfair namely because Evangelicalism, though culturally adaptable and dynamic, maintains a central core of belief.¹³⁴ Citing Bray, he contends that Evangelicalism's coherency is comparable to an unsolved Rubik's cube whose three dimensions ['denominational variety,' 'spirituality' and 'church type'] produce a plethora of theological permutations, all uniting around four evangelical distinctives ['authority of Scripture,' 'flexibility,' 'spiritual unity,' and 'importance of doctrine'].¹³⁵ Theological diversity does not, therefore, imply incoherence. As Noll states, [Evangelicalism] "has always been *diverse, flexible, adaptable, and multiform*,"¹³⁶ a view supported by Elwell who describes the movement as an assortment of emphases predicated on a core nexus of belief.¹³⁷

In summary, Hart's assertion that Evangelicalism is theologically vacuous falls short on three counts: (1) whilst Hart is justified in defending the pre-eminence of biblical truth, orthodox belief and practice,

134 Tidball, 1994, 31.

135 Bray, G. 'What is the Church? An Ecclesiology for Today.' In *Restoring the Vision: Anglican Evangelicals Speak Out* (ed. Melvin Tinker). MARC, Eastbourne, 1990, 194-98 in Tidball, 1994, 157-60.

136 Noll, 2001, 14.

137 Elwell, 2001, 409.

his accusation of theological incoherence should be reserved for post-evangelicalism and to a much lesser extent neo-evangelicalism – the former proudly eschewing metanarratives and attempts at systematisation (2) though he rightly draws attention to the disconnect between evangelical belief and practice, the fact that evangelical practice does not always align with evangelical belief is not itself proof that Evangelicalism is incoherent (3) Hart's criticism demonstrates a lack of nuance by failing to identify classical/fundamentalist and neo-evangelical strains of Evangelicalism. He consequently runs the risk of tarnishing the entire movement by failing to distinguish different developmental phases.

It is concluded that with every advancing phase in the evangelical project, levels of theological coherence diminish. From Revivalist and Fundamentalist Evangelicalism (highly coherent) to neo-evangelicalism (less coherent due to cultural engagement and a jettisoning of 'cultic trappings' such as literalism and dispensationalism), to post-evangelicalism (incoherent due to postmodernist obedience), Evangelicalism has been haemorrhaging doctrinal solidarity ever since it split from Fundamentalism. Though this author cannot agree with Hart's claim in its entirety that neo-evangelicalism was theologically vacuous and incoherent (it did adhere to core Christian fundamentals), it is indisputable that in seeking to be more outward oriented and socially engaged, neo-evangelicalism forfeited a considerable amount of internal theological rigour and definitional precision. More will be said about evangelical distinctives in the proceeding section where an attempt is made to contextualise the neo-evangelical movement historically and theologically.

IS EVANGELICALISM AN ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCTION?

Marsden helpfully identifies four key stages in the history of American Evangelicalism:

1. Orthodox Protestantism (1876-1918)
2. Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy (1919-1929)
3. Anti-Fundamentalism (1929-1940s)
4. Neo-Evangelicalism (1940s-1970s).¹³⁸

Added to these might be the ‘Methodist era’ of the 18th century, the holiness movement of the mid-late 19th century, the ‘Pentecostal ‘charismatic’ era of the 20th century concurrent with the rise of neo-evangelicalism, and the ascendance of post-evangelicalism in the 1990s. It is interesting to note that today, Evangelicalism has its axis in Africa, Asia and Latin America denoting a shift from Europe and North America.

Hart and McCune insist that neo-evangelicalism was artificially constructed during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy¹³⁹ of the 1930s. They observe how classical Evangelicalism was hijacked by modernists/anti-fundamentalists who sought to construct a theological middle-ground by avoiding the pitfalls of Fundamentalism on the one hand and Liberalism on the other.¹⁴⁰ The ‘neo-evangelical’ architects of this construction¹⁴¹ thus sought to distance themselves from Fundamentalism’s “fragmentation, segregation, separation, criticism, censoriousness, suspicion, solecism...”¹⁴² In the 1940s-50s, leading neo-evangelical figures such as Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry, Charles Fuller, Harold Lindsell and Billy Graham established the National Association of Evangelicals (1942),¹⁴³ Fuller Theological Seminary (1947)¹⁴⁴ and

138 Marsden, George M. ‘From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism’. In *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They are Changing* (ed. Wells, D.F., Woodbridge, J.D.). Nashville: Abingdon, 1973, 122 in McCune, 1998, 21. The 1974 Lausanne Congress was also a watershed moment in the movement’s history marking a move away from old fundamentalist core beliefs towards greater inclusivity (neo-evangelicalism).

139 Hart, 2004, 18, 21; McCune, 1998, 22; McCune, 2003, 93.

140 Hart, 2004, 25; Yong, 2002, 237.

141 Hart, 2004, 24.

142 Ockenga, Harold J. Can Fundamentalism Win America? *Christian Life and Times*, 1947, 2, 15 in Hart, 2004, 25.

143 McCune, 1999, 109.

144 Ibid., 121.

Christianity Today (1956).¹⁴⁵ The founding of such institutions gave birth to a new religious identity, one that claimed to be 'truly conservative'¹⁴⁶ whilst being underpinned by modernist/anti-fundamentalist values.

By rebranding itself as an intellectually competent and theologically conservative alternative to Liberalism, Hart contends that [neo]-Evangelicalism soon began to oppose Fundamentalism's rigid conservatism and in so doing, according to Stone, became devoid of definitional clarity and exactness.¹⁴⁷ Hart, for example, argues that Carl Henry defined an evangelical as one who simply avowed belief in the sinfulness of the human condition and the need for redemption and conversion through Christ.¹⁴⁸ As both Protestants and evangelicals affirm such beliefs, nothing appears to distinguish the two camps. Hart continues to assert that by jettisoning the 'cultic' trappings of fundamentalism¹⁴⁹, namely dispensationalism, separatism and literalism, evangelical theology engaged in a race to the bottom,¹⁵⁰ which led to profound existential difficulties in affirming the distinctiveness of its beliefs, its theological mandate, and membership prerequisites.

Tidball disagrees with Hart's contention that Evangelicalism is an artificial construction and regards neo-evangelicalism as a legitimate developmental phase in the movement's attempt to adjust to its post-Enlightenment setting.¹⁵¹ Whilst it is true that all theological movements, including neo-evangelicalism in the 1940s, are to some extent reactionary, it must also be noted that 18th century Evangelicalism emerges *organically*, out of a mix of revivalism and the re-discovery/application of biblical truth, making its precise moment of inception difficult to identify.

145 Ibid., 143.

146 Hart, 2004, 24-25. Hart (2004, 25) writes that neo-evangelicals such as Ockenga and Henry constructed the notion that "evangelicals, not fundamentalists, were the successors to Augustine and the Protestant Reformers."

147 Stone, 1997, 8.

148 Hart, 2004, 25.

149 Ibid., 26.

150 Ibid., 30.

151 Tidball, 1994, 36-7.

Hutchinson identifies Thomas Haweis as one of the first to systematise evangelical theology in his 1757 publication ‘Evangelical Principles and Practice.’¹⁵² According to Hutchinson, Haweis affirmed Christ’s divinity, the corruptness of man, the salvific atonement of Christ, justification by faith alone, and the importance of sanctification.¹⁵³ These doctrines were later elaborated by the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 during a conference which affirmed Scripture’s inspiration, authority, sufficiency and the right of private judgement; the triunity of the Godhead; man’s corruptness; Christ’s atonement; salvation by faith alone; and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁴

Thus, according to Hutchinson, there appears to be a great deal of overlap between evangelical theology when broadly defined and historical expressions of Protestant orthodoxy.¹⁵⁵ For example, the creeds and confessions of Nicaea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, Augsburg, Westminster, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion¹⁵⁶ are wholly compatible with Evangelicalism’s doctrinal tenets. Conversely, Stott’s description of evangelicals as Bible and Gospel people¹⁵⁷ nicely complements the Reformation doctrines of *sola Christus*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *sola scriptura* and universal priesthood.¹⁵⁸ Elwell notes that evangelistic fervour and devotional pietism were even “features of the

152 Haweis, Thomas. *Evangelical Principles and Practice*. London: Oliver, 1762, iv-v in Hutchinson, 2012, 1

153 Ibid.

154 Evangelical Alliance. Report of the Proceedings of the Conference: Held at Freemasons’ Hall, London from August 19th to September 2nd 1846. London: Partridge and Oakey, 1846, in Hutchinson, 2012, 2.

155 Hutchinson, 2012, 11. Noll (2001, 12) observes how “Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and some Episcopalians ... Lutherans, German and Dutch Reformed, and the Restorationist churches (Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ)” shared broadly evangelical beliefs. Elwell (2001, 406-7) notes that evangelicals and orthodox Christians both believe in “the Trinity; Christ’s incarnation, virgin birth and bodily resurrection; the reality of miracles and the supernatural realm; the church as the body of Christ; the sacraments ... immortality of the soul; and the final resurrection.”

156 Collins, 2005, 89.

157 Stott, John R.W., 1977. *What is an Evangelical?* Church Pastoral Aid Society, London in Tidball, 1994, 12.

158 See Yong, 2002, 240.

apostolic church, the fathers, early monasticism, the medieval reform movements ... and the Reformation precursors Wycliffe, Hus and Savonarola.”¹⁵⁹ Consequently, according to Hutchinson, Hart’s assertion that Evangelicalism did not exist before the mid-20th century is erroneous¹⁶⁰ as the movement’s theological origins may be traced back hundreds of years, if not thousands, to the teachings of Christ.

Though Protestant orthodoxy is an essential component in evangelical belief, it does not represent the sum total of evangelical doctrine. Put another way, though classical evangelical beliefs accord with orthodox Protestant doctrines, this does not mean that all orthodox Protestant beliefs are evangelical in nature. Stott encapsulates this when he writes “not all evangelical *essentials* are evangelical *distinctives*.”¹⁶¹ Larsen, Noll and Bebbington contend that evangelicals are theological descendants of the 18th century British-American revival movements marked by religious zeal and pietistic influences – a response to the Reformation’s rigid ecclesiology, confessionalism, and dry traditionalism.¹⁶² Elwell traces the origins of these influences to German pietism’s commitment to “Bible study, preaching, personal conversion and sanctification, missionary outreach, and social action”, Methodism’s fiery preaching and evangelistic fervour, and Puritanism’s “emphasis on biblical authority, divine sovereignty, human responsibility, and personal piety and discipline.”¹⁶³ Qualities that were largely overlooked by the established church – such as vigour, compassion, urgency and assurance – therefore distinguish Evangelicalism from Protestantism.¹⁶⁴ As Elwell writes: “Evangelicalism is more than orthodox assent to dogma or a reactionary return to past

¹⁵⁹ Elwell, 2001, 407.

¹⁶⁰ Hutchinson, 2012, 18-19.

¹⁶¹ Stott, John R.W., 1999. *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 11 in Hutchinson, 2012, 11.

¹⁶² According to Noll (2000, 238) Protestant churches were not spiritually lacklustre but rather unsuccessful “in freeing themselves from the political restraints of their own establishments,” shying away from the task of cross-cultural evangelism. See Larsen, 2007, 5; Noll, 2001, 9; Bebbington, 2004, 42.

¹⁶³ Elwell, 2001, 407.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 405.

ways. It is the affirmation of central beliefs of historic Christianity.”¹⁶⁵

Consequently, because evangelical distinctives may be traced back to 18th Century revivalism, classical Evangelicalism cannot be regarded as an artificial construction as its theological antecedents stretch back long before the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. A rediscovery and reapplication of key doctrinal emphases, accompanied by spiritual fervour throughout the centuries, underpinned the great missionary revivals and even the kerygma itself. Such values, though reactionary, emerge and develop organically throughout history. In the case of neo-evangelicalism and post-evangelicalism, both were consciously constructed in the mid and late-20th century in response to anti-fundamentalist sentiment and the rise of postmodernism respectively. The fact that they developed as reactionary kickbacks does not necessarily render them artificial constructions as their emergence could be regarded as legitimate developmental phases in Evangelicalism’s bid to adjust to an ever-changing epistemological terrain. The issue of construction (organic or artificial) therefore appears to be largely one of semantics.

IS EVANGELICALISM’S ECCLESIOLOGICAL DEFICIENCY A *FATAL* FLAW?

Hart contends that for neo-evangelicalism to grow in popularity with the American public, the movement had to appeal to a broad demographic. However, by ignoring or rejecting doctrinal differences in favour of finding common theological ground, an insipid ecclesiology gained sway.¹⁶⁶ An emphasis on ‘church unity’ led to accusations that converts at Billy Graham rallies were sometimes sent to liberal or even Roman Catholic churches, allegations that were denied at the time.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, McCune

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 407.

¹⁶⁶ Hart, 2004, 117.

¹⁶⁷ McCune, 1999, 136.

insists that Graham’s desire for inclusivity,¹⁶⁸ whereby the evangelist insisted on working with a broad gamut of churches,¹⁶⁹ precipitated neo-evangelicalism’s final break from the fundamentalists.¹⁷⁰

Widely regarded as the poster-boy for post-WWII Evangelicalism,¹⁷¹ Hart argues that Graham evangelised with little ecclesial accountability¹⁷² by capitalising on the growth of the parachurch movement. According to Marsden, the parachurch movement eschewed traditional ecclesial and denominational structures by replacing them with feudalist beacons of loyalty.¹⁷³ He attributes the popularity of parachurch organisations to a general indifference towards the institutional church,¹⁷⁴ an erosion of denominational loyalties, and anti-traditionalist fervour.¹⁷⁵ Hart argues that Evangelicalism’s infatuation with celebrity culture¹⁷⁶ and ‘non-committal’ forms of Christianity¹⁷⁷ resulted in a commoditised, individualistic and easy-going faith¹⁷⁸ and he laments the demise of “churchly expressions of Christianity”¹⁷⁹ such as “creeds”, “structures of governance”, “liturgical resources”, regular times of worship, and discipleship.¹⁸⁰ What, however, can be said of Hart’s assertion that theological robustness and ‘churchly expressions of Christianity’ are inextricably linked, even mutually dependent?

Evangelicalism has a long history of experimenting with ecclesiastical and denominational structures. Larsen, for example, observes how despite their differences, Wesley and Whitefield could agree on Evangelicalism’s

168 Ibid., 139.

169 Ibid., 142.

170 Ibid.

171 Hart, 2004, 118.

172 Ibid.

173 Marsden, George M., 1991. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 81 in Hart, 2004, 120.

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid.

176 Hart, 2004, 120.

177 Ibid., 124.

178 Ibid., 126-7.

179 Ibid., 197.

180 Ibid., 124.

chief doctrinal tenets and were united by a common evangelistic goal, demonstrating a healthy spirit of cooperation that soon came to characterise subsequent generations of evangelicals.¹⁸¹ Additionally, Noll observes how Wesley composed hymns for gatherings that were only loosely associated with the established church and was committed to establishing charitable societies and organisations without official church sanction.¹⁸² Wesley and Whitefield also eschewed ecclesiastical norms by preaching in the fields, refusing to confine the gospel message to a religious setting and thereby reaching a more diverse demographic. Though Wesley, Whitefield and other Methodists maintained their Anglican ties, they nonetheless eschewed a rigid ecclesiology (as did the German Pietists and Moravians)¹⁸³ by revolutionising cross-cultural evangelism.¹⁸⁴ Great missionary advances were aided by the establishment of numerous churches in the same locality throughout British America, a radical departure from the Reformation's assumption that there should be only one 'unifying' church for each region.¹⁸⁵ Parachurch tendencies may therefore be observed as early as the 18th century and arguably *bolstered* the work of the established church.¹⁸⁶

Tidball additionally observes that evangelicals distinguish the visible church from the invisible, a trait that dates back to Augustine and the Reformers.¹⁸⁷ He cites Litton who describes the visible church as comprising nominal and unregenerate, as well as true believers.¹⁸⁸ Tidball thus argues that accusations of ecclesiological deficiency have been unfairly levelled against Evangelicalism simply because the movement acknowledges that ultimate (spiritual) reality is not found in visible

181 Larsen, 2007, 6.

182 Noll, 2000, 239.

183 Ibid., 238-9.

184 Ibid., 240. The Moravians severed ties with the state church (Ibid., 239).

185 Ibid., 235.

186 Ibid. 238-9.

187 Tidball, 1994, 159.

188 Litton, E.A., 1979. 'The Church of Christ, in its Ideal, Attributes and Ministry.' In *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (ed. Peter Toon). Marshall Morgan & Scott, London, 178 in Tidball, 1994, 159.

(earthly) structures.¹⁸⁹ He notes for example that the movement demands evangelicals “find, support and unite with Christians wherever the gospel is preached, the Bible is honoured and the Spirit is moving, regardless of the niceties of church order.”¹⁹⁰ Consequently, evangelicals are duty-bound to flee from error and unite in truth (see 1 Corinthians 10:14-22). Rather than representing an ecclesiological deficiency, Tidball affirms that such an outlook is essential if the church is to attain doctrinal faithfulness. It becomes harder for evangelicals to unite over the truth of the gospel when constrained by denominational boundaries. Though Hart is justified in warning against the dangers of unfettered evangelical cooperation with liberal, modernist, and unorthodox groups, he fails to observe how the deep-seated distinction between church visible and invisible is internalised within parachurch and pan-denominational influences and specifically how this outlook can have a purifying effect on church doctrine as well as a deleterious one.

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND ITS PURPOSE

The Greek word for ‘church’, ἐκκλησία, conveys the idea of the people of God ‘assembling’ together. This concept is rooted in the Hebrew terms *qāhāl*, which describes a gathering in response to God’s call (Numbers 16:26; Deuteronomy 9:10), and *ēdā*, which describes a distinct national religious community (Exodus 12:3; Numbers 16:9; 31:12).¹⁹¹ According to Milne, the early Christians saw themselves as God’s people gathered in response to God’s call. This image is further substantiated by the fact that ἐκκλησία comprises ἐκ (out of) and καλέω (to call), communicating the idea of a ‘called-out assembly’.¹⁹² Of its 114 New Testament uses, 109 times

¹⁸⁹ Tidball, 1994, 159.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Milne, 2009, 284.

¹⁹² Fruchtenbaum, A.G., 2005. ‘The Universal Church’, MBS097, *Ariel Ministries*, 4 [available at: www.arielcontent.org/dcs/pdf/mbs097m.pdf] [accessed 21.2.22].

ἐκκλησία describes an assembly that has been ‘called out’ from the mass of humanity.¹⁹³ Though there are 79 singular and 35 plural uses, singular use always refers to the universal church (Ephesians 3:10),¹⁹⁴ making known the wisdom of God. Never is ἐκκλησία used to refer to a church building nor is the word associated with denominational ties.¹⁹⁵ Therefore even a cursory New Testament survey of ἐκκλησία compounds traditional Evangelicalism’s distinction between the invisible (universal) and visible (local) church. Evangelical acknowledgement that denominational ties are not immutable therefore provides insufficient grounds alone for denigrating the movement as ecclesiological deficient.

Hart’s accusation is further weakened by a lack of definitional clarity. The movement may only be deemed ‘ecclesiological deficient’ if local churches fail to fulfil their biblical mandate. According to Fruchtenbaum, biblical churches should: teach Bible doctrine (Acts 2:42; 11:26; 1 Timothy 3:15-16), exercise the function of priesthood (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; Philippians 4:18); engage in corporate prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:31; 12:5,12; Hebrews 13:15); observe baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:41-42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29); exercise spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14), practise church and spiritual discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:20); send out missionaries around the world (Acts 11:22-24; 13:1-4); provide for the needy, especially believers (Acts 6:1-6; 2 Corinthians 8:4-7; 1 Timothy 5:16; James 1:27); make disciples & disciple believers (Matthew 28:18-20); build up the Body (Ephesians 4:11-16); do good in the world, especially to believers (Galatians 6:10); show the love of the Messiah so that the world can see the believer’s love for Him (Revelation 2:4-5), and glorify God through ministry (Romans 15:6, 9; Ephesians

193 Ibid., 5. The five times ἐκκλησία is not used of the NT Church (used in either classical Greek usage of an assembly or in its LXX use of the congregation of Israel) are: Acts 7:38; 19:32, 39, 41; and Heb. 2:12. Yet even in these references, the idea of a ‘called out’ people remains, either referencing the wilderness generation or a political meeting (Acts 19:32, 39, 41) (Ibid., 5).

194 Ibid., 6.

195 Ibid., 5.

3:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; 1 Peter 4:11).¹⁹⁶ Only if evangelical churches are failing in their collective duty to carry out these responsibilities can the movement be described as 'ecclesiologicaly deficient'.

As a reformed Presbyterian, it is unsurprising that Hart writes from a particular ecclesiological perspective. It is problematic, however, to denounce a church as 'ecclesiologicaly deficient' purely because it identifies with the evangelical label. That aside, Hart is justified in directing his ire at an ecclesiology that resulted in the growth of churches that failed to discharge their duties in accordance with their biblical mandate, attracting worshippers who knew little of the importance and responsibilities of fellowship life. It is ironic therefore, that far from denominational ignorance precipitating the movement's demise, the influence of parachurch organisations, ecumenism and special interest groups sustained church membership growth. It is a shame, however, that Hart fails once again to distinguish between traditional/classical evangelical ecclesiology (grounded in pan-denominationalism and a biblical distinction between the universal and invisible church), and neo-evangelical strains (embracing nascent ecumenism); the former having a much closer allegiance to and respect for recognised denominational affiliations. Hart must therefore be wary of equating 'ecclesiological deficiency' with pan and non-denominationalism espoused by classical evangelical theology throughout the ages because Evangelicalism has always embraced a nascent twofold ecclesiology.

CONCLUSION

Whilst it is true that Evangelicalism has always exhibited a degree of theological diversity and cultural sensitivity, never in the movement's history has its membership been so accommodating and its theological voice so muffled. This author partially agrees with Hart's bold claims

196 Fruchtenbaum, A.G., 2005. 'The Local Church', MBS106, *Ariel Ministries*, 6-7 [available at: www.arielcontent.org/dcs/pdf/mbs106m.pdf] [accessed 21.2.22].

so far as emergent/post-evangelicalism is concerned but cannot – out of respect for its commitment to core biblical tenets – endorse the contention that neo-evangelicalism was theologically vacuous and indistinct. Despite serious shortcomings, it is possible to heuristically abstract and isolate key theological emphases from 18th century Evangelicalism in the neo-evangelicalism of the mid-20th century. Although neo-evangelicals adopted a more inclusive approach that sought to directly engage culture and modern scholarship, and which arguably precipitated the rise of theological incoherence in future evangelical variants, there remain emphases that distinguish the movement from orthodox Protestantism, such as spiritual fervour, missionary zeal, and a commitment to personal conversion, assurance, and revivalism. Moreover, not all churches were caught up in the neo-evangelical project and would have more readily aligned themselves doctrinally with the classical theology of 18th century Evangelicalism. The same is true of a handful of evangelical churches today.

Though this author agrees with Hart that neo-evangelicalism broke away from Fundamentalism in the mid-20th century, he cannot endorse the scholar's assertion that Evangelicalism, as an epoch spanning theological movement, is a mid-20th century artificial construction as its theological roots may be traced as far back as the Reformation or even the apostolic church. Contentiously, it remains a descendant of classical Evangelicalism despite destructive theological bents. Further, contra Hart's claim that classical Evangelicalism is essentially orthodox Protestantism by another name, this article has shown that distinctive qualities, such as revivalism, distinguish 18th century Evangelicalism from Protestantism.

Evangelicalism has always sought to transcend rigid ecclesiastical boundaries, rooted in a distinction between the invisible and local church. As a reformed Presbyterian, Hart appears to define 'ecclesiological deficiency' solely in terms of denominational allegiance or lack thereof. As such, he runs the risk of unfairly tarnishing evangelical churches that *do* meet the New Testament requirements of a local church simply

because they eschew denominational affiliations. It is true, however, that parachurch practice sought to downplay theological differences by engaging in social welfare agendas, jettisoning doctrinal allegiance and fidelity as a result. Though Hart is to be commended for drawing attention to the danger of such unfettered cooperation with theologically unorthodox and liberal groups, he fails to note the distinction between the visible and invisible church rooted in classical evangelical theology, and that far from emolliating doctrinal purity, a practical outworking of this reality enables Christians to flee from error associated with doctrinal strictures and to unite in truth. Consequently, biblical truth may even be preserved by such an evangelical ecclesiology.

One must be wary of oversimplification as Evangelicalism is a practical school of Christian living and not a polished theological treatise. Like tributaries that branch off from a river course and ultimately have as their source the Reformation, revivals and great spiritual awakenings of yesteryear, Evangelicalism does have a rich theological pedigree that is, lamentably, being jettisoned in a post-modern world. Hart is therefore to be commended for issuing a serious wake-up call to modern evangelicals by providing an exhortation to cherish and return to our rich theological roots. In so doing, we may even rediscover new potency, power, and joy in the proclamation of timeless biblical truth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Asumang, A. (2010). Review of Anderson: An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches. *Conspectus*, 9:1
- Bebbington, David W. (2005). *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*. Leicester: IVP
- . (2004). *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. Routledge
- Bielo, J.S. (2011). *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*. New York University Press

- Carson, Donald A. (2002). *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. Zondervan
- Collins, Kenneth J. (2005). *The Evangelical Moment*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books
- Earls, Aaron. (2020). '3 in 5 Evangelicals Live in Asia or Africa,' *Lifeway Research* [<https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/03/02/3-in-5-evangelicals-live-in-asia-or-africa/>]
- Elwell, Walter A. (2001). *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic
- Fath, Sebastian (2020). '660 million evangelicals in the world?' *Evangelical Focus* [<https://evangelicalfocus.com/print/5119/660-million-evangelicals-in-the-world>]
- Fath, Sebastian (2020). [<http://blogdesebastienfath.hautetfort.com/archive/2020/01/21/660-millions-d-evangeliques-en-2020-estimation-6207073.html>]. /
- Fruchtenbaum, A.G. (1996). The Toronto Phenomenon (Part 1 of 2). *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*, 2:1
- Fruchtenbaum, A.G. (2005). *The Local Church*. MBS106, *Ariel Ministries* [available at: www.arielcontent.org/dcs/pdf/mbs106m.pdf]
- Fruchtenbaum, A.G. (2006). *The Universal Church*. MBS097, *Ariel Ministries* [available at: www.arielcontent.org/dcs/pdf/mbs097m.pdf]
- Greggs, T. (2010). *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World*. Taylor & Francis.
- Hart, Darryl G. (2004). *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham*. Baker Books
- Hutchinson, Mark and Wolffe, John. (2012). *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism*. Cambridge University Press
- King, J. (2005). Emerging Issues for the Emerging Church. *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, 9:2
- Knowles, S. (2010). *Beyond Evangelicalism: The Theological Methodology of Stanley J. Grenz*. Ashgate Publishing Ltd
- Larsen, Timothy and Daniel J. Treier. (2007). *The Cambridge Companion*

to Evangelical Theology. Cambridge University Press

- Marsden, George M. (1980). *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCune, Rolland D. (2003). The New Evangelicalism: Evaluations and Prospects. *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 8, 1: 85-99
- . (1998). The Formation of the New Evangelicalism (Part One): Historical and Theological Antecedents. *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 3, 1: 3-34
- . (1999). The Formation of The New Evangelicalism (Part Two): Historical Beginnings. *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 4, 1: 109-150
- McGrath, Alister E. (1996). *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism*. Leicester: Apollos
- Milne, Bruce. (2009). *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*, IVP, 3rd ed.
- Muck, T.C. (1993). Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 36:4
- Noll, Mark A. (2001). *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell
- . (2000). *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Baker
- Payne, W.P. (2003). *The Social Movement Dynamics of Modern American Evangelicalism*. *Ashland Theological Journal*, 35
- Pettegrew, Larry D. (2006). Evangelicalism, Paradigms and the Emerging Church. *The Masters Theological Seminary*, 17, 2: 159-175
- Pew Forum (2011). [<https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>]
- Shelton, W.B. (2004). Resounding the Chicago Call: A Plea to Restore Evangelicalism's Theological and Historical Foundation. *Reformation and Revival*, 13:1
- Sider, R.J. (2005). *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like The Rest of the World?* Grand Rapids,

Michigan: Baker Books

Stone, Jon R. (1997). *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition*. Basingstoke: Macmillan

Sweeney, D.A. (2005). *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement*. Baker Academic

Tidball, Derek J. (1994). *Who Are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of Today's Movement*. London: Marshall Pickering

Wilkin, Robert N. (2007). The Gospel According To Evangelical Postmodernism. *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 20, 38: 3-13

Yong, Amos. (2002). The Word and the Spirit or the Spirit and the Word: Exploring the Boundaries of Evangelicalism in Relationship to Modern Pentecostalism. *Trinity Journal*, 23, 2: 235-252

Matthew Wong

Matthew Wong holds an M.A. in Theology from the University of Chester. He is an Associate Tutor in Theology at King's Evangelical Divinity School, UK.



What is God Saying Through ‘Natural Disasters’?

David C. Lewis

KEY WORDS

| Earthquake | Natural Disasters | Amos |
| Armenia | Tsunami | Prophecy | Job |

ABSTRACT

Many Christians struggle with the question of why God allows ‘natural disasters’ such as earthquakes. This paper presents a perspective on this question with particular reference to the Armenian earthquake of 1988, noting how there were parallels between the situation in Armenia and that of Israel at the time of the prophet Amos. In both cases, the earthquake might be interpreted not only as a judgement from God but also as a means by which some people are brought to recognise their need of God. Christian researchers are encouraged to seek God in discerning insights into why disasters occur at specific times or places, and the spiritual impact that they have on local residents.

CAN WE SAY THAT 'NATURAL DISASTERS' ARE SENT BY GOD?

At least since the writing of the book of Job (and probably long before), human minds have struggled to make sense of suffering. This struggle is particularly acute when the suffering impacts those who appear to be morally upright; this question of theodicy is further complicated if one also believes that God is fundamentally good. It is relatively simple to assert that the majority of suffering is caused by human beings themselves, resulting from greed and selfishness which leads people to steal, exploit others or fight fellow human beings – often to gain access to resources. However, one cannot so easily blame human sin for natural disasters - which insurance companies describe as 'acts of God'.

Nevertheless, some Christians attempt to explain natural disasters as also resulting from human sin, in so far as God said to Adam and Eve, 'cursed is the ground because of you' - although the specific examples following this statement refer to thorns and thistles rather than natural disasters (Genesis 3:17-19). In a more general sense, a link between human sin and the defilement of God's natural creation is indicated by Romans 8:19-22, which states that the creation 'waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time'.¹ Other biblical passages, such as Leviticus 18:25, 28, Isaiah 24:5-6 and Jeremiah 2:7; 3:2-3, 9 refer to the land or ground being defiled by sin. Elsewhere in the Bible drought, a natural disaster, is described as a consequence of sin: the warning in Deuteronomy 28:22-23 that scorching heat and drought can be a

1 Biblical quotations are from the New International Version (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), unless otherwise stated.

punishment for sin is graphically illustrated by the three year drought during the reign of Ahab when the prophet Elijah was challenging the king about the consequences of his promoting idolatry (1 Kings chapters 17 and 18; James 5:17-18).

Apart from a general connection between natural disasters and human sin, those trying to explain in theological terms why natural disasters occur tend to take one of three main positions: (1) these are acts of God; (2) the disasters must be from evil powers, because God is good; (3) natural phenomena are neutral in themselves and cannot be said to be specifically under the control of spiritual powers, whether these are regarded as good or evil entities. Some biblical support could be claimed for each of these positions. For example, the view that these are from God could be supported by passages such as the collapse of the walls of Jericho (possibly caused by an earthquake) in Joshua chapter 6. However, the 'mighty wind' that killed Job's children (Job 1:19) was evidently sent by Satan, just as the storm on the lake in Mark 4:37-39 appeared to have been sent by evil powers seeking to kill Jesus and his disciples.² Jesus rebuked the wind (or the demonic powers controlling it) in the same way as he rebuked unclean spirits. Satan's ability to control or use the wind might be related to the description of demonic forces in Ephesians 6:12 as 'powers of this dark world' and as 'spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms', while the 'prince of this world' mentioned in John 14:30 appears also to refer to Satan. In Job 1:16 Satan was apparently able to send a lightning bolt to destroy Job's sheep and servants, mimicking phenomena that at other times was sent by God (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Chronicles 7:1).³

2 This interpretation is derived from John Wimber, who at one of his conferences linked the storm on the lake with the fact that Jesus was on his way to Gadarene territory, where he would deliver a demonic from many evil spirits.

3 This might be why Job's servant who survived to tell the tale described it as "the fire of God" (Job 1:16). Whether or not the servant was aware of other such incidents depends on the dating of the book of Job, which is problematic because of the absence of clear dating markers apart from the mention of Job by Ezekiel (14:14; 14:20). The view that Job lived in the patriarchal period is largely an inference from the absence of any references to Levites or the temple in the context of Job's sacrifices - but this also assumes that Job was actually a Jew. He lived in the 'land of Uz', not in Israel. Although Uz as a personal name is mentioned in Genesis 10:23, a territory called Uz is only

Nevertheless, Satan's power is still limited. As the 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' (Ephesians 2:2) perhaps his powers extend to some control over wind and lightning, producing counterfeit miracles (Revelation 13:13) but nowhere in the Bible are earthquakes attributed to Satan. On the contrary, in Revelation 12:16 'the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth' to protect her from the dragon; similarly, in Numbers 16:30-33 it is clearly God who causes the earth to open up to swallow up those rebelling against Moses. A divine perspective is presented in chapters 38 to 41 of the book of Job, focussing attention on God's power and wisdom in creation, which Satan is unable to counterfeit: the works of creation underline the strong affirmation in Psalm 24:1 that 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it'.

Support for the third position, that the natural phenomena are neutral in themselves, comes from 1 Kings 19:11-13 which states that the Lord was not in the powerful wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire, but his presence was made known through a 'gentle whisper' - better known to many as the 'still, small voice' of the Authorised (King James) Version. In this paper I am not advocating any of these positions - nor trying to set up a 'straw man' to argue against any other viewpoint - because the actual situation is likely to be more complex than our human reasoning can understand. A hint of this comes from the book of Job, most of which focusses on the humanly visible events. Although Job and his friends saw the impact of natural phenomena and recognised that God spoke to them out of a storm (Job 38:1), they did not know that it was Satan who had used a powerful wind to destroy Job's children. Their knowledge, like ours, was partial. A natural phenomenon, wind, was used by Satan to kill Job's children but the event was also allowed by God. From a human, temporal perspective this was a great tragedy. On the other hand, from the perspective of eternity, perhaps the interval between the children

mentioned at the time of Jeremiah (25: 20; Lamentations 4: 21) and was associated with the land of Edom. If this gives an approximate dating for an entity called 'the land of Uz', it is possible that Job's servant would have been aware of the 'fire of God' that had fallen in response to the prayers of Solomon and Elijah.

entering into God's heavenly kingdom and being joined there by their father might seem to be almost instantaneous.⁴ Hence such events can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

In the first two chapters of the book of Job, the writer was apparently granted an insight into the unseen, spiritual realm which shows that, even though Satan was allowed to attack Job's family and possessions, God's authority is greater than that of Satan. We do not know how the information in Job chapters 1 and 2 was revealed to the writer but elsewhere in the Bible there are people who are given glimpses into the unseen realm by means of visions, such as those given to Isaiah (6:1-13) or Daniel (10:1). Sometimes the revelation is auditory, the classic example being that of Samuel as a boy, although in 1 Samuel 3:15 it is referred to as a 'vision'.⁵ At times the one receiving the vision seems to be transported to another place (Ezekiel 3:12-15; 8:3; 11:1; Revelation chapters 4-22).⁶ Sometimes a message, or divine guidance, can come through a dream (e.g. Jeremiah 31:26; Matthew 2:12); at times an angel can appear in the dream (Matthew 1:20; 2:19) but at other times the information can come through an angelic appearance while the person is awake (e.g. Luke 1:11-20, 26-38; Acts 10:3). We are not told how prophets such as Isaiah or Jeremiah received the majority of their revelations but some clues might be given by the contemporary experiences of Christians who receive what the Authorised Version in 1 Corinthians 12:8 translates as a

4 It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the relationships between time and eternity, our understanding of which is limited. Nevertheless, it could be noted that some of these issues are analogous to the concept of 'time dilation' in modern Physics, according to which time is perceived or experienced differently by different observers. This concept is based on Einstein's theory of relativity.

5 Examples of auditory revelations in my own experience are detailed in Hope Price's book *Angels: True stories of how they touch our lives* (London: Pan Books, 1994), p. 143 and in David C. Lewis *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 351, note 31.

6 A very detailed account of a near-death experience recounted by George Ritchie in his book *Return from Tomorrow* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1978) has a structure which is similar to that of the book of Revelation. Near the beginning of the experience Ritchie was in this world when he found himself in the presence of Jesus Christ, from whom bright light was radiating. Jesus then took Ritchie to various other places before finally giving him a glimpse of a beautiful city of light.

‘word of knowledge’ and in the NIV is called a ‘message of knowledge’. As no further explanation is given, the term must have been familiar to Paul’s readers.⁷ Nowadays we may have to infer its meaning on the basis of other biblical passages (e.g. John 4:16-19; Acts 5:1-11) in which knowledge is conveyed supernaturally. To some extent contemporary experience can also influence modern interpretations of this expression. Among the 1,890 people who filled in a questionnaire for me at the end of a Christian conference, 444 said that they had received a ‘word of knowledge’ by means of an inner conviction or ‘strong intuition’.⁸ Other forms of communication included a mental picture (175 cases), ‘spontaneous utterance’ (97 cases), a pain in part of the body that was believed to be showing the location of someone else’s pain (57 cases), seeing words written (38 cases) and various ‘other’ methods (31 cases).⁹ God is not limited to this repertoire of communication channels but these statistics give an indication of the relative frequency of various means that are reported nowadays.¹⁰

God can also speak in various ways to those who do not know him. Besides what can be discerned through creation (Romans 1:20), or the voice of conscience (Romans 2:15), God can sometimes speak through dreams or visions. In some cases the meaning is clear to the recipients themselves (e.g. Genesis 20:3-7; Matthew 27:19) but in many cases the interpretation of the dream is given through a man of God such as Joseph with Pharaoh (Genesis 41) or Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel chapters 2 and 4). In such cases the man of God was given a gift of discernment. A principle

7 This is discussed in more detail in my book *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), pp. 129, 345-346 note 1.

8 John Wimber, the main speaker at that conference, described this kind of deep inner conviction as “knowing in your knower”!

9 David C. Lewis *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact?* op. cit., p. 138.

10 A mental image involving seeing written words is a form of communication that not only entails literacy but is also linguistically bounded, indicating that the message is geared to the cultural context of the recipient. The use of mental pictures to convey a prophetic message may be implied by passages such as Jeremiah 24 or Amos 7:1-9 in which the prophet is shown something (figs, locusts, fire, a plumb-line) and the meaning of the image is then explained through dialogue with the prophet.

mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2:14 is that in such cases the spiritual insights come from the Spirit of God: we are not told exactly how they received the interpretations but it was probably through processes similar to those listed above as ways in which 'words of knowledge' are received today.¹¹ In general, the source of a spiritual revelation can be tested by its content (1 John 4:2-3; 1 Corinthians 12:3) and by its effects (Matthew 7:15-17), as I have discussed elsewhere.¹² Some people also report seeing an evil spirit, which sometimes is described as having an appearance like that of an animal.¹³

Although the dreams given to Pharaoh in Genesis 41 foretold immutable future events, the warning enabled him to take action in the present to avoid some of the future consequences; the same principle applied to the prediction given to Agabus about the famine in the reign of Claudius, the effects of which could be mitigated by acting on the information (Acts 11:27-30). Other disasters, or events such as the exile to Babylon, could be averted by repentance: if people repented - as the people of Nineveh did in response to the prophecy of Jonah (3:1-10) - the disaster would not happen. Although sometimes the occurrence, or otherwise, of various disasters was conditional upon human responsiveness to divine warnings, in other cases the disaster occurred but some people were miraculously saved out of it. For example, Noah and his family were saved because

11 In my book *After Atheism: Religion and Ethnicity in Russia and Central Asia* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press and New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000; New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p. 58 I suggest that some dreams can be like parables – that is, a pictorial or story-like depiction of a spiritual truth, often illustrating the inner state of a person. Some popular manuals of dream interpretation and some forms of psychoanalysis tend to see a one-to-one correlation between a certain symbol and its meaning but this approach seems to be too simplistic because the same symbols can have different meanings in different cultures, or even among different people within a culture. In trying to interpret these kinds of dreams one needs to be sensitive to the Spirit of God, who might give an inner conviction of the meaning or show how the dream relates to an event in the person's life, such as a trauma that needs healing.

12 David C. Lewis 'Spiritual Powers' – *Genuine and Counterfeit* in Michael Cole, Jim Graham, Tony Highton and David Lewis *What is the New Age?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), pp. 110-120.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

they heeded the warning and acted upon it.¹⁴ Similarly, God sent angels to warn Lot about the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: he was saved but the young men who wanted to marry Lot's daughters did not take the warning seriously and ended up as disaster casualties (Genesis 19:14).

THE ARMENIAN EARTHQUAKE

A particularly sensitive and potentially controversial area concerns a suggested interpretation of natural disasters as signs of God's judgement. It is difficult to make such claims without appearing to be insensitive to human suffering. In 1988 I found myself in this very position when I believed that God had given me insights into some of the reasons he had allowed a major earthquake in Armenia to occur.

At that time I had already been conducting research on the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh – an area populated primarily by ethnic Armenians which for various political reasons had ended up as an enclave within Azerbaijan. The Armenians were wanting it to be reassigned to Armenia and were seizing

14 God not only saved humans but also animals from the Flood. Anecdotal reports from many places and times have associated unusual animal behaviour with earthquakes, as if the animals knew in advance what was about to happen. For instance, elephants were seen running away from the sea towards higher ground before the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, while a mass migration of thousands of frogs was reported shortly before the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in China, and so on. Various theories have been advanced to account for these reports, such as animals having an ability to sense sounds or vibrations in the earth, or to be aware of the presence of subterranean gases released prior to earthquakes (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/history-of-geology/can-animals-sense-earthquakes>; http://thelivingmoon.com/45jack_files/03files/Tsunami_Can_Animals_Sense_Disasters.html; <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2004/12/how-did-animals-survive-the-tsunami.html>; <https://www.weirdasianews.com/2008/05/13/frog-migration-omen-to-china-earthquake-disaster>; <https://sos.noaa.gov/education/phenomenon-based-learning/can-elephants-sense-tsunamis> <all accessed 30th December 2021>). We might add a further hypothesis – namely, that some animals (like Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22:21-35) have a spiritual sensitivity that human beings have lost on account of sin; if so, the animals may be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's warnings than many of us are.

the chance afforded by Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) to express their demands for the boundaries to be redrawn. In what follows I shall attempt to summarise a fairly complicated perspective on the Armenian earthquake which came to me unexpectedly in the course of my research on the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. In December 1988 I would have been in the region itself had not the Soviet authorities cancelled visits to the area by Westerners on account of the unrest, demonstrations and incipient violence. Therefore, on hearing news of the severe earthquake in northern Armenia at that time, my initial reaction was to go into my bedroom, kneel down and ask God two questions: "Why now?" and "Why Armenia?". Somehow in my spirit I felt that it was connected with the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Immediately into my mind came two passages from the biblical prophecy of Amos.¹⁵ The book opens with the statement that his prophecy was given 'two years before the earthquake', when Uzziah was king of Judah (Amos 1:1). This must have been such a major earthquake that over two centuries later it was referred to by the prophet Zechariah, who said, 'You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah' (Zechariah 14:5). Archaeological excavations at Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Jerusalem and elsewhere have uncovered fractured and tilted walls, a layer of broken artefacts and other evidence of a major earthquake dated to the middle of the eighth century BC with its epicentre in the north but the tremors also affecting the south of the region.¹⁶ Many of the predictions of disaster given by Amos refer to divine judgment through foreign invasion

15 See David C. Lewis *After Atheism: Religion and Ethnicity in Russia and Central Asia* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press and New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000; New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p. 291.

16 See <https://biblereadingarcheology.com/2018/02/05/earthquakes-in-the-bible/>; <https://www.livescience.com/biblical-earthquake-jerusalem-found.html>; <https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/earthquake-bible-0015659> and <https://patternsofevidence.com/2019/01/20/biblical-quake-confirmed/> <all accessed 29th December 2021>. Further evidence of a major earthquake dated to the same period comes from deformed sediments near the Dead Sea. The extent of the structural damage to buildings and the wide area affected are indications that this was one of the most powerful earthquakes to occur in the region since the Bronze Age.

and deportation, but some of his predictions (*e.g.* Amos 6:11, ‘the Lord... will smash the great house into pieces and the small house into bits’) might also have referred to the earthquake two years later.

The other passage which came to my mind is Amos 6:13, which refers to those who ‘rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar and say, “Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?”’. At that time, Israel had succeeded in annexing a very small amount of extra territory, but the people were focussing on their political gain instead of the virtues of justice and righteousness. In the previous verse, Amos had accused the people of turning ‘justice into poison’ and ‘the fruit of righteousness into bitterness’. It might be said that the people were seeking territorial expansion at the expense of seeking first the values of the Kingdom of God. Amos therefore prophesied that God would stir up a nation against them who would oppress them in the very territories which they had so recently acquired (Amos 6:14; cf. 2 Kings 14:25).

It seemed to me that the Armenians of today were very similar to the people of Israel at the time of the prophet Amos. Both were supposed to be ‘the people of God’ surrounded on most sides by hostile nations, but in fact corruption was widespread in their midst. The devastation in Armenia was greatly exacerbated by corruption because the country had tight building regulations and enough engineers to enforce them, but those regulations had been ignored when some cement had been siphoned off for other purposes and the resulting concrete had an illegal ratio of sand to cement. Apartment blocks built of poor-quality bricks and flimsy concrete became death-traps, totally lacking the strength to withstand the tremors. Earlier buildings built during the Khrushchev era survived but many of those which collapsed had been constructed more recently, during a period of rampant corruption. If an earthquake of such a magnitude, measured at 6.9 on the Richter scale, had hit Tokyo or Los Angeles it would have caused much less loss of life because earthquake-resistant buildings would normally remain standing, despite being damaged: by contrast, in northern Armenia such a quake was sufficient to expose the corruption and its deadly consequences. It has been

said that earthquakes do not normally kill people: it is falling buildings that kill people. The human element, in terms of types of buildings, significantly affects the degree to which earthquakes actually result in the loss of human life.

On the surface, the Armenians had a case for claiming Nagorno-Karabakh because over 80% of the population are ethnic Armenians. Nevertheless, Armenian claims to the province rest upon relatively weak historical foundations, because the last time this territory was actually under the jurisdiction of an Armenian state was in 65 B.C.! What is also clear, however, is that the conflicts - later escalating into warfare - were initiated by Armenian demands for Nagorno-Karabakh to be reassigned to Armenia.

The Azerbaijanis were also guilty of atrocities against Armenians - including the ripping out of unborn infants from pregnant Armenian women in Sumgait.¹⁷ Exactly the same kind of atrocities had been committed in the eighth century BC by Israel's eastern neighbours, the Ammonites (Amos 1:13): Amos prophesied that they would not go unpunished either, but he focussed his condemnations on the corruption and injustice among the people of Israel.

As I reflected on these and other parallels between modern Armenia and Israel at the time of Amos, I was faced with a dilemma: if God had indeed given me insights into some of the reasons why the earthquake had been allowed to occur, what was I supposed to do about it? Should I write to a supposedly atheistic government struggling to cope with the devastation of the earthquake and, as it were, to 'beat them over the head' with what would sound like a callous "I told you so" attitude? If God had indeed given me insights into the 'spiritual' reasons behind the earthquake, I needed to have these ideas checked out first by others, following the principle in 1 Corinthians 14:29, but none of those I approached gave me a clear opinion one way or the other.¹⁸ However, by April 1989 I felt I could

17 *Guardian* 9th March 1988; *Times* 12th March 1988. The reports stated that this was done by an Azerbaijani mob that entered the maternity wing of a hospital in Sumgait while searching for Armenians.

18 Over a year later, Bishop David Pyches confirmed to me that he thought my insights

wait no longer and that I had to send a copy of an article of mine entitled ‘Armenia and Amos’ to the Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Etchmiadzhin.¹⁹ The final part of this article stated that I believed God was calling the Armenians to repentance in two areas of their lives: firstly, to repent of the corruption within their own society, and, secondly, to repent of their attitudes towards the Azerbaijani people, by putting into practice the teachings of Jesus about forgiveness, loving one’s enemies and doing good to those who hate them.

This article was sent by registered post, accompanied by a letter explaining that these events are hard for anyone to understand but that I nevertheless felt I needed humbly to share with him the insights I believed God had given me. Similar letters were also sent to Armenian church leaders in Turkey, Lebanon, Europe and the USA - none of whom ever replied to me. I do not know what kind of reply I might have expected, but their silence did make me begin to wonder whether or not I had really heard from God. Then in October 1989 I attended a conference on Worship in Brighton, England, where one of the principal speakers was John Wimber - the American pastor whose ministry I had investigated while writing a book on healing miracles.²⁰ John started off by talking about a visit to him the previous December by a man named Paul Cain. When Paul had come to John with a message purporting to be from God, he had accurately predicted that on the day he arrived in California there would be a ‘sign in the ground’ confirming the message he had for John. At 3:38 a.m. that day there was indeed a ‘shaking’-type of earthquake in California which left

were indeed of God and apologised for not having conveyed that to me earlier.

19 The church is called ‘Apostolic’ because it is believed to originate from the preaching of the apostles Thaddaeus and Bartholomew in Transcaucasia; later, in 301AD, Armenia became the first country to adopt Christianity as its state religion.

20 David C. Lewis *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989). Some of the main findings are summarised in my chapter entitled *A Social Anthropologist’s Analysis of Contemporary Healing* in J.I. Packer, Jeffrey Niehaus, Wayne Grudem, S.M. Burgess, David Lewis, John White and Others *The Kingdom and the Power* edited by Gary S. Greig and Kevin N. Springer (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1993), pp.321-343. An earlier report on another of John Wimber’s conferences was published as an appendix to *Power Healing* by John Wimber with Kevin Springer (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

no casualties. Moreover, the timing was also significant, because some of what Paul Cain had to tell John Wimber was focussed around the promise in Jeremiah 33:8.²¹ However, Wimber's account in Brighton then added a further detail, saying that Paul Cain had also mentioned that on the day after he left California "there would be a much more major earthquake elsewhere in the world which would be God's judgement on his people in that place." At the end of that session John confirmed to me that the earthquake in question was indeed the one in Armenia.²²

From this followed my subsequent involvements in Armenia which, among other things, included opportunities to share about these insights in churches, on television and in a newspaper interview. I also encouraged people to see the earthquake as an opportunity to make a fresh start and to turn away from the corruption which had brought so much suffering in their society. A much more difficult message to bring has been that of being willing to forgive one's enemies, because resentments and anger had become like a cancer in the hearts of the Armenian people.²³ In 1998, on a visit to Armenia to mark the tenth anniversary of the earthquake, I was not permitted to meet the President of Armenia himself but instead I was given the opportunity to meet with his press secretary and to present her with a Christian book entitled '*The Lost Art of Forgiveness*'.²⁴

21 Obviously, as there are only twenty-four hours in a day, the earthquake could not occur at "33:08"! Even though minor earthquakes do often occur in California, the accurate prediction of the exact day, coinciding with a significant time on that very day, is still highly remarkable.

22 The next issue of the magazine *Equipping the Saints* (Vol. 3, No. 4, Fall 1989), p.5., published by Wimber's organisation, Vineyard Ministries International, also confirmed this but the printed account did not include the comment spoken by John at Brighton about the earthquake being a form of judgement on God's people.

23 David C. Lewis *After Atheism*, op. cit., p. 292.

24 Johann Christoph Arnold *The Lost Art of Forgiving* (Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 2008). [I think this book had previously been published with the title *The Lost Art of Forgiveness* and that it was a book of that title that I gave to the press secretary for Robert Kocharian, the President of Armenia in 1998.]

EARTHQUAKES AS ‘SIGNS’

My interest in the Armenian earthquake also helped me to understand more of what the Bible says about the significance of earthquakes. Of course, these principles can be derived from a study of the Bible itself, without coming to it through research into contemporary phenomena, but it seems to me that very often our perception of the Bible is conditioned to some extent by our own experience. We all know that events described in the Bible seem more ‘real’ or ‘meaningful’ to us if they relate in some way to our own circumstances of life: the truths have not changed but our perception of their relevance is often influenced by our own environment and experiences.

The whole question of suffering is a difficult one and has been discussed at great length by others, so I do not pretend to have all the answers. Nevertheless, to at least some extent this is an area in which contemporary experience can help to open our eyes to principles in the Bible that we might not have noticed before. For example, when I was in Armenia I was told that prior to the earthquake many people in the affected area had been warned in a dream or vision about the impending disaster.²⁵ One person, for example, said that she felt strongly that she had to get out of the city and go to visit relatives elsewhere. She had already left the city of Leninakan (nowadays renamed Gyumri) when the earthquake happened. Of course, we only know of the accounts of survivors but it raises the question of whether or not there were others who had been warned but who did not heed the warning or act on it. This is reminiscent of biblical examples cited earlier in which people like Noah or Lot were not only warned of natural disasters but also acted on the warning.

In Armenia, some people who were not taken out of the experience of the disaster itself nevertheless believed that their lives were spared in

25 David C. Lewis *After Atheism*, op. cit., p. 291.

miraculous ways. One woman, for example, was on the seventh floor of a building when it collapsed but she landed on the ground unhurt, afterwards saying that she felt as if "something or someone" had carried her down. A man on the ninth floor of a tall building sought God in prayer and felt that his prayers were answered because all the surrounding buildings collapsed but his did not.²⁶ This has parallels with some of the plagues of Egypt, when the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived, was spared certain disasters that befell the rest of Egypt. However, we have to realise that this was only due to the grace and mercy of God: Jesus said that those who survived a disaster or who were not involved in it should not consider themselves to be better than those who perished (Luke 13:2-4). On the contrary, Jesus emphasised that all of us need to repent (Luke 13:5).

Repentance was indeed one effect of the Armenian earthquake. Whereas Leninakan had previously been a relatively prosperous city where the materialistic inhabitants had felt they had no need for God, after the earthquake there was a noticeable turning to Christ among the survivors. This was shown by the growth not only of Protestant churches but also of a more evangelical movement within the Apostolic Church.²⁷ It seems as if the shaking of the ground and the destruction of material property makes many people begin to re-examine their own values and to ask what is most important in life. In such circumstances there are those who realise that spiritual values, and a relationship with God, are far more important. A close brush with death can also make people think seriously about what happens after death. In that process, there are those who realise that they need to repent and turn back to God.

From a geological point of view we can say that earthquakes are caused by stresses within the earth's crust and other factors. However, a secular geologist cannot answer the deeper questions which many of those affected by the earthquake may be asking, such as "Why has God allowed

26 David C. Lewis *After Atheism*, op. cit., p. 290.

27 David C. Lewis *After Atheism*, op. cit., p. 291.

this to happen to me?”²⁸ Those ministering in such situations may be asked such questions but many Christians themselves do not know what to say. There a danger of appearing overly critical or insensitive if we speak of the events as a judgement from God. On the other hand, it seems that relatively few Christians have thought much about the significance of earthquakes in the Bible or what God might be communicating through such events.

In the Bible at least two different types of earthquakes can be discerned. Several passages refer to relatively minor earthquakes in which there are no reports of casualties but the timing was extremely significant. Examples include the earthquakes which took place both at the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and also the one in Philippi when Paul and Silas were in prison (Matthew 27:51-54; 28:2; Acts 16:26). If these earthquakes had happened even a day earlier or later, their significance would have been lost, but the fact that they occurred when they did was not lost on those who had eyes to see. It was not the magnitude of the earthquakes but their *timing* which imparted to them the significance of a sign from God.

A different kind of phenomenon appears to be the more major earthquakes which did cause suffering and death. A clear example is the judgement on Korah, Dathan and Abiram, along with their families (Numbers 16). Perhaps the earthquake mentioned in Revelation 11:13 could be another example. Although it states that seven thousand people died in it, it also says that the survivors ‘were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven’. It appears as if the earthquake probably led to repentance among a significant number of those who survived. If so,

28 Although I use the word ‘God’ in this example, in various cultural and religious contexts the question might be posed in different terms, involving ideas such as Fate, karma and so on. In Africa, it might be expressed in terms of witchcraft, as classically described by the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard in his book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). He describes how the Azande recognise that a house has fallen down because termites have eaten away its supports but the other, more pertinent question is ‘Why has my house been eaten by termites and not someone else’s house?’. The answer to that question is found in concepts of witchcraft.

we can say that even those earthquakes which are forms of judgement also have a beneficial effect in terms of the spiritual lives of some of the survivors.

In taking the example of earthquakes, however, I do not want to make any claims that these are signs of the end-times. Although Jesus did say that 'there will be famines and earthquakes in various places' he added that 'all these are the beginning of birth-pains' (Matthew 24:7-8). Although Jesus mentioned earthquakes, among many other phenomena, as signs of the end of the age, he simply said that there would be 'earthquakes in various places' (Mark 13:8), without saying anything about their frequency or intensity. In a thorough review of available geological data, Steven A. Austin and Mark L. Strauss note that there has been a decrease in major earthquakes in the second half of the twentieth century as compared to the first half of the century.²⁹ I suggest that the spiritual significance of many earthquakes lies not so much in their magnitude as in the *timing* of their occurrence in a particular context. The same could apply to other forms of 'natural disasters', including tsunami caused by earthquakes under the ocean.

WIDER PERSPECTIVES

To interpret a specific earthquake as a 'sign' from God depends primarily on insights gained by supernatural revelation. It was when I prayed and asked God specific questions about the Armenian earthquake that he began to show me the parallels between the Armenian situation and that of Israel at the time of Amos. However, there is a danger of jumping to conclusions because of interpreting a disaster through the lenses of one's own religious outlook and circumstances. Some Azerbaijani Muslims interpreted the Armenian earthquake as the judgement of Allah and

29 Steven A. Austin and Mark L. Strauss *Earthquakes And The End Times: A Geological And Biblical Perspective* (http://www.icr.org/research/index/researchp_sa_r06/ <accessed 27th February 2011>).

used it as propaganda to promote Islam.³⁰ My own perspective agrees with these Muslims in seeing it as a form of divine judgement but my interpretation is different because I regard it as a case of judgement starting with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). Rather than ‘taking sides’ and saying one side is ‘right’ and the other is ‘wrong’, I see both sides as culpable and needing to repent or to seek God’s mercy. In a similar way, Amos began by addressing the sins of some of Israel’s neighbours, saying that they would be judged by God, but then the prophet focussed on the sins of Israel, and to some extent Judah – that is, those who claimed to be the people of God.

Even if an earthquake is a form of divine judgement for some, at the same time there are many accounts of divine mercy in the form of miraculous interventions. In other words, many different things are happening at the same time. The Armenian man whose building remained standing while those around fell down might be seen as a modern counterpart to the unusual circumstance whereby Rahab’s house in Jericho apparently remained standing when the rest of the wall collapsed (Joshua 6:20-23). Similarly, in 2011 many drowned in the tsunami which hit the Tōhoku (Northeast) region of Japan but one man found himself being pulled out of the floodwaters by someone who appeared to be walking on the water: the Japanese man linked his miraculous rescue with the fact that he was wearing a cross at the time.³¹

In Armenia, some people realised after the earthquake that they had been warned of the disaster in advance through a dream or ‘premonition’ but they did not necessarily know how to act upon the information – or else they chose not to act. Likewise, during the plagues of Egypt, God through Moses predicted in advance what was going to happen: in at

30 An anonymous reviewer who read an earlier draft of this paper brought to my attention the way that Muslims also used the Krakatoa eruption for propaganda purposes in spreading Islam in Indonesia; this is mentioned by Richard Ellis at <https://freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/897682/posts> <accessed 28th December 2021>.

31 David C. Lewis *Behind the façade: Unseen faces of Japan* in Riamsara Kuyakanon, Hildegard Diemberger and David Sneath (eds.) *Cosmopolitical Ecologies Across Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022, pp. 124-142), p. 131.

least one case even some of Pharaoh's officials acted on the warning so that they were able to save their livestock from the hail (Exodus 9:20-21), whereas those who did not heed the warning suffered the consequences. A modern parallel occurred in 2004, when a Christian in Myanmar had a dream about an imminent disaster: people in the church took this warning seriously and they prayed specifically for God's protection on their community. When the Indian Ocean tsunami struck Myanmar, other places along the same stretch of coastline suffered damage but the town where the Christians were praying was unaffected.³²

After a disaster, people are initially more likely to turn to whatever religion is more familiar to them in their culture, not necessarily to Christianity. For instance, in the Shintō-Buddhist hybrid of 'Japanese religion' only about a quarter of the population regard themselves as having a 'religion' but this proportion doubled in Northeast Japan after the 2011 'triple disaster' of earthquake, tsunami and meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear power plant.³³ On the surface this increased Japanese religiosity might appear to be a setback in terms of the spread of Christianity. However, an experienced missionary to Japan once commented to me that those who are more open to the spiritual dimension of life - even if it is in its Shintō or Buddhist forms - also tend to be more open to hearing the gospel of Jesus, as compared with those having a more secular outlook.³⁴ Anecdotally, I have heard reports that at least some survivors of certain earthquakes, including those at Wenchuan in 2008 and Haiti in 2010, seemed to be more open to the gospel - or at least asking spiritual questions. However, it is very difficult to measure 'spiritual receptivity' in an objective way because evaluations of 'receptivity' are based on local reactions to specific approaches by certain people using particular methods; others who

32 Roman Dombrauskas, personal communication, reporting on a conference at which he had heard this testimony from the pastor of that church in Myanmar.

33 Horie, Norichika *Continuing Bonds in the Tōhoku Disaster Area: Locating the Destininations of Spirits* (*Journal of Religion in Japan* Vol. 5, Issue 2-3, pp. 199-226, 2016), p. 210.

34 Dr. Patrick McElligott, personal communication.

develop relationships with local people in a different way might develop trust and friendships that might then lead to a totally different perception of local ‘receptivity’. Therefore attempts to measure ‘receptivity’ to the gospel may be more like mirrors than lenses.

Sometimes the significance of an earthquake is only perceived by certain individuals – and it almost seems as if the earthquake occurred specifically for them. A biblical example might be the earthquake in Philippi, as a result of which the jailer and his family came to faith, especially after seeing how the prisoners had not taken the opportunity to escape (Acts 16:25-34). A Christian from one of the indigenous ethnic groups of southern Siberia told me of a time in the autumn of 2003 when she was on the point of abandoning her Christian faith. Just as she was about to return to her home village in the Kosh-Agach district of the Altai Republic and revert to shamanism, the road to her village was made impassable because of damage by an earthquake.³⁵ Nobody was physically injured by the tremors but the timing of the quake, and the way it damaged the road to her home village, was enough to convince my informant that God was speaking to her: “It was a sign,” she said, “... that I should not become a servant of Satan”. She re-committed herself to Jesus.

In this paper I have sought to highlight the fact that our research on events happening in the world around us, or our investigations into social or other trends, has to be complemented by an openness to God and asking the question ‘What is God doing, or saying, through this?’ In other words, our research has to be interpreted not only with the intellect but also spiritually, through a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. In seeking to apply these principles to specific circumstances, asking whether or not contemporary natural disasters convey any deeper spiritual meanings, it is important to combine prayerfulness and listening to God with research into what is happening ‘on the ground’. That is difficult to do, especially

35 Reports on this earthquake are available in Russian at https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Чуйское_землетрясение, <https://www.culture.ru/materials/31275/zhizn-v-epicentre> and <https://www.gorno-altaisk.info/news/94665> <all accessed 30th December 2021>.

if one is caught up in relief work, but it is by asking appropriate questions that one begins to gain insights into unseen spiritual dynamics that might be operating in and through the visible circumstances.

There is also a place for counselling traumatised survivors. They, or their relatives and friends, at some time or other might be asking questions about whether the disaster was something caused by demonic powers or was a judgement from God. These are questions that can be raised not only by Christians but also by Muslims and those from other religious backgrounds – and even those who had hitherto considered themselves to be agnostics or atheists. Such questions are difficult to answer in any blanket fashion because they depend on discerning what God might be saying or doing in specific circumstances. I hope this paper might help to give pointers to some of the questions that counsellors could be asking: for example, it might be appropriate in some cases to ask people whether or not they felt they had received any kind of supernatural warning, perhaps through a dream, about what was going to happen.

The news media are unlikely to report on the spiritual effects of major disasters in terms of prompting people to re-evaluate their own lives and motives, or to ask questions about the purpose of life, and so on. The shaking of the material world may stimulate at least some people to seek after a 'kingdom that cannot be shaken' (Hebrews 12:28). While the media report on the material consequences and suffering, we as Christian researchers need to be asking deeper questions about the spiritual consequences in people's lives and about what God is doing in and through these events. In this way, our perspective needs to go beyond the visible events and trends in order to ask deeper questions, the answers to which are spiritually discerned.



The Concept of Miracles in Islam: A Case for the Resurrection of Jesus

Sherene Khouri

KEY WORDS

| Miracles | Islam | Mohammad's Miracles |
| Minimal Fact Theory | Resurrection |

ABSTRACT

The concept of miracles in Islam is not being given much attention in Western scholarship. While much literature has been written in the Arabic world about Mohammad's miracles in the Qur'an, not many are known in the Western world. Therefore, this paper shall use the analytical method to examine the definition and the purpose of miracles in Islam, and critically compare the miracles performed by Jesus and Mohammad in the Qur'an. Moreover, the resurrection miracle is not a foreign concept in Islamic belief (Surah 2:73). The Qur'an itself attests to Jesus miraculously restoring dead people to life, which aligns with the New Testament account. Therefore, following the exegesis of the early Islamic/Sunni scholars of Surah 3:55, this paper will show that the resurrection of Jesus is plausible within the Muslim worldview.

INTRODUCTION

Theistic religions, especially Islam and Christianity, accept the concept of miracles. They believe that miracles are possible because of the supernatural power of God. They also believe that miracles are historical events and not mythical stories repeated over passing generations. Despite this apparent similarity, closer inspection reveals the existence of deep differences between the Christian and the Islamic views regarding the definition and the purpose of miracles. One of the key differences occurs over the resurrection of Jesus. Muslims deny the crucifixion, the killing, and the death of Jesus—entailing the denial of his resurrection (Surah 4:157).¹ They believe that Jesus ascended to heaven without experiencing death, whereas Christians believe that Jesus was crucified, died, buried then was resurrected from the dead, and that this miracle is the most important event in history (1 Cor 15 ESV).

This paper first discusses the definition and purposes of miracles between Islam and Christianity, second compares the miracles of Jesus and Mohammad in the Qur'an to examine if they are consistent with the Islamic criteria of miracles, and lastly makes a case for the resurrection of Jesus from Islamic literature.

THE CONCEPT OF MIRACLES: CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC VIEWS COMPARED

A Christian Definition of Miracles

In the Christian view, a miracle is a supernatural event that refers to or is caused by a supernatural power. As Richard Purtill states, a miracle is “an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order

1 Unless otherwise noted, all qur'anic passages referenced are in *Translation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an in English Language* (Madinah, KSA: King Fahed Complex, 1984).

of things, to show that God is acting.”² This definition implies several facts: first, miracles are real historical stories. They happened to real people in particular locations and at a particular time. Second, a miracle is not an event that happens against the order of nature but “an exception to the laws of nature, [that] can be permitted only by the creator of nature, just as an exception to a legal ordinance can be permitted only by the authority that passed the law (or some higher authority).”³ In other words, these events do not contradict or violate natural laws, but they go beyond them or supersede them.⁴ Thirdly, miracles are rare. These events do not happen on a daily basis because they are not the norm. However, most Christians believe that they are still happening today because the living God is actively interacting with his creation (Acts 17:27; Rom 8:26). In other words, God performs miracles not only through his prophets and disciples of the past but also directly in the lives of regular people today.

An Islamic Definition of Miracles

The Islamic understanding differs from the Christian view in that a miracle is an event that violates natural law, and such a violation can only be performed by Allah through his prophets.⁵ The Arabic word for a miracle in the Qur’an is *aya* which also means sign, wonder, and marvel. Muslims believe that Qur’anic verses are expressive of inexhaustible truth. They signify meaning layered within meaning, light upon light, truth upon truth. As Sayed Mubarak explains in his book, *Mu’jizat Al-Anbiya’ wa Al-Mursalin*,

2 Richard L. Purtill, “Defining Miracles,” in *Defense of Miracles*, Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 62-63.

3 Ibid., 68.

4 Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 6.

5 There is a misconception that the word Allah in Arabic is used to refer to the name of the Islamic God. This is not true for Allah means God in Arabic language. Arab Christians use the word Allah to refer to the Christian God in their Arabic Bible and literature. In this study, however, I will be referring to Allah as the god of Islam and God (with a big G) as the God of Christianity.

The miracles that Allah—Glory be to his name—did on the hands of his prophets and messengers are facts without any doubt... Allah supported his prophets and messengers with miracles to prove to the people the honesty of their message... and miracles are acts that human beings cannot do, they are supernatural acts, which do not submit to ontological nor natural laws, and Allah—Glory be to his name—prevents the prophet who did the miracle from taking any credit for it. In this way the miracle would be attributed to Allah—Glory be to his name—only.⁶

Several points should be made regarding the Islamic definition of miracles: first, like the Christian view, Muslims believe that miracles are real historical events, not fictional or merely mythical stories. Second, unlike the Christian view, miracles are events that violate or contradict the natural laws of Allah. When Allah performs a miracle, he chooses to contradict and violate certain natural laws that he himself had applied in creation. This view is compatible with the view of the ultimate will of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah is a universal possibilist because he can do anything he wants (Surah 2:20; 2:259; 3:189; 5:17; 16:77; 22:6 ...etc.).⁷ Since he has dominion and power over his creation, he can choose to create, order, and define everything according to his own approval.⁸ Third, miracles are performed only by Allah himself through the prophets. No other person can perform miracles. Mohammad Al-Sha'rawi agrees with Mubarak on the idea that only prophets perform miracles. He explains,

6 Sayed Mubarak, *Muʿjizat Al-Anbiya' wa Al-Mursalin* (Cairo, Egypt: Al-Maktaba Al-Mahmoudiyah, 2004), 5. The original Arabic translation renders this way: المعجزات التي أجراها الله تعالى على يد أنبيائه ورسله حقائق لا شك فيها... لقد أيد الله أنبياءه ورسله بالمعجزات ليثبتوا للناس صدقهم فيما يدعون إليه... والمعجزات أفعال يعجز البشر عن الاتيان بمثلها، فهي أمور خارقة للعادة، لا تخضع لنواميس الوجود، ولا لقوانين العلوم، وينزع الله تعالى من النبي الذي أجرى على يده المعجزة أي سبب من شأنه ان يحدث المعجزة، وبذلك تخلص المعجزة لله تعالى وحده.

7 The mainstream of Sunni traditionalists believe that Allah can do anything logically and illogically impossible if he wants. See Sherene N. Khouri, "What Does the Euthyphro Dilemma Reveal about the Nature of Allah?" *Eleutheria*, vol.6, no. 1, (2022):83.

8 Alvin Plantinga, *Does God have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 90.

A miracle is a violation of human laws, and no one can do it except for Allah who created these laws ... the miracle, the miracle of every prophet, should be related to what his people are proficient in, so the challenge can be great and strong and pointing to the ability of Allah—glory be to his name. For instance, he will not send a miracle of eloquence to people who are great in medicine.”⁹

Allah used his prophets to perform different miracles among different people based on their skills in order to show them that no matter how good they are, he is able to exceed their expectations. However, if Mubarak and Al-Sha'rawi's definition of a miracle is true (i.e. only prophets can perform miracles), then miracles no longer occur because the prophecy era has ended with Mohammad as the last prophet.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES: A CHRISTIAN VIEW VS. AN ISLAMIC VIEW

Miracles are affirmed in the Christian and Islamic theology. They have functional similarities for both views believe that miracles, when they occur, confirm the message of the prophet, and point to the divine. However, the purpose of miracles in the Christian view is different from the Islamic view because of its relation to the intention of God.

In the Christian belief, the purpose of miracles is to show that God has acted in history and that he is still active with his own creation today. Miracles, by nature, point beyond themselves because of the awe that they produce. However, God in the New Testament performs miracles for several reasons, but first and foremost because he cares about the people.

9 Mohammad Al-Sha'rawi, *Al-Qur'an Mu'jiza*, vol. 1 (Dar Akhbar Al-Yom, 1981), 7. The Arabic translation renders this way: أن المعجزة يجب أن تكون خرقاً لقوانين البشر ولا يقدر عليه إلا الله سبحانه وتعالى الذي وضع هذه القوانين ... وأن المعجزة معجزة كل نبي يجب أن تكون مما ينبغ فيه قومه حتى يكون التحدي نابغاً وقوياً .. وإثباتاً على قدرة الله سبحانه وتعالى .. فلا أتى بقوم نبغوا في الطب مثلاً وأرسل لهم ”معجزة في البلاغة“

In the Christian context, God loved the world (John 3:16)¹⁰ and wanted all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4); therefore, performing miracles is not just to challenge them but to lead them to repentance.¹¹ As the apostle Paul explains, “Faith comes from hearing the message” and the message which “is heard through the word about Christ” is confirmed through miracles (Rom 10:17). Also, Jesus asks the Jews to not believe in him if he is not doing “the works of the Father” (meaning miracles), but he invites them to believe in him because he performed several miracles among them, so they are without an excuse (John 10:37-38).

In contrast, Allah in the Islamic view performed miracles in the past to challenge people to believe in him. In other words, his main purpose of performing miracles is to impress people with his power. To explain this concept, Al-Sha’rawi gives the example of Jesus and his miracles in the Qur’an. In his view, Allah sent Jesus to people who were very knowledgeable and proficient in medicine. He allowed him to heal their blind and lepers and even raise their dead in order to prove his ultimate power.¹² Isra Yazicioglu echoes this idea explaining that “The Qur’an is very clear that such miracles do not signify that the prophets are endowed with any superhuman qualities. Rather, it is God who enables the prophets to perform the miracles at specific times during their mission and, at times, to their own surprise (e.g., Q. 19:8, 27:10).”¹³ This is to say that miracles point beyond the prophet to surprise people about the power of God. Rebecca Williams quotes one of the most important commentators on the Qur’an stating, “For al-Tabari, the role of God is revealed in relation to a request by the unbelievers for a sign like those performed by Moses or Jesus, and his emphasis is on the power of God to choose His prophet as

10 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

11 Purtil, “Defining Miracles,” 64.

12 Al-Sha’rawi, *Al-Qur’an Mu’jiza*, 10. The Arabic translation renders as: “وعيسى جاء الى قومه وقد نبغوا في الطب فأبرأ الأكمه والأبرص .. وزاد على ذلك بأنه أحيا الموتى بإذن الله .. إذن عيسى تحدى قومه في شيء يبغوا فيه .. فجاء لهم بما تجاوز علمهم .. وزاد عليه بإحياء الموتى بإذن الله .. فكان التحدي من جنس ما نبغ فيه قومه.”

13 Isra Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Qur’anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015), 4.

opposed to the power of man to question that choice.”¹⁴ The prominent goal of many of the earlier reported miracles is to show the power of Allah and the humanity of Mohammad. People of Arabia had different backgrounds (Jews, Christians, and Pagans) and they are used in their scriptures to see signs and miracles as part of the evidence of prophethood. However, in the Qur’anic reports of miracles the priority was given to stress the power of Allah and his ability to do all that he wants to do, not what people asked for. The later reports of miracles in Hadith and Sira books, however, took a different route.¹⁵ As William explains,

In these reports, rocks, trees, Christian monks, Jewish soothsayers, pagan idols, and angels all reveal Muhammad’s future importance. And yet, Muhammad himself is unaware of most of these events. He rarely speaks – his only dialogue coming from reports of later events in which he tells someone about his early life. Instead, he is portrayed simply as a passive receptor of God’s signs – things to him or for him rather than because of his actions.

As if these accounts were created later to answer certain objections that were not raised during the life of Mohammad. As stated earlier, the paper will focus on the Qur’anic miracles of Jesus and Mohammad and not the later reports of signs and miracles. None of the previous explanations show Allah’s careness for his people, but the emphasis is always on his power so that people may believe in him. This contrast shows that the purpose of miracles in both religions is different because the divine’s ultimate priority in Islam is Allah’s power.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS VS. THE MIRACLES OF MOHAMMAD IN THE QUR’AN

The Qur’an mentions several miracles performed by Jesus and only three miracles performed by Mohammad. By focusing on the miracles that are

14 Rebecca Williams, *Muhammad and the Supernatural: Medieval Arab Views* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 34.

15 Hadith means the accumulated commands and sayings of prophet Mohammad.

mentioned in the Qur'an only, the following section shall list the miracles of Jesus and Mohammad, and applies the criteria of the Islamic miracles to both (Jesus and Mohammad's miracles) to evaluate the consistency of their purpose within the Islamic standards. The conclusion will show that while Mohammad's miracles are inconsistent with the Islamic criteria of accepting a miracle, Jesus miracles are consistent. Mohammad's miracles are ahistorical, lack eyewitnesses, and do not serve Allah's purpose; however, Jesus's miracles are consistent with the Islamic criteria of accepting a miracle. This conclusion entails the idea that the invention of the later miracles of Mohammad in the books of Hadiths and Sira was a necessity to fill in the gap in the literature and to fulfill the demands of prophethood's signs.

Jesus's Miracles in the Qur'an

The Qur'an mentions several miracles that were done by Jesus. For instance, Jesus was born of a virgin (Surah 19:16-21), speaking in the manger (Surah 19:27-33), predicting his death and his ascension to heaven while a child in the manger (Surah 19:33), creating a living bird from clay, healing blind people and lepers, raising the dead (Surah 5:110), and creating a huge feast for his disciples to believe in him (Surah 5:112-115). It is worth noting that all these miracles are unique to Jesus, Mohammad did not do any of them.

Mohammad's Miracles in the Qur'an

The major and most important miracle that Mohammad did—which most Muslims agree upon—is the Qur'an itself.¹⁶ The writer of the Qur'an repeatedly challenges its people to produce a similar discourse on their own: "If you are in doubts concerning that We have sent down to Our slave, then produce a surah of the like thereof and call your witnesses besides Allah, if you are truthful" (Surah 2:23). Also, provocatively,

16 Mubarak, *Mu'jizat Al-Anbiya' wa Al-Mursalin*, 102.

Mohammad reframes the challenge, stating, “If the mankind and the jinn were together to produce the like of this Qur’an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another” (Surah 17:88, see also 10:38, 11:13, 52:33-34). The Qur’an was considered a sufficient sign in itself and presented as a challenge to people who disbelieved in Mohammad.¹⁷ There is no specific verse that mentions or calls the Qur’an a miracle. However, most Muslims agree that the Qur’an is the strongest miracle that was given to humankind about the truthfulness of the message of Allah. Many verses mention that the Qur’an is a dictation from Allah that was given to Mohammad through *Jibril* (angel Gabriel) in a plain eloquent Arabic language (Surah 6:19; 26:192-193; 41:1-3). The miraculous element is that no one was able or will be able to create a book like the Qur’an. This logic might sound circular, especially to Westerners; however, most Muslim scholars agree with it because it is mentioned in the Qur’an (Surah 17:88).

Mohammed’s second Qur’anic miracle is the trip that he took from Makkah to Jerusalem. It is mentioned in a concise way in the Qur’an, but in more detail in the Hadith:¹⁸

Gloried (and Exalted) be He (Allah) [Above all that (evil) they associate with Him] who took His slave (Muhammad (ﷺ))¹⁹ for a journey by night from *Al-Masjid-Al-Haram* (at Makkah) to *Al-Masjid-al-Aqsa* (in Jerusalem), the neighborhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him (Muhammad) of Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, lessons, signs, etc.). Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.²⁰

On this overnight trip, Mohammad traveled to Jerusalem on Buraq

17 Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Qur’anic Miracle*, 5.

18 This miracle is repeated in Sahih Bukhari

19 “Sala Allah Aleih wa salam صلى الله عليه وسلم” (for artistic purposes, it occurs sometimes in this way []). The literal translation is: Allah prayed over Mohammad and greeted him. However, Muslims do not translate this statement to English in a literal way; they simply interpret it as “Peace be upon him.”

20 No emphasis was added to this citation. The extra information between two parentheses are provided by the translators.

(a metaphysical winged animal that is between a mule and a donkey). According to Hadith, he bargained with Allah and reduced the number of daily prayers from fifty to five.²¹

The third miracle of Mohammad was the splitting of the moon. At the introduction of Surah Al-Qamar (the moon), Mohammad writes, “The Hour has drawn near, and the moon has been cleft asunder. If they see a sign, they turn away and say: ‘This is continuous magic’” (Surah 54:1-2). When the people of Makkah asked Mohammad to perform a miracle in front of them, he cleaved the moon. Despite this miracle, they did not believe, and they attributed what they saw to magic.²²

MOHAMMAD VS. JESUS’S MIRACLES IN THE QUR’AN: AN EVALUATION

Mohammad’s Miracles: An Evaluation

An examination that arrays evidence to establish the authenticity of an event is a very essential act of historiography. Historians use several criteria to authenticate the event under study, such as the number of eyewitnesses, artifacts, scientific laws, and written documents that describe the event.²³ According to the Islamic view, miracles are historical events that happened in real-time and in geographical places. However, none of Mohammad’s miracles share the aforementioned criteria, either because the Qur’an mentions none (no eyewitnesses, no external or unbiased written documents, etc...) or because of the nature of the miracles. As for

21 Muhammad Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith no. 3207, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/59/18>

22 Islamic scholars disagree whether this miracle should be interpreted literally or figuratively. See Hussein Abdulsater, “Full Texts, Split Moons, Eclipsed Narratives: The Literary History of a Cosmological Miracle,” *Narrative Culture*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 162-166.

23 Philip P. Wiener, “On Methodology in the Philosophy of History,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 38, no. 12 (1941): 309–24.

the eyewitness account, no one saw the Qur'an descending on Mohammad because it was a direct communication between him and angel Jibril. Those who did not believe in Jibril's revelation were accused of being the prophet's enemies (Surah 2:97), without the ability to provide any evidence to Jibril's communication. Moreover, there is no extra-Islamic account affirming that Jibril gave the Qur'an to Mohammad and there is no verse in the Qur'an testifying that people saw Jibril revealing the Qur'an to Mohammad. On the contrary, there is contraposition information to eyewitnesses. The Qur'an mentions several times that when Mohammad recited the verses of the Qur'an in front of other people, they said that it was the legends of their ancestors (Surah 16:24; 23:83-89; 83:13; 25:5; 26:68; 46:17; 68:15). They were able to recognize the stories, but they attributed them to tribal legends. Jibril's revelation would be a stronger argument if an enemy eyewitness account was available. However, many of Mohammad's listeners gave opposing testimony to how Mohammad got the Qur'an.

In a similar fashion, there are no eyewitnesses to Mohammad's trip to Jerusalem. This trip took the form of a vision that no one but Mohammad saw.²⁴ The only miracle that involved eyewitnesses is the splitting of the moon. Nevertheless, the eyewitnesses accused Mohammad of being a magician by attributing it to sorcery (Surah 54:1-2). In fact, if the moon did really split that night, then there should have been some recordings of astronomical observations that attest to this event in different countries. However, no known historians have recorded such an event that we know of today. In short, no historical criterion applies to any miracle that Mohammad performed because they lack viable eyewitnesses.

The second criterion for accepting miracles in the Islamic belief is that they are supposed to be performed by prophets. Mohammad's miracles fit this criterion, but they bear a weakness. Mohammad's miracles are self-attestation to his prophecy and using the Qur'an (that says Mohammad is

24 This story is called Al-Isra' wa Al-Mi'raj. Its genre is similar to a myth. It also could be copied from the Ethiopic legends, such as the apocryphal book "The book of Enoch."

a prophet) as a testimony to the truth of his prophecy is circular reasoning. The same weakness applies to his vision or trip to Jerusalem because there is no way to authenticate it. Mohammad thinks that he is a prophet because he believes that he has seen a supernatural vision in his dreams that no one can confirm.²⁵

The last criterion is that miracles should challenge people to show the power of Allah and lead them to believe in him. However, this criterion is dysfunctional because miracles in the Islamic view have ceased. By Mohammad being the last prophet, no miracle can be performed today and no attestation to the divinity of Allah is accomplished except through da'wa (preaching). Challenging people today to believe in Allah is an inapplicable measure for contemporary evaluation.

In conclusion, Mohammad's miracles that were mentioned in the Qur'an cannot serve the purpose of miracles in the Islamic view and point to the divinity and the existence of Allah because of the absence of historic testimonies, the lack of eyewitnesses, and the cessation of miracles. This weakness perhaps explains why additional miracle accounts (such as the ones mentioned in the Hadith and Sirah) were needed to authenticate the prophethood of Mohammad.

Jesus's Miracles in the Qur'an: An Evaluation

Despite the fact that Jesus's miracles are numerous in comparison to Mohammad's (especially the ones that are mentioned in the Qur'an), they fit into the Islamic criteria of miracles better than Mohammad's. For instance, all of Jesus's miracles enjoyed strong testimonies from eyewitnesses. Unlike Mohammad's miracles, they were performed in front of people who approved and testified their authenticity in addition to people who were his enemies (Surah 5:110; 3:49). For example, miracles such as Jesus speaking in the manger or creating a bird were performed in front of people who witnessed their accounts and were not private to

25 Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj Al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith no. 127, accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.sunnah.com/muslim/1/337>.

the person who claimed to have done them. Moreover, people who were in contact with Jesus approved of his message because all of his miracles were done to benefit them. For instance, Jesus's disciples believed in him after he had fed them and testified to his identity as a prophet (Surah 5:112-115), whereas the people around Mohammad accused him of borrowing their earlier legends to compose the Qur'an (Surah 6:25). Jesus raising people from the dead is a very strong account to his prophethood because it would be very easy to oppose if the miracle did not happen.

THE RESURRECTION: THE ISLAMIC VIEW VS. THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

While the Christian view of the resurrection of Jesus is unique to the Christian faith, it fits the Islamic miracle criteria better than all of Mohammad's miracles. The resurrection is considered a historical fact performed via a messenger of God to help people believe in him and gain eternal life. Nevertheless, Muslims do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus because of the Qur'an's *a priori* rejection of Christ's death. The Qur'an clearly states that Jesus was never killed nor crucified: "but the resemblance of Isa (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man), and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not. But Allah raised him [Isa (Jesus)] up (with his body and soul) unto Himself. And Allah is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise" (Surah 4:157).²⁶ It is beyond the scope of this paper to show the historical evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus. But since the resurrection from the dead is not a foreign idea in Islamic belief, the rest of this paper focuses on the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus and shows several problems related to the claim that Jesus was never raised from the dead. The following sections make a case for the resurrection of Jesus from the Islamic criteria of miracles

26 All the information between parentheses and square brackets that are added by Al-Hilali and Khan.

by defining the minimal facts about the concept of the resurrection that all Muslims agree upon, and by discussing the dispute among Islamic scholars of whether Jesus died before his ascension.

A Case for the Resurrection: A Minimal Facts Approach

Christian scholar, Gary Habermas, created the minimal facts theory by finding at least twelve facts that most critics accept in their scholarly works about the resurrection.²⁷ Following his steps, this section lists several facts about the miracles of Jesus that Christians and Muslims accept. Believing in these facts and ignoring the resurrection of Jesus shows inconsistency in the Islamic belief, and therefore, makes a case for the resurrection of Jesus.

Muslims and Christians agree on several facts related to the personhood and the miracles of Jesus. Both affirm that Jesus was a prophet/messenger sent by God, although Christians believe he was more than a prophet (John 1:1). They agree that he performed several miracles including raising a person from the dead (John 11:42-43; Surah 5:110). They also agree that he was ascended to heaven and will be back in the future to judge the world (John 5:22).²⁸ Furthermore, Christians and Muslims believe that miracles are historical facts, done by prophets for the purpose of affirming their message and pointing to God. Jesus's resurrection affirmed his message as a prophet (the Islamic account) and the Son of God (the Christian account) because many can claim they will be raised from the dead; however, just one person was able to fulfill it, Jesus Christ. There is collaborative evidence from biblical and non-biblical resources which support the historical status of the resurrection of Jesus. The strongest early biblical source is the first epistle to the Corinthians, which includes

27 Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 9-10

28 Abi Abdullah Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith no. 3448, (Damascus, Syria: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2002), 854. Abi Al-Hussain Muslim Al-Nissabouri, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith no. 242, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar Tiba, 2006), 80.

an early (mid-30s AD) creedal confession that “provides some crucially important information, like the report of Jesus’s appearance to several groups, including to five hundred persons as one time,” says Habermas (1 Cor 15:6).²⁹ The non-biblical sources that testify to Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection are many, including prominent historical figures like Josephus (AD 37),³⁰ Tacitus (AD 56-120),³¹ and Thallus (AD 55).³² Although Muslims believe in Jesus’s ascension, their literature does not include any eyewitness account of this event.

The resurrection of Jesus fits the rest of the criteria of the Islamic miracles because it challenged the Jews, proved Jesus’s prophecy, and pointed to God. Jesus challenged the Jews several times by performing several miracles. However, prophesying his resurrection and raising himself from the dead on the third day is the ultimate challenge because no man was ever able to fulfill it before Jesus (Luke 24:46; Mark 10:34; Matt 20:19). Moreover, the resurrection of Jesus pointed to God because Christianity started spreading all over the world after that event, which means people started believing in God after this event in a widespread way. Even those who were skeptical about Jesus during his life changed their perspective and became willing to die after they saw the resurrected Jesus. In a nutshell, the resurrection of Jesus fits the Islamic criteria for miracles more than Mohammad’s own miracles. Therefore, disbelieving in the resurrection of Jesus is considered *a priori* rejection and it is inconsistent with the Islamic belief in miracles.

A Case for the Resurrection: Ascension vs. Resurrection

The claim that Jesus was never raised from the dead is inconsistent and incoherent with the Islamic view because of a particular verse that says

29 Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 19.

30 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18 ,63.

31 Tacitus Ann. 15.44.

32 Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2010), 235-245.

Allah has ended the life of Jesus. If Jesus died, then his ascension to heaven should be regarded first as a resurrection from the dead and later a bodily ascension. There is a missing link, an intermediate stage between the death and the bodily ascension of Jesus, which the resurrection event covers. Muslims, however, believe that Allah saved Jesus from the crucifixion without mentioning what happened to him or to the other person who was crucified in his place (Surah 4:157; 3:55).

A close examination of Surah 3:55, however, proves that Jesus died before his ascension. In this verse, Allah speaks to Jesus saying, “I will take you [Jesus] and raise you to Myself.” It does not say how or when Allah took Jesus to himself. It is also noteworthy that the English translation of this verse substitutes the word *mutawafika* (ending your life) with the verb “will take you,” and this translation does not capture the meaning because the root verb of *mutawafika* is *tawafa*, which means “قبض روحه” took his soul”³³ not “will take you.”

The word *tawafa* and its different forms are mentioned several times in the Qur’an under the meaning of ending someone’s life. In Surah 39:42, Mohammad explains how Allah’s sovereignty controls the death and the life of people. He states, “It is Allah who takes away [*yatawafa*] the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep.” Mohammad distinguishes between those who Allah *yatawafa* and those who sleep. In other words, those who sleeps will wake up again, therefore, Allah did not take their soul—Allah did not *yatawafa* these people. The same meaning is translated for the word *yatawafa* and its form in several other places in the Qur’an to indicate death (Surah 8:50; 22:5; 40:67; 10:46; 13:40; 40:77). Finally, when Allah asks Jesus if he told the people to believe in him and his mother, Jesus answers using the past tense of the verb *yatawafy*, which is *tawafa*, but the English translation insists on using “when you took me up” for the verb *tawafaytani* (Surah 5:117). The word *tawafa/yatawafa/tawafaytani/mutawafika* all mean

33 Al-Mu’jam al-Wasit, s.v. “توفي” ed., (Cairo, Egypt: Al-Shuruq international, 2004). See also, al-Muhit Qamus, s.v. “توفي” ed., (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Risala, 2005)

“ending someone’s life” in every place in the Qur’an and the dictionaries, yet they are translated as “took me/you up” in English when Jesus speaks. This rendering does not seem consistent or correct linguistically or Qur’anically. It may include a pre-supposed meaning that the translators of the Qur’an are trying to convey to non-Arabic speakers.

One of the proper ways to know the accurate meaning of *mutawafika* is to go to early Islamic commentaries, such as Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi, who most Sunni Muslims trust and follow. Surprisingly enough, these scholars do not fully agree on the meaning of this word. Al-Tabari and the Al-Qurtubi both mention three possible meanings: 1) Allah put Jesus under sleep and then he ascended him to heaven, 2) Allah terminated his life, or 3) Allah ended his life temporary for few hours, then raised him from the dead and ascendant him to heaven.³⁴ Al-Qurtubi adds a fourth meaning: Jesus asked his disciples, “who is ready to die with him?” when one of them volunteered, Jesus gave him his staff and garment and placed his likeness on him so that people would think that they are crucifying Jesus.³⁵ Then Al-Qurtubi continues, “As for the Messiah, Allah covered him with feather and light and cut his pleasure of eating and drinking, so he flew with the angels.”³⁶ Even this meaning does not say when or after how long Jesus ascended to heaven. It seems that Muslim scholars are confused about this word and disagree about its exact meaning because they do not want to submit to its only and obvious meaning. They do not want to admit that Jesus died and that the word *mutawafika* (ending your life) is the Qur’anic proof. They know that if they approve this meaning, they will contradict the view that Jesus was never crucified (Surah 4:157), which implements death. This position, however, is inconsistent with the

34 Muhammad Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jame' Al-Bayan An Ta'weel Ay Quran*, Bashar Ma'roof & Issam Al-Heršani eds., vol. 2, (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Risallah Publisher, 1994), 265-266. Muhammad Iben Ahmad Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Asna fi Sahreh Asma' Allah Al-Husna*, accessed February 24, 2019, <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura3-aya55.html#qortobi>

35 Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Asna fi Sahreh Asma' Allah Al-Husna*.

36 Ibid., The Arabic translation is: وأما المسيح فكساه الله الريش وألبسه النور وقطع عنه لذة المطعم والمشرّب فطار مع الملائكة

Islamic claim about the original Arabic of the Qur'an and its superiority to the English translation. Taking this notion into consideration with the concurrent meanings of Al-Qurtubi and Al-Tabari, the reader can conclude that this verse is a clear declaration that Jesus deceased first (even for a few hours as they claimed) before he was raised from the dead and then ascended to heaven. This notion is crucial because it supports the Christian claim that Jesus died and then was resurrected from the dead.

A Case for the Resurrection: The Status of Jesus & Allah's Omnipotence

As stated earlier, miracles in the Islamic view are performed by prophets only. Several prophets performed different types of miracles. However, no prophet was able to raise people from the dead, except for Jesus. In the Qur'an, the miracle of raising people from the dead is dedicated only to Allah for he is introduced as the creator and the one who raises people from the dead (Surah 22:6; 30:50; 36:11; 41:39; 42:9). In Islamic history, no other man was able to do what Allah does—raising people from the dead—except for Jesus. To be consistent with Islamic belief, this miracle should elevate Jesus's status from a prophet to a miracle worker, if not divine.

In a different story, Mohammad himself took notice of the importance of the miracle of the resurrection. In a conversation between him and Allah, Allah says, "When you killed a man and fell into dispute among yourselves as to the crime. But Allah brought forth that which you were hiding. So we said: 'strike him (the dead man) with a piece of it (the cow). Thus Allah brings the dead to life and shows you His ayat (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelation, etc.) so that you may understand" (Surah 2:72-73). The purpose of this miracle is to point to Allah by showing unbelievers the evidence of the resurrection. Denying that Jesus was raised from the dead, therefore, is denying the ability of Allah and rejecting his evidence. Resurrecting the person who was killed by mistake is one of the signs that Mohammad was ordered to perform,

but never did. Yet, when Jesus performed it, Muslims undervalued it.

CONCLUSION

Miracles' criteria in the Islamic view are divided into four points. They are historical events that were performed by prophets to prove their message, challenge people, and point to the divine. Mohammad's miracles that are mentioned in the Qur'an fail to fulfill these criteria because of their nature. They are ahistorical events that lack eyewitnesses, and they do not prove Mohammad's message nor point to Allah because they are self-attested. In contrast, Jesus's miracles, including Jesus's resurrection from the dead, aptly fit the Islamic criteria. The miracle of Jesus's resurrection was a historical event that challenged people to believe in God. When Muslims insist that Jesus's resurrection was a mere ascension, they contradict the Qur'an and reverse the early belief of Muslim commentators who state that Jesus died before his ascension. When they deny the resurrection, they cripple the ability of Allah to perform it and they disrupt its purpose, which is to point to Allah. In a nutshell, Muslims should consider the resurrection of Jesus because it fits the Islamic criteria of miracles, it does not contradict the Qur'an, and it proves the ability of Allah to raise people from the dead.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdulsater, Hussein. "Full Texts, Split Moons, Eclipsed Narratives: The Literary History of a Cosmological Miracle." 2018. *Narrative Culture*. Vol. 5. no. 2. (Fall).
- Al-Bukhari, Muhammad. *Sahih Bukhari*. Hadith no. 3207. Accessed February 2, 2019. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/59/18>.
- Al-Naysaburi, Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj. *Sahih Muslim*. Hadith no. 127. Accessed February 23, 2019. <https://www.sunnah.com/>

muslim/1/337.

Al-Qurtubi, Muhammad Iben Ahmad. *Al-Asna fi Sahreh Asma' Allah Al-Husna*. Accessed February 24, 2019. <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura3-aya55.html#qortobi>

Al-Sha'rawi, Mohammad. *Al-Qur'an Mu'jiza*. Vol. 1. Dar Akhbar Al-Yom, 1981.

Al-Tabari, Muhammad Ibn Jarir. *Jame' Al-Bayan An Ta'weel Ay Quran*. Edited by Bashar Ma'roof & Issam Al-Herstan. vol. 2. Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Risallah Publisher, 1994.

Habermas, Gary R. *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Khouri, Sherene N. "What Does the Euthyphro Dilemma Reveal about the Nature of Allah?" *Eleutheria*, vol.6, no. 1, (2022).

Licon, Michael R. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2010.

Mubarak, Sayed *Mu'jizat Al-Anbiya wa Al-Mursalin*. Cairo, Egypt: Al-Maktaba Al-Mahmoudiyah, 2004.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Does God have a nature?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980.

Purtill, Richard L. "Defining Miracles." In *Defense of Miracles*. Edited by Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Yazicioglu, Isra. *Understanding the Qur'anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015.

Williams, Rebecca. *Muhammad and the Supernatural: Medieval Arab Views*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.

Wiener, Philip P. "On Methodology in the Philosophy of History." *The Journal of Philosophy* 38, no. 12 (1941): 309–24.



Missionary Affluence: A Question of Privilege and Sacrifice

Thorsten Prill

KEY WORDS

| Cross-cultural Mission | Missionary Lifestyles | Poverty |
| Power | Privileges | Wealth |

ABSTRACT

Twenty-first century Christianity is a religion with an economically poor majority in the Global South and a wealthy minority in the Global North. Missionaries who leave the latter to serve in Africa, Latin America and the developing countries of Asia are confronted with an affluence gap that has the potential to damage their cross-cultural ministries. Thus, missionary affluence can separate Western workers from the local communities in their host countries and subvert the Gospel message they have come to share. Culturally sensitive, simple lifestyles and new models of partnership with indigenous Christians can help Western missionaries to overcome the pitfalls presented by significant differences in access to personal and institutional wealth, education and knowledge. It is crucial, however, that they learn from the biblical missionary role models par excellence, Jesus and his apostles, who relinquished privileges and rights and made extraordinary sacrifices for the sake of their missions.

INTRODUCTION

A Swiss missionary family came to serve in the capital city of an African country. After having consulted the local missionary community, the family decided to send their children to one of the best private schools. The majority of pupils at this school came from expat families and the political and economic black elite as well as from the local white minority population. The school leadership and the majority of teachers were both local white people and expatriates. The family's mission agency agreed to that decision. It was the agency's policy that all missionary children were entitled to go to a private school whatever context in Africa a family was serving. The missionaries' local co-workers and Christian friends not only understood but also shared the missionaries' desire to have good education for their children. Nevertheless, they were still struggling with the missionaries' decision. The local Christians could not afford private schooling for their own children, and they were well aware that the annual school fees for the missionary children exceeded their own yearly income. In addition, they did not understand why the missionary children could not attend one of the good state schools which existed in the capital. They concluded that the missionaries preferred a white Western education and did not trust the local public school system. They were left with the impression that the education which their own children received was not good enough for the children of missionaries. Without intention, the missionary family had sent out a message of superiority to their local co-workers and friends.¹

Like the Swiss family, the majority of Western missionaries who come to Africa, Latin America or many parts of Asia today are by default in a privileged position. They are by far more affluent than the majority of the indigenous population. Their faith is a faith, as Tinyiko Sam Maluleke notes, "whose wealthiest adherents and institutions reside in the North at a time when its poorest adherents and institutions can be found in

1 This scenario is fictitious but based on real cases.

the South.”² Contemporary global Christianity is a religion with a poor majority and a wealthy minority.³ The relativity of missionary wealth, which is small by the standards in their home countries and large by the standards of their host countries, is a very common experience of many cross-cultural mission workers,⁴ or in the words of Akinyemi Alawode: “For the missionaries, living in a foreign land may mean being deprived of the pleasures of life at home; it may mean living below the standard of the economy at home [...] Nevertheless, from their host’s viewpoint, missionaries are rich people.”⁵

CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

Writing from a Western position, Jayson Georges gives, what he thinks, is the main reason for missionary affluence. He states: “Because of the large income gap between the countries of origin and ministry, it was (and still is) considered infeasible for a missionary to live self-sufficiently within the economic system of the host country like Paul, medieval monastics or the Moravians; instead, we rely on funds sent from the Western mission agency.”⁶

Similarly, Jonathan Bonk, argues that both an ever-increasing entitlement attitude and a distorted understanding of basic needs in the West have contributed to the affluence gap between Western missionaries

2 Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Christian Mission in a World Under the Grip of an Unholy Trinity: Inequality, Poverty and Unemployment,” in *Mission and Money: Christian Mission in the Context of Global Inequalities*, ed. Mari-Anna Auvinen-Pöntinen and Jonas Adelin Jørgensen (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 68.

3 Maluleke, “Christian Mission in a World Under the Grip of an Unholy Trinity”, 68.

4 Cf. Rita Smith Kipp, *The Early Years of Dutch Colonial Mission* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 51.

5 Akinyemi. O. Alawode, “The Importance and Challenges of Money in Christian Missions,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020): 3. <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v76n1/46.pdf>.

6 Jayson Georges, “A Missionary Ethic of Economic Affluence,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2009), <https://missionexus.org/a-missionary-ethic-of-economic-affluence>.

and the people they have come to minister amongst. Moreover, the requirement of mission agencies that one hundred percent of a missionary's support must have been pledged before he or she can leave for Africa or other parts of the world has also contributed to the affluence gap. Thus, he writes: "It is not unusual, for example, for nondenominational agencies to insist that potential candidates raise the prescribed amount of support before being permitted to venture forth. Furthermore, should support for a particular missionary wane, that missionary will not be permitted to remain on the field, but must return home to garner more support. Such Western mission agencies thus operate on a blatantly "rice-missionary" principle: no money – no missionary [...]. [I]t seems clear that successive generations of Westerners have been enculturated to uncritical redefinition of personal material "needs" in accordance with continually escalating notions of entitlement that most of the world's population can only regard as widely profligate."⁷

Another reason why sending churches and mission agencies might support a relatively high living standard of their missionaries is the problem of missionary attrition. To keep Western missionaries 'happy' and the attrition rate low they are enabled to lead privileged comfortable lifestyles in contexts where poverty is often the plight of the majority of the indigenous population. John Rowell notes: "In the modern era, discomfort and disunity are probably more common causes of early departures from the field than either death or disease. But economic realities still dictate that the most cost-effective mission is the one that can keep missionaries on the field and can get out of them the best service they are capable of offering. Taking good, practical care of missionaries is an obvious and logical decision. So goes the economic rationale for maintaining missionaries in relatively lavish means on the fields in which they serve."⁸

7 Jonathon J. Bonk, "Mission and the Problem of Affluence," in *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, ed. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 297-99.

8 John Rowell, *To Give Or Not To Give? Rethinking Dependency, Restoring*

For Samuel Escobar, it is the failure of evangelical mission organisations, in particular, that has hugely contributed to the problems created by missionary affluence. Evangelical missionary models, Escobar argues, “have not been able to overcome the distance and barriers created by the comparative affluence of missionaries and agencies.”⁹ Instead of working with their indigenous partners evangelical mission agencies tend to bypass them and perpetuate their independence.¹⁰

Jim Harries, a British missiologist and missionary based in Kenya, argues that Western development workers and missionaries, because of their privileged financial positions, have power over local people – whether they are aware of it or not.¹¹ This power can easily become a significant stumbling block for their work, even if they take the task of contextualisation seriously, do their best to be cross-culturally sensitive and demonstrate a high degree of humility. Harries explains: “At the same time, they have an armory of available money (of vast size in local terms) constantly at their [disposal] that they are free to wield at any time they wish. This puts a Westerner into a position of structural power that no amount of (feigned?) humility can undo. Westerners coming into poor communities are immediately in the position of being major power brokers, while also being majorly ignorant of cultural norms.”¹²

While not every Western missionary has huge amounts of money at his or her disposal, as suggested by Harries, it is certainly true that many of them have their ways of raising additional money for themselves or projects that they support. In the same way, there is no reason to assume that *money power* is alien to the mission field. When Western missionaries support a local project financially, experience shows, that they also want to have their say, or with the words of an English proverb “The one who

Generosity, and Redefining Sustainability (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 125.

9 Samuel Escobar, *A Time for Mission: The Challenge for Global Christianity* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2003), 48.

10 Escobar, *A Time for Mission*, 48.

11 Jim Harries, *Theory to Practice in Vulnerable Mission: An Academic Appraisal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 55.

12 Harries, *Theory to Practice in Vulnerable Mission*, 55.

pays the piper calls the tune”. That the ones who pay make the final decisions is one of the well-known principles of Western public finance.¹³ Against this background, it should not come as a surprise when supporters back home expect missionaries to play an active role, i.e., to monitor or even control and direct the use of any pecuniary donations.

Having said that, “the concept of affluence”, as Georges helpfully points out, “should not be limited to money, but understood within the broader notions of wealth, access, and non-material desirables.”¹⁴ Missionaries are not only affluent because of their higher income but also because of their knowledge, access to education, prestige, etc. “[A]ffluence implies”, as Georges puts it, “access to a greater amount of choices.”¹⁵ Many Western missionaries come from countries, such as Australia, Canada, the Netherlands or the USA, where people demonstrate a relatively weak control of their desires and impulses.¹⁶ In such indulgent cultures personal freedom, happiness, enjoying life and having fun are important values.¹⁷ People, in particular, appreciate having leisure time and the ability to do with their money as they wish. In contrast, people in *restrained* cultures tend to delay social pleasures and do not value personal freedoms so highly.¹⁸ Frugality and discipline are regarded as important values.¹⁹ According to Hofstede Insights, many African countries, such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia, can be classified as restrained.²⁰ Consequently, it should not surprise us when affluent

13 Cf. Richard M. Bird and Robert D. Ebel, “Subsidiarity, Solidarity and Asymmetry: Aspects of the Problem,” in *Fiscal Fragmentation in Decentralized Countries*, ed. Richard M. Bird and Robert D. Ebel (Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, 2007), 6.

14 Georges, “A Missionary Ethic of Economic Affluence”.

15 Georges, “A Missionary Ethic of Economic Affluence”.

16 Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, Edwin R. McDaniel and Carolyn S. Roy, *Communication Between Cultures* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2013), 193.

17 Yvette D. Hyter and Marlene B. Salas-Provence, *Culturally Responsive Practices in Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences* (San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2019), 55.

18 Hyter and Salas-Provence, *Culturally Responsive Practices in Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences*, 55-56.

19 Samovar, Porter, McDaniel and Roy, *Communication Between Cultures*, 193.

20 Hofstede Insights, “Country Comparison,” www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison.

Western missionaries from indulgent societies are closely watched by the local African community, in which sharing of “what one has with others and especially the members of one’s family, clan, tribe, and friends” is considered an important virtue.²¹ Since Africans are generally good observers they take note of the accommodation missionaries rent or buy, the cars they drive, the holidays they have, the places they eat, the schools they send their children to (or do not send to in the case of home schooling) and the people they socialise with. The affluence of missionaries can lead to envy and suspicion among the local population,²² since the latter see missionaries with access to personal and institutional wealth, education and knowledge of which they can only dream.²³ Missionary affluence can prevent missionaries from developing genuine relationships, let alone friendships, with indigenous people who are struggling to make ends meet. It can separate the missionary from the local community and the majority of society and create an *us versus them* mentality among the missionaries toward the local people and vice-versa.²⁴ Bonk, for example, notes: “To the missionary family belongs the privilege, power, and position that go with wealth. Conversely, it is hard for the poor family to understand or appreciate the motives of the missionary family, in his eyes privileged beyond imagination as evidenced by clothing, transportation, holidays, special schools, technology, and other amenities that are the lot of the rich.”²⁵

Similarly, Phil Parshall writes about the negative perceptions that some indigenous Christians have of an affluent missionary lifestyle: “One national Christian observed the “luxurious” standard of missionary housing in a Muslim nation and questioned, “If the missionaries live on

21 Joe M. Kapolyo, *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 40.

22 Cf. Jonathan Bonk, “Affluence: The Achilles’ Heel of Missions,” EMIS (1985). <https://missionexus.org/affluence-the-achilles-heel-of-missions/>.

23 Cf. A. Scott Moreau, “Missionary Affluence,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 645.

24 Georges, “A Missionary Ethic of Economic Affluence”.

25 Bonk, “Affluence”.

such a standard of affluence here, why do they speak so much of heaven? They have their heaven right here.” Another national categorized a luxury hotel, to which missionaries went on Saturdays to relax and swim, as a “hell hole”.²⁶ These examples show that missionary affluence has the potential to subvert the Gospel message that the missionaries have come to share.²⁷ It can lead to resentment, rejection and even open conflicts.

Abraham Akrong draws attention to another potentially negative aspect of missionary affluence. Akrong argues that the affluent missionary lifestyle is a reason why today’s missionaries are seen in a similar light as their predecessors during colonial times. While missionaries of the past were sometimes perceived as agents of colonialism, there is the danger that contemporary missionaries are perceived as representatives of the wealthy countries of the northern hemisphere. Akrong writes: “In the heyday of the colonial era, mission was co-opted into the empire-building ideology of colonialism. In the contemporary world, mission is imperceptibly allowing itself to be co-opted into the structures of multilateral organization whose affluence at the local level are creating problems for the witness of the church. Since the missionaries are often seen as just another group of experts or consultants of either a multinational co-operation or multilateral organization because of their lifestyle, they are not significantly differentiated from the other representatives of the North. The perception of the missionary as just another representative of the affluent North in the South comes with all the divisions and symbols that separate the affluent North from the poor South.”²⁸

While missionary affluence can lead to situations and responses as described by Bonk, Parshall and Akrong above, it must be noted that not all local people, especially if they are Christians, see missionaries in

26 Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 121.

27 Moreau, “Missionary Affluence,” 645.

28 Abraham Akrong, “Deconstructing Colonial Mission: New Missiological Perspectives in African Christianity,” in *Christianity in Africa and the Africa Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, ed. Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff and Klaus Hock (London: Continuum, 2011), 74.

such a light. Not all Africans expect a missionary to live in a tin shack or mud house. In his book *When Helping Works* Michael Bamwesigye Badriaki tells the story of an American missionary serving in Uganda who organised social justice trips for young short-term missionaries from his home country.²⁹ This missionary tried to break the short-term missionaries and compelled them “to do manual labor, sleep on shabby mats, become exposed to malaria infected mosquitos, and be crowded in a small room.”³⁰ Badriaki questions this approach by asking “Is the condition of being poor some type of underclass category and torture chamber suitable for the belittling of the affluent? Is that a gospel-centric attitude? What have missions come to?”³¹

Experience shows that there are Africans who do not necessarily have a problem if the missionary's accommodation and lifestyle are different from their own because most of them aspire to a better accommodation and lifestyle for their own lives. Moreover, many African Christians will sympathise with missionaries who have left behind family and friends to serve God and his people far away from home. They will appreciate the sacrifice missionaries make by being separated from their mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. If, however, local Christians get the impression that missionaries lead a life they could never afford in their home countries, in other words, that their ministry is anything but a sacrifice, they might start to speculate about the missionary's true motives for coming to Africa. The same is true if missionaries are unwilling to share some of their affluence with others. Some of them might do so with good intentions. They feel that they cannot share too much with the local people because they do not want to run the risk of making *rice friends* or *rice Christians*. This seems to be a laudable attitude to have, but it is, in fact, a problematic one, as people who do not share with the less privileged are seen by the African community as being greedy

29 Michael Bamwesigye Badriaki, *When Helping Works: Alleviating Fear and Pain in Global Missions* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 90.

30 Badriaki, *When Helping Works*, 90.

31 Badriaki, *When Helping Works*, 90.

and self-centred and therefore immoral.³² People who do not share are seen as people who are simply not interested in others. Harries notes: “Westerners hold deeply to the belief that friendship should be based on other than money. [...], what might be in English termed as “begging” for something, a very socially undesirable action, can in Africa be a way of showing someone the greatest possible respect. Relationship often, if not typically, is in Africa based on a necessitated sharing of resources. Westerners need to know this. To refuse to share can be interpreted as being a refusal to enter into relationships.”³³

Some missionaries, who lack cross-cultural sensitivity, are not aware of these dynamics mentioned above. Others are, but they put their conscience at ease by reminding themselves of the many material sacrifices they are making (e.g., career, income, health care, food, leisure activities, etc.) by serving far away from home. These sacrifices, they believe, justify some form of compensation. The problem is that the material sacrifices missionaries make (unlike the sacrifices in the area of family relationships) are not necessarily seen by the local community. Furthermore, the Bible does not speak about any earthly/material compensation for sacrifices Christians make. However, what the Bible speaks about are Christian workers who are aware of their privileged position and are willing to waive privileges or rights for the sake of their ministry and the gospel

Finally, it is important to note that the biblical teaching challenges not only missionaries who work cross-culturally abroad but also economically privileged indigenous Christians who seek to reach out to those who belong to the poorer segments in their society. The fact that the wealthy missionary is a fellow countryman or woman does not remove the stumbling block that their affluence presents. What Ashley Barker writes about Thailand resonates with the situation in southern African

32 Levera Levi, *Together in Christ: Form I: Pupil's Book* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publisher, 2005), 168.

33 Jim Harries, “The Place of Money in Mission between Africa and the Rest: A Personal Theological Narrative,” in *Wealth, Health and Hope in African Christian Religion: The Search for Abundant Life*, ed. Stan Chu Ilo (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 189.

countries where well-to-do Christians from large urban churches organise mission trips to deprived rural communities: “The lifestyle challenges raised by mission in slums are not issues only for Western missionaries in the developing world. The Thai Christian community in Bangkok, for example, is predominantly wealthy, and so the gap between those living in Klong Toey slum and most Christians in Bangkok can be acute. It’s one thing, for example, for a Thai Christian to share a Christmas message and then drive back home to a mansion. It is quite another to consider how the life and teachings of Jesus who was born in Nazareth relate to the lifestyle of those both sharing and receiving the Christmas story. The incongruence between medium and message may be a major barrier to the transformation of slums in Bangkok.”³⁴

RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES: THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

There are only three times in the New Testament where we are told that the apostle Paul demanded his rights. In Acts 25:11 we read that Paul made use of his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to be tried by the emperor in Rome. Paul was innocent. Neither the political nor the religious charges against him were justified.³⁵ When Festus, the Roman governor, suggested that he could be tried in Jerusalem the apostle feared that he would not get a fair trial there. Luke notes that Festus wished “to do the Jews a favour” by making this suggestion.³⁶ The governor might either appoint members of the Sanhedrin as his counsellors in Paul’s case or hand him over to a Jewish court to deal with the religious charges, while he himself would deal with the political charges against

34 Ashley Barker, “Enfleshing Hope: Incarnational Approaches to Emulate,” in *River of God: Introduction to World Missions*, ed. by Douglas D. Priest and Stephen E. Burris (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 34-35.

35 Acts 25:8.

36 Acts 25:9.

the apostle.³⁷ In any way, it seems that Paul felt that the Jewish capital was too dangerous for him.³⁸ If he wanted to have a chance of fair treatment he had to escape from his own people and their leadership,³⁹ and so he was left with no option but to say to Festus: “I appeal to Caesar”. Derl Keefer suggests that Paul’s decision should be seen in the light of his desire to spread the good news of Jesus. He writes: “Even in this situation, before we jump to criticize him for demanding his right as a Roman citizen, we must realize that this appeal only served to fulfill his desire to take the gospel to Rome. Although it was not in the way that he envisioned, demanding his right took him to Rome where he was able to save many to The Way.”⁴⁰ In other words, appealing to the emperor was the only way that Paul could be obedient to his apostolic calling, which included witnessing to Jesus in the capital of the Roman Empire.⁴¹

We can see the same apostolic motivation in Paul when he reminds his opponents of his Roman citizenship in Acts 16:37 and Acts 22:25. In Acts 16:37 he mentions his citizenship and demands a public apology for the sake of the church and its mission. I. Howard Marshall points out that leaving Philippi the way the magistrates had suggested “could have set a dangerous precedent for the future treatment of missionaries and also could have left the Christians in Philippi exposed to the arbitrary treatment from the magistrates.”⁴² Divulging his status as a Roman citizen in Acts 22:25 saved Paul from an extreme form of torture and enabled him to testify about Jesus in Jerusalem and ultimately in Rome. Thus, Luke reports that Jesus appeared to Paul shortly after saying to him: “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you

37 Cf. William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), 238; John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 366; David J. Williams, *Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 408.

38 Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 238.

39 Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 2003), 335.

40 Derl G. Keefer, *The Wesleyan Preaching Resource, Volume Two* (Lima: CCS Publishing, 2002), 77.

41 Cf. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 335.

42 I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 274.

must also testify in Rome.”⁴³

While Paul makes use of his right as a Roman citizen in these cases for the sake of the Gospel, he encourages the relinquishing of personal rights throughout his letters for the same purpose.⁴⁴ In his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9, for example, the apostle Paul discusses the rights of full-time Christian workers. These rights include the right to be married and the right to receive hospitality.⁴⁵ However, there is one right that Paul expounds on: the right of the Christian worker to be sufficiently supported for his ministry. Paul writes in verses 13 to 14: “Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” Paul reminds the church in Corinth that they have a God-given responsibility to support their gospel workers in material terms. This is the church’s responsibility towards all workers including the apostle himself who started the work in Corinth. “If we have sown spiritual seed among you”, Paul asks, “is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more?”⁴⁶ Paul points out to the Corinthians that they are the fruit of his ministry. He is their spiritual father. Together with Barnabas, Paul was instrumental in the Corinthians coming to faith in Christ. Therefore, they have an obligation to support him. John Phillips comments: “He was an apostle and had been ordained an apostle by the Lord Himself. He was a missionary and his success as a missionary was evident everywhere he went. He had thrown himself into the work [...] If anyone had a right to be financially supported by the Lord’s people, he did. The Corinthians, especially, since they were part of his success and proof of his gifts and fruit of his unwearying labors, ought to acknowledge his claim. If

43 Acts 23:11.

44 Keefer, *The Wesleyan Preaching Resource*, 77.

45 Corinthians 9:4.

46 Corinthians 9:11-12.

anyone had the right to financial support, he did.”⁴⁷

At the same time, Paul stresses that he did not make use of this apostolic right.⁴⁸ As an apostle of Christ, he was obliged to preach the gospel. On the matter of preaching, he had no choice. He had to do it.⁴⁹ “He did have a choice, however, regarding whether or not to receive pay, and for the sake of the gospel he offered it free of charge.”⁵⁰ Paul knew if he insisted on his right of financial support, it would become a hindrance to the work of the gospel in Corinth. He may have been aware of people in the congregation who “had some reasons to doubt the sincerity of someone who received income from preaching and teaching.”⁵¹ In other words, Paul relinquished his right because he did not want to give anyone the chance to claim that he was preaching the gospel for the wrong motives, i.e. for his material gain, which ultimately would have discredited his ministry and the gospel message.⁵²

Paul, by waiving his rights as an apostle for the sake of his mission, followed the example of Jesus about whom he wrote in his letter to the church in Philippi: “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage [...].”⁵³ Put differently, when the pre-existent Son of God became a human being he renounced any divine privilege. Jesus gave up his right to his heavenly glory, riches and power.⁵⁴ He humbled himself to fulfil his mission. Jesus did not use his authority to get his way or to make life easier for himself. Neither did he resist when they came first to arrest and then to kill him. No, Jesus used his power only for others: he raised the dead, he healed

47 John Phillips, *Exploring 1 Corinthians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 190.

48 1 Corinthians 9:12.

49 1 Corinthians 9:16.

50 Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 216.

51 Knofel Staton, *First Corinthians* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 173.

52 Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 422-23.

53 Philippians 2:6.

54 Cf. William Hendriksen, *Philippians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 107-08.

the sick and he fed the hungry. His service culminated in his death on a cross where he died as a ransom for many. Ian Coffey comments: "He did not stop being God in order to be a servant but he demonstrated his very God-ness as a slave. He chose to humble himself as a man even to the humiliating and painful death on a cross. This was obedience, humility and unselfishness at its very limits."⁵⁵

NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

There are certainly no simple solutions to the challenge of missionary affluence. One can only agree with Bonk who wrote over thirty years ago: "Lifestyle habits and expectations are not only deeply rooted culturally and psychologically but institutionalized in the sending agencies and in on-the-field structures of *modus operandi*."⁵⁶ To tackle the problem Bonk made some practical suggestions. Thus, he argued that missionary candidates should read the biographies of missionaries like Hudson Taylor or James Gilmour, while those involved in the training of missionaries "would do well themselves to model simplicity and contentedness in their personal lifestyles and ambitions."⁵⁷ In addition, Bonk suggests that mission studies curricula should include the "scriptural teaching regarding the stewardship of money and possessions."⁵⁸ A simple, sensitive missionary lifestyle, that does not stress the greater resources they often have,⁵⁹ is also promoted by Richard Lewis who writes the following about his time in rural Kenya: "[...] I ate what the Kenyans ate and slept where they slept. I did not build a two-story block building that looked like a Mogul castle on the hill. The Pokot and Turkana people knew I had money, (their view was that all people from America are rich), but I was sensitive not

55 Ian Coffey, *Philippians: Crossway Bible Guide: Free To Be God's People* (Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1994), 55.

56 Bonk, "Affluence".

57 Bonk, "Affluence".

58 Bonk, "Affluence".

59 See Titus Leonard Presler, *Horizons of Mission* (Cambridge: Cowley, 2001), 194.

to flaunt my wealth. I usually wore the same shirt and trousers and one change of clothes, which is one extra pair than most of them had. I was careful that my riches did not detract from my love for them while at the same time not creating stress in my own life. Missionaries who are obsessed with having what they have in the States are playing a losing game, and eventually will become dissatisfied and go home.”⁶⁰

In more general terms, Akrong pleads for a radical paradigm shift. Churches from the northern hemisphere, he argues, need to adopt a new paradigm of mission “in which there are no sending nor receiving churches but rather the common sharing of experience, knowledge, insights and available resources at the service of the transforming mission of God in Christ.”⁶¹ According to Akrong, such a new understanding of partnership will save the church from its entanglement in the global divide between the poor South and the wealthy North.⁶²

As we have already seen earlier there is much that today’s missionaries can learn from Jesus and the apostle Paul. Like Paul, missionaries need to be willing not to insist on their rights if doing so would hinder their ministry and the spread of the gospel. They need to be willing not to insist on their privileges if doing so would communicate an attitude of material superiority to the local people they serve. At the same time, it is not helpful if missionaries send themselves on a constant guilt trip.⁶³ Missionaries “need to accept that missionary lifestyles will vary as widely as their contexts.”⁶⁴ According to Phil Parshall, their audience is crucial. He notes: “Who is our target audience? If it is the wealthy, then lifestyle compatibility with them pretty well undercuts this as a problem. But a ministry to the poor exacerbates the complexity of the identification

60 Richard G. Lewis, *The Journey of a Post-Modern Missionary: Finding One’s Niche in Cross-cultural Ministry* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2006), 107.

61 Akrong, “Deconstructing Colonial Mission,” 74.

62 Akrong, “Deconstructing Colonial Mission,” 74-75.

63 Christine Jeske, “Lifestyle Choices in Missions: What to Carry/What to Leave Behind,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2012). <https://missionexus.org/lifestyle-choices-in-missions-what-to-carry-what-to-leave-behind/>

64 Jeske, “Lifestyle Choices in Missions.”

process. It seems prudent to me to enter one's ministry area at as low a financial profile as possible. Then, as necessary, move upward. Those who come in at a higher level seldom move downward. But emotional stability and physical well-being are of utmost importance. I have known missionaries who have held tenaciously to extreme simplicity only to be forced to return home shattered in mind and body. Such a scenario profits no one."⁶⁵

Which rights missionaries relinquish depends on their circumstances. For some, this might mean that they choose to live in a two-bedroom flat though their mission organisation's accommodation policy allows them to rent a three-bedroom house. For others, it might mean buying a used car or sending their children to a state school though there is sufficient money in their budget for a brand-new vehicle or private schooling. To decide which lifestyle choice to make missionaries need, as Christine Jeske writes, "to ask the right questions and accept God's answers."⁶⁶ Among these questions are (a) What facilitates the work missionaries are called to do? (b) How do indigenous people expect missionaries to live? and (c) Are missionaries taking resources away from indigenous people?⁶⁷ Jeske's comments on the last question are worth quoting: "In a world where materialism often rules, we must remember that not everything we can have is something we should have. This challenge presents itself in many forms. While working at a South African seminary, our family was offered one of the largest apartments on campus free of charge. Was accepting this taking away from someone else, or was it a gift kindly given to us? In many cases, families will honor guests with the best cut of meat or their single egg, while their own children watch in hunger. In these situations, we need constant sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's stirrings in order to give honor and respect to the giver. Sometimes, serving others

65 Phil Parshall, "Missions and Money," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 484-85.

66 Jeske, "Lifestyle Choices in Missions."

67 Jeske, "Lifestyle Choices in Missions."

works in reverse of what we expect. After I made the choice to take my daughter to a public South African hospital, a friend suggested that since public hospitals were strapped for resources, we should go elsewhere. Was our place in the hospital taking away resources from someone else? Was our attempt at solidarity more of a burden than a witness? [...] Whatever the choices we make about purchases, homes, and housekeepers, we need to walk in the freedom and grace of Christ, trusting the Holy Spirit's convictions and promptings without judgment or jealousy toward others."⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

Most Western missionaries serving in middle and low-income countries in Africa, Latin America or other parts of the world face the challenge of missionary affluence. Their financial means tend to be much higher than the means of those they have come to serve. This often results in lifestyles that are detached from the majority population in their host countries, which again harms their ministries. There are multiple reasons for missionary affluence. Among these reasons are an attitude of entitlement and a culture of indulgence. Some authors, therefore, call missionaries to lead more culturally sensitive, simple lifestyles. Others recommend that they need to rely more on God's Holy Spirit in their decision-making. Others again call for new models of partnership with local churches and Christian organisations in the missionaries' countries of service. While all these suggestions are helpful, it is crucial that missionaries are willing to learn from the missionary role models par excellence we find in the New Testament: Jesus and the apostle Paul who both relinquished rights and privileges and made extraordinary sacrifices for the sake of their missions.

68 Jeske, "Lifestyle Choices in Missions."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akrong, A., "Deconstructing Colonial Mission: New Missiological Perspectives in African Christianity", in *Christianity in Africa and the Africa Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, eds. A. Adogame, R. Gerloff and K. Hock (London: Continuum, 2011)
- Alawode, A.O., "The Importance and Challenges of Money in Christian Missions", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76/1 (2020), <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v76n1/46.pdf>.
- Badriaki, M.B., *When Helping Works: Alleviating Fear and Pain in Global Missions* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- Barker, A., "Enfleshing Hope: Incarnational Approaches to Emulate", in *River of God: Introduction to World Missions*, eds. D.D. Priest and S.E. Burris (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012)
- Bird, R.M. and Ebel, R.D., "Subsidiarity, Solidarity and Asymmetry: Aspects of the Problem", in *Fiscal Fragmentation in Decentralized Countries*, eds. R.M. Bird and R.D. Ebel (Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, 2007)
- Bonk, J.J., DiStefano, M.G., Jennings, J.N., Kim, J. and Lee, J.H. (eds.), *The Reality of Money and Missions: Global Challenges and Case Studies* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2022)
- Bonk, J.J., *Missions and Money* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006)
- Bonk, J.J., "Mission and the Problem of Affluence", in *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, eds. J.M. Phillips and R.T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993)
- Bonk, J., "Affluence: The Achilles' Heel of Missions", *EMIS* (1985), <https://missionexus.org/affluence-the-achilles-heel-of-missions/>.
- Caldwell, L.W., "Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem", *Journal of Asian Mission* 11 (2009):21-30.
- Coffey, I., *Philippians: Crossway Bible Guide: Free To Be God's People* (Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1994)
- Cueva, S., *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension: An Analysis of the*

Relationships in Mission within the Evangelical Movement with Special Reference to Peru and Britain between 1987 and 2006 (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2015)

Denyer, T.W., *Decolonizing Mission Partnerships: Evolving Collaboration between United Methodists in North Katanga and the United States of America* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2020)

Escobar, S., *A Time for Mission: The Challenge for Global Christianity* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2003)

Franklin, K. and Niemandt, N., "Funding God's Mission: Towards a Missiology of Generosity", *Missionalia* 43/3 (2015):384-409.

Garland, D.E., *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003)

Gaventa, B.R., *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 2003)

Georges, J., "A Missionary Ethic of Economic Affluence", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 45/3 (2009), <https://missionexus.org/a-missionary-ethic-of-economic-affluence>.

Harries, J., "The Place of Money in Mission between Africa and the Rest: A Personal Theological Narrative", in *Wealth, Health and Hope in African Christian Religion: The Search for Abundant Life*, ed. S.C. Ilo (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017)

Harries, J., *Theory to Practice in Vulnerable Mission: An Academic Appraisal* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012)

Hendriksen, W., *Philippians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977)

Hofstede Insights, "Country Comparison", www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison.

Hyter, Y.D. and Salas-Provence, M.B., *Culturally Responsive Practices in Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences* (San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2019)

Jeske, C., "Lifestyle Choices in Missions: What to Carry/What to Leave Behind", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 48/2 (2012), <https://missionexus.org/lifestyle-choices-in-missions-what-to-carry-what-to-leave-behind/>.

Kapolyo, J.M., *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes* (Leicester: IVP, 2005)

- Keefer, D.G., *The Wesleyan Preaching Resource*, Volume 2 (Lima: CCS Publishing, 2002)
- Kighoma, E.K., "Rethinking Mission, Missions and Money: A Focus on the Baptist Church in Central Africa", *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75/4 (2019)
- Lederleitner, M.T., *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010)
- Levi, L., *Together in Christ: Form I: Pupil's Book* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publisher, 2005)
- Lewis, R.G., *The Journey of a Post-Modern Missionary: Finding One's Niche in Cross-cultural Ministry* (-: Xulon Press, 2006)
- Longkumer, A., Sørensen, J.S. and Biehl, M., *Mission and Power: History, Relevance and Perils* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016)
- Maluleke, T.S., "Christian Mission in a World Under the Grip of an Unholy Trinity: Inequality, Poverty and Unemployment", in *Mission and Money: Christian Mission in the Context of Global Inequalities*, eds. M.-A. Auvinen-Pöntinen and J.A. Jørgensen (Leiden: Brill, 2016)
- Marshall, I.H., *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester: IVP, 1999)
- Moreau, A.S., "Missionary Affluence", in *Evangelical Dictionary of Missions*, ed. A.S. Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000)
- Neil, W., *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981)
- Ott, C., "Missions and Money: Revisiting Pauline Practice and Principles", *Evangelical Review of Theology* 42 (2018):4-20.
- Parshall, P., "Missions and Money", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. R.D. Winter and S.C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009)
- Parshall, P., *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003)
- Phillips, J., *Exploring 1 Corinthians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002)
- Presler, T.L., *Horizons of Mission* (Cambridge: Cowley, 2001)

- Rowell, J., *To Give Or Not To Give? Rethinking Dependency, Restoring Generosity, and Redefining Sustainability* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006)
- Samovar, L.A., Porter, R.E., McDaniel, E.R. and Roy, C.S., *Communication Between Cultures* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2013)
- Smith Kipp, R., *The Early Years of Dutch Colonial Mission* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990)
- Staton, K., *First Corinthians* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000)
- Stott, J.R.W., *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 2000)
- Sweeney, M.L., “The Pauline Collection, Church Partnerships, and the Mission of the Church in the 21st Century”, *Missiology* 48/2 (2020):142-153.
- Taylor, M., *1 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014)
- Williams, D.J., *Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999)

Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

Review Articles





Review Article

From Marginal to Central: Carl Trueman's Analysis of Self and Society

William B. Bowes



Carl Trueman,
*The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia,
Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution.*
Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. pp. 432. ISBN 978-1-4335-5633-3.

Carl Trueman,
*Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined
Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution.* Wheaton, IL:
Crossway, 2022. pp. 208. ISBN 978-1-4335-7930-1.

KEYWORDS:

| Culture | Worldview | Philosophy |
| Post-Christian | Individualism | Sexuality |

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern Western culture has seen radical change in recent years, from technological advancement to the complete transformation of what sexual ethics are considered acceptable. Some of these shifts can seem to have materialized overnight, leaving many to wonder how society arrived at this point, where things will go in the future, and what these changes mean for Christians whose resistance of the cultural tide has often been ineffective. Carl Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, and its more recent, abridged, popular-level revision, *Strange New World*, seeks to address these questions, showing that such changes have predictable and recognizable trajectories that can be linked to broader, long-term shifts in how people have understood the concept of selfhood. By "self," Trueman means "where the 'real me' is to be found, how that shapes my view of life, and in what the fulfillment or happiness of that 'real me' consists" (*Strange*, pp. 21-22). Consequently, the core of his approach is that social and cultural attitudes toward behaviors and mores have followed deeper shifts in how personal identity is understood. This review will primarily evaluate the first and longer work (*Triumph*), and will periodically reference the second, shorter work (*Strange*) as necessary.

From the initial pages (*Triumph*, pp. 19-31), Trueman notes that the impetus for the book came from a desire to understand the modern acceptance of transgender identities, when previous generations would not have considered such expressions acceptable. One of Trueman's core ideas is that the normalization of a wider variety of sexual and gender expression "cannot be properly understood until it is set within the context of a much broader transformation in how society understands the nature of human selfhood ... the sexual revolution is simply one manifestation of the larger revolution of the self that has taken place in the West. And it is only as we come to understand that wider context that we can truly understand the dynamics of the sexual politics that now dominate our culture" (*Triumph*, p. 20). The "sexual revolution" that Trueman mentions

refers to the steady movement and eventual dissolution of traditional sexual mores and boundaries from the 1960s until today, where the mores of previous generations are not only transgressed but are characterized as stupid and dangerous. Trueman's analysis proceeds in four parts, delineated below.

2. PART ONE: ARCHITECTURE OF THE REVOLUTION

Trueman begins the first major part of his work (*Triumph*, pp. 35-102; *Strange*, pp. 19-30) with an exploration of the idea of selfhood, and how notions of identity have changed in Western culture. The self is Trueman's starting point in both books because the rest of his conclusions are derived from it. The main idea is that the modern sexual revolution can only be contextualized as a part of a series of gradual changes in how sexuality is connected to modern notions of personhood and identity. The primary way he analyzes these shifts is by examining perspectives on selfhood held by some of the most influential thinkers and shapers of Western culture since the Enlightenment. From the earliest pages, Trueman relies heavily on the language and observations of the philosopher Charles Taylor, specifically Taylor's ideas of the "social imaginary" (the way people think about the world, imagine it to be, and act intuitively and unconsciously in relation to it, making up a cultural framework for what ideas are acceptable), the cultural movement from "mimesis" to "poiesis" (the former being a view that sees the world as having a given order and meaning for humans to discover, and the latter as seeing the world as raw material out of which meaning and purpose can be crafted by the individual), and "expressive individualism" (a label for Western culture which refers to how people find meaning by giving expression to our own feelings and desires in the quest for authenticity) (*Triumph*, pp. 36-42).

In addition to his frequent references to Taylor, Trueman's analysis borrows significantly from the work of the sociologist Philip Rieff and the

ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre. Throughout his work, Trueman applies Rieff's work to his own argument, specifically to his contention that a culture's abandonment of a sacred order leaves them without a foundation and ensures that previously accepted hierarchies of authority will collapse. The collapse of these authorities leads to a change in fundamental ideas like the nature of personhood (*Triumph*, pp. 42-50). Trueman likewise applies MacIntyre's contention that the social assumptions of Western culture are based on "emotivism" (the idea that all judgments are only expressions of preference, attitude, or feeling) in order to explain how modern discourse about moral concepts and moralistic language is filtered through the broader lens of expressive individualism (*Triumph*, pp. 82-88). Trueman's point in synthesizing the ideas of these thinkers is to establish a basis for understanding how contemporary discourse about ethics has become increasingly subjective due to inner happiness and psychological well-being now being the core values of the modern age.

3. PART TWO: FOUNDATIONS OF THE REVOLUTION

The next part of Trueman's work begins a more thorough exploration of what he sees as the main roots of contemporary views of personal identity and sexual expression (*Triumph*, pp. 105-197). For Trueman, the impetus of modern cultural ideas about personal authenticity and self-expression are most clearly traceable to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who considered the individual to be the most authentic version of themselves before being shaped and corrupted by social influences. Authenticity here refers to one's expression of their own self-determined way of life; an authentic person to Rousseau would be one who can think and act without the imposition of external social boundaries or moral guidelines. In Trueman's words, authenticity is achieved by "acting outwardly in accordance with one's inward feelings" (*Strange*, p. 23).

Trueman sees a movement from Rousseau toward an exclusively internal locus of legitimation for an authentic identity, and associates Rousseau with the idea that ethical decisions should primarily arise from sentiment (*Triumph*, pp. 116-124). From Rousseau, Trueman highlights several other important thinkers who have contributed to cultural change over time, first highlighting the Romantic-era poets William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, and William Blake (*Triumph*, pp. 129-161). What is important about the Romantics is their emphasis on the power of aesthetics to unlock the truths of human nature and the fullness of human experience in a way that reason or religion could not. Trueman notes that Percy Shelley was the most radical and perhaps the most important of Romantics who can be associated with the idea that institutional religion is oppressive, and that sexual liberation is the key to political liberation (*Triumph*, pp. 148-158).

Following the Romantics, Trueman moves to the turn of the twentieth century and analyzes the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin (*Triumph*, pp. 163-192). For Trueman, these three made possible a new way of imagining human nature, rejecting the prior understanding of human nature with a fixed identity, granting plausibility to the idea that humans are “plastic” and have no intrinsic identity or essence. Nietzsche critiqued the idea that the universe has an objective, discoverable meaning or that a moral law exists within nature, and after declaring the death of God, Nietzsche proposed the humans must create themselves and their own world, crafting meaning based on the fulfillment of personal satisfaction without recourse to objective or transcendent justification (*Triumph*, pp. 171-176). Marx likewise minimized an objective or transcendent reference point for human nature, conceptualizing persons as caught in a fundamentally material struggle against oppression (*Triumph*, pp. 176-184). Lastly, Darwin provided a framework in which atheistic materialism could be considered viable, and in proposing natural selection he excluded the idea that there is anything special or purposeful about human existence (*Triumph*, pp. 185-188).

4. PART THREE: SEXUALIZATION OF THE REVOLUTION

In his final exploration of important thought and figures in the twentieth century (*Triumph*, pp. 201-268), Trueman spends a significant amount of time analyzing Sigmund Freud. Trueman considers Freud the key figure in his narrative, largely because of Freud's proposition that sex and sexuality lies at the core of what is most important about human development and experience. For Trueman, the discrediting of most of Freud's ideas is irrelevant; what matters is that Freud "provided a compelling rationale for putting sex and sexual expression at the center of human existence and all its related cultural and political components in a way that now grips the social imaginary of the Western world" (*Triumph*, p. 204). In Freud we see the fullest expression of the idea that sexual fulfillment is what it means to be human, which is increasingly an axiomatic assumption in twenty-first century Western culture. For Trueman, Freud represents a third movement in the development of modern thought and culture, with the first movement represented by Rousseau, the second by the Romantics, and Freud as capstone (*Triumph*, p. 203; 265-268).

Following his discussion of Freud, Trueman explores the rise of modern critical theory and the more widespread application of ideas that were only nascent in the work of Marx, namely that society oppresses the individual and that economic and social relationships must be radically reorganized and redefined for individuals to flourish (*Triumph*, pp. 226-264). Through the lens of critical theory, psychological categories dominate discussions, and Marx's language of oppression is applied to the non-recognition of one's expressed identity. As part of the move toward the turn of twentieth century, Trueman also credits the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir with being a precursor to modern perspectives of transgender identities, as she asserted that to feel like a woman (or to experience oneself emotionally or psychologically as

such) is to be a woman (*Triumph*, pp. 259-260). Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir repudiated the idea that reproduction is essential to female identity and that both the effort to control this, and the limitations of the family structure, were inherently oppressive to women (*Triumph*, p. 263). Trueman connects these developments with the move from expressive individualism to sexually expressive individualism, where freedom is inseparable from sexual liberation and true happiness and fulfillment is to be affirmed in that liberation (*Triumph*, pp. 254-264).

5. PART FOUR: TRIUMPHS OF THE REVOLUTION

Trueman concludes with an exploration of three ways that the sexual revolution has “triumphed” (*Triumph*, pp. 271-382). He begins noting how the recent proliferation and widespread acceptance of pornography has also signified a shift in ideas about sexual expression from the margins of society to the center of the public sphere (*Triumph*, pp. 280-285). In the normalization of pornography, sex is depersonalized, disconnected from relationship, and becomes about personal satisfaction without responsibility. Trueman contends that the end result of pornography’s desacralization of sex is that people become devalued and debased, and the increasing ubiquity of pornography represents for Trueman the “triumph of the erotic” (*Triumph*, pp. 297-300). Second, Trueman argues that changes in public attitudes toward abortion and marriage serve as evidence of the “psychologizing” of the person, and represent the “triumph of the therapeutic” (*Triumph*, pp. 301-336). Third, Trueman argues that the psychological subjectivizing of the self leads natural to modern views of transgender identities. He calls this “the triumph of the T,” which is made possible when individual self-consciousness has no fixed or objective reference point and thus there is no hierarchy or authority by which one should retain old categories like the gender binary

(*Triumph*, pp. 340-378).

The final pages of both books provide (albeit briefly) some suggestions for ways that believers can move forward and respond in a fruitful and positive way to the manifold changes in how society understands what it means to be a self (*Triumph*, pp. 383-407; *Strange*, pp. 169-185). First, he suggests that the church should reflect on the connection between aesthetics, beliefs, and practices, understanding the (undervalued) importance of aesthetics to the communication of the Christian message. Second, he argues that there should not be a distancing from historic, orthodox doctrine but instead the church should refocus on what it means to live as a community in such an individualistic milieu. Lastly, he argues that the church needs to recover “both natural law and a high view of the physical body” (*Triumph*, p. 406). In *Strange New World*, he reiterates these same suggestions but focuses slightly more pointedly on the need for the church to repent from compromising the gospel and embracing the spirit of the age, which should lead to a position of humility toward those with whom we disagree.

6. MERITS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF TRUEMAN’S APPROACH

Trueman’s work is timely and thoughtful. His analysis is meticulous and well-researched, and it bears the marks of many years of engaging with these issues at a profound level. A complaint that readers may have while reading *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is that it is highly philosophical and, at times, quite academic, and can therefore be difficult for lay readers to navigate. However, in writing *Strange New World*, Trueman has answered this problem and provided a more accessible presentation of the same core ideas. If Christians are to understand how to respond appropriately and wisely to the current cultural moment, it must begin with coming to an understanding of what has shaped and led to the current cultural moment. Inasmuch as Trueman seeks to provide a

lens through which leaders can come to that understanding, he succeeds.

In most cases, Trueman's tone is refreshingly neutral, and his writing does not carry a sense of moral indignation or self-righteousness. However, there are occasional places in both books where his language sounded somewhat acerbic or polemical, even while he states that he intends to avoid writing that way. For example, in one instance he characterizes a particular perspective on pornography as "sheer stupidity" (*Triumph*, p. 286), and described modern society in the language of "crudity" and "vulgarity" (*Triumph*, p. 300). Even so, his overwhelming efforts at objectivity in nearly every other instance are commendable, and his treatment of even the most sensitive and controversial issues tends to be gentle. Additionally, some of Trueman's genealogical connections (like his presumption of a link between the Romantic poets and Friedrich Nietzsche, for example) may have plausibility but they are disputable, nonetheless. One can find connections between the thoughts of these figures and contemporary movements, but it is difficult to be sure if someone like Percy Shelley was really as influential as Freud or Darwin.

Trueman's work could be improved with a lengthier or broader exploration of possible responses or actual next steps for Christians and churches, rather than the minimal words of advice at the end of each book. The lack of focus on application or future guidance is not necessarily inconsistent with Trueman's purpose in writing since he seeks to offer something of a prolegomenon to further discussion more than a guide for future action. However, since he does intentionally include a series of suggestions at the end, readers may be left wishing they had more clarity on what to do next, even if they (almost certainly) better understand their cultural moment. Regardless, it is honestly difficult to find many faults with his work; Trueman has done the church and academy a service in providing these tools and it is difficult to imagine any readers, irrespective of belief or background, who would not benefit through engaging with either of these books. The work is obviously limited in that it only engages with developments of Western culture and does not consider non-Western

views of identity and sexuality. However, Trueman's purpose in writing necessarily implies and requires this limitation. In terms of the best audience for each work, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is best suited for graduate students or highly educated laymen, while *Strange New World* would be most appropriate for the general layman or also for church group settings, as it includes discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIANITY IN AN ERA OF EXPRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

Any astute observer of society and culture will see that the West has reached a tipping point. If expressive individualism is the cultural tide that Christians must navigate, then evangelism, discipleship, and the experience of community will need to adapt. It would be naïve to expect that there will be a swing of the cultural pendulum to a position more favorable to Christianity or to its ideas of selfhood and sexuality. Instead, it seems that the best use of Trueman's work is as a basis or foundation for believers to develop a coherent and thoughtful roadmap for maintaining a faithful presence within this culture, rather than to separate from society or to be inimical toward culture. The clearest places for a faithful witness are the areas of greatest weakness for expressive individualism. As Trueman hinted at, but did not fully develop, one of the most obvious areas is community. Modern culture breeds division, loneliness, and despair. Therefore, one of the clearest steps forward will be a vision for a unified and loving community that walks together in a common mission, which may be the most effective evangelistic tool of the twenty-first century church.

Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics
Reviews





Book Reviews

George A. Yancey &
Ashlee Quosigk.
*One Faith No Longer:
The Transformation of Christianity
in Red and Blue America*
New York University Press. 2021.
\$30.00 ISBN 978-1-4798-0868-7.

Reviewed by, Luca Azuma. M.A.,
California State University, Fullerton

One Faith No Longer seeks to understand the present Christian schism between progressive and conservative Christians by examining how these groups build their “social identities,” with special emphasis on whom each respective group purposefully avoids or embraces. These loci of focus exist to address an overarching issue the authors see in circles of research: that Christians are often lumped together as a monolithic social group, which fails to account for the diversity which exists within American



Christianity. The authors question whether Christianity as it has developed in the United States any longer represents a single faith, or if it has split into two major categories with distinguishable aims and means of faith expression. To accomplish this objective, Yancey and Quosigk follow a structural outline typical of books from the field of sociology, laying out a history of the issue at hand, describing methodology, then parsing through results. This review starts in the introduction because readers might overlook an important definition if they are not on alert from the get-go. The authors' definition of traditional Christianity is found in footnote one of page two (leading to page 245) defining traditional/conservative Christians as those with "views broadly aligning with those of Jonathan Edwards." With this, the authors focus in the first chapter on an overview of the modernist-fundamentalist divide and the extent (or not) to which fundamentalists have historically been active in politics in the United States.

The authors employ a mixed methods analysis to delve into the ideological/political differences between conservative and progressive Christians. In chapter two, the authors use surveys and quantitative methodology to identify how conservative and progressive Christians "see" each other. The reactions and thoughts of different Christian groups (one progressive and one conservative congregation and a smattering of leaders representing each side) regarding how members of each group defined members and non-members. In other words, members of different groups were asked to define their "in-group" and "out-group." Amongst the findings, Yancey and Quosigk observed that progressive Christians show "powerful antipathy" towards conservative Christians while being more neutral towards atheists and Muslims.¹

1 Readers should exercise patience in asking who the survey participants were, as the authors reveal more about the survey-takers throughout the book. Findings are presented beginning on page 42.

Chapter three discusses the political preferences present amongst conservative and progressive Christians. The authors reviewed blog/website articles that discussed political issues and employed qualitative methods to identify how conservative and progressive Christians framed and argued political issues. The impetus for studying these persons was to glean their argumentation strategies directed at their peers to study intra-Christian dialogue to reveal what values each appeal to in convincing like-minded voters. The case-studies are on progressive Christians who oppose abortion, and conservative Christians who support immigration reform. Of the former, Yancey and Quosigk find that progressive Christians who oppose abortion typically will not advocate for legal reform, preferring to keep it as a personal stance rather than one imposed upon the broader society. On the latter, Yancey and Quosigk detail the theological standard by which they observe conservative Christians trying to sway each other on immigration policy.

Chapter four begins by insightfully pointing out the under-studied phenomenon of present conservative-progressive splits being starker even within denominations than inter-denominational conflict that historically marked divisions within American Christianity.² The authors then move into an explanation of the qualitative methodology (i.e.—an open-format interview with congregation members and the leaders of the earlier survey) which serves as the basis for the presented findings in chapters five through seven. This chapter outlines preliminary findings before the subsequent, thematically-oriented chapters, and the method will serve researchers well if they are interested in higher themes expressed by the book but do not have time to expend looking more closely at the findings.

Hence, chapter five sets out (as will the following two chapters) to prove its title—namely, that conservative Christians are more

2 Yancey and Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer*, 79-81.

“theologically rigid” than progressive Christians, but are more “socially diverse.” Yancey and Quosigk bring up the “In Christ Alone” hymnal word-change controversy to great effect, and skillfully employ interview questions surrounding depravity, damnation, and the authority of Scripture to assess conservative Christian views on matters that they might not be willing to address directly with someone they do not know.³ Chapter six shows “Progressive Christians as Theologically Flexible and Politically Optimistic” presenting that “many progressives...perceived ‘Christian’ to be a socioreligious category, not a term to describe whether or not one believes in Christ for our forgiveness of sin.”⁴ Chapter seven builds upon the work of chapter six, fleshing out the areas in which the authors see progressive Christianity deviating from historical Christian stances and their voluntary disassociation from theological conservatives.

Chapter eight answers “no,” to the question of whether or not progressive and conservative Christians still belong together. Their argument stems from data they collected indicating two sides beginning to see each other as out-groups, and finding “sufficient differences in [the] core beliefs” which produces “a different ultimate goal for each group.”⁵ The authors liken this split to the emergence of Buddhism from Hinduism, stating, “we are not impressed by arguments that both progressive and conservative Christians intend to serve Christ, if what they mean by serving Christ is tied to dramatically different value systems and ways to answer questions of meaning.”⁶ This leads to a further conclusion of significant interest for scholars of Christianity, that progressive and conservative Christians “cannot be grouped

3 For “In Christ Alone” see 96-97; for interviewing techniques and finding positions on “hardline” aspects of the faith, see 105-107.

4 Ibid., 141.

5 Ibid., 197; 201; 215.

6 Ibid., 204.

together in any meaningful way” and should be treated separately in academic inquiries.⁷

The aforementioned conclusion ruminates upon the future of Christianity in the United States given the divide the authors have identified, and presents musings which scholars will find stirring for their own research. Among these, Yancey and Quosigk question the view of Christians as the majority given their divided state, and ponder the dearth of research on Christians who claim to hold a middle ground between the warring factions.⁸ They also state: “If there is a civil war withing Christianity...it is progressive Christians who understand that fact and have reacted accordingly. They are the ones who are most likely to take the initiative to condemn conservative Christians. They are the ones more isolated from other Christians and thus most likely to direct negative stereotypes toward other Christians. To be sure, critiques of progressive Christianity by conservative Christians exist, but there is not the sense of war against other Christians that is more common among progressive Christians.”⁹ This segment does not provide a complete picture of the rich dialogue and fierce competition between the two sides, and is derived narrowly from the research of this particular study. A more contextualized, less ahistorical approach (which Molly Worthen’s intellectual history provides) quickly reveals, among other events, key flashpoints from Al Mohler’s cleansing of the Southern Baptist Seminary’s theological progressives to the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and the 2000 Baptist and Faith message.¹⁰

These claims also run contradictory to findings in a recent book by

7 Ibid., 205.

8 Ibid., 215-224.

9 Yancey and Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer*, 213.

10 Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, Oxford University Press, 2014, 199-202, 208, 221, 231, 235, 239-240.

fellow sociologist Brad Vermurlen, whose observations in *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle Over American Evangelicalism* may be read as a meta-analysis of the argumentation displayed in *One Faith No Longer*.¹¹ Vermurlen suggests that leaders and intellectuals of conservative theological bent “enact their accumulated symbolic power in the American Evangelical field as part of a ‘classification’ struggle over which Christian leaders (in addition to themselves) ought to be classified or categorized as belonging to [Christianity] at all.”¹² As such, *One Faith No Longer* may best be understood as part of, rather than removed from, this long dialogue over the nature of how Christianity, specifically Evangelicalism, should be defined in the United States.

In closing, there is much in the way of insightful commentary on the current state of Christianity in the United States present in this work, and this book adds valuable statistical dimensions to scholarship on a topic which previously was more observationally and anecdotally driven. Academics and graduate students will find the sections presenting the survey evidence most useful, while other sections have a broader appeal for undergraduate researchers. Most of all, this work does not shy away from the identity question present in contemporary Christianity, boldly asking, “is there something at the core of what this religion is supposed to represent that can unify Christians?” which demands, perhaps more so than ever, a compelling answer.¹³

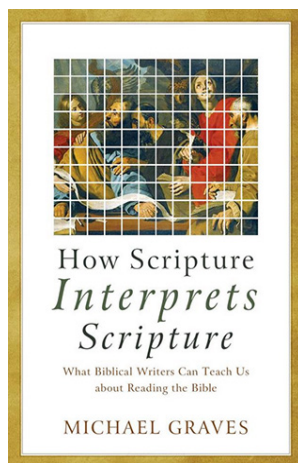
11 Brad Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle Over American Evangelicalism*, Oxford University Press, 2020, 94, 143, 174, 191.

12 Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence*, 191.

13 Yancey and Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer*, 196.

Michael Graves.
*How Scripture Interprets Scripture:
What Biblical Writers Can Teach
Us About Reading the Bible*
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
Academic, 2022.
978-1-5409-6200-3. 240 pages pb.

Reviewed by, Stephen M. Vantassel
Tutor at King's Evangelical
Divinity School



As Armerding Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College, Dr. Graves is no stranger to the field of the interpretation of Scripture. His efforts have included translating Jerome's Hebrew Jeremiah commentary for the Ancient Christian Texts series, as well as early Christian interpretation in *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture: What the Early Church Can Teach Us* (2014). In his latest book, Graves argues "that biblical writers have much to teach us about how we should interpret the bible." (p.177).

Graves uses his splendid introduction to prepare his readers to be receptive to his thesis. Interestingly, he states a profoundly pastoral purpose for learning the internal hermeneutic of the biblical authors, namely, to help us improve our relationship with God, to develop Christian virtues, to make proper decisions, and to show love to our fellow man (p.1). In a time where too many Christians confuse information with godliness, Graves forthrightly states that knowledge of Scripture is to cause behavioral changes. In this regard, one could read this book as a plan to build a bridge over Gotthold Lessing's ugly trench.

To illustrate how the biblical authors interpreted each other, Graves dedicates each of the next five chapters to the following biblical themes: corporate and individual responsibility, insiders and outsiders, marriage-

polygamy-divorce, sacrificial offerings, and afterlife. Clearly, the selection of topics underscores the author's interest in ethics rather than more cerebral topics such as the doctrine of God or eschatology. All five themes are discussed in the following manner. First, Graves reviews the relevant key passages in the Old Testament with due attention to conflicting concepts or ideas. Second, the theme's treatment and development by the Writings or the Prophets is discussed. Graves is careful to not press harmonization of conflicting concepts. He allows tensions to remain. However, he does assume that there is an inner coherence to the text and, therefore, will suggest harmonization when he believes a reasonable solution is available. Third, the summaries are typically provided before the New Testament testimony is taken up. Fourth, how the Apostolic writings appropriated the Old Testament is addressed, noting where the authors emphasized ideas and ignored others. Finally, Graves summarizes key ideas that he believes show an inner unity and reasonable development flowing from the Old Testament to the New.

The final chapter reprises his findings in shortened form, followed by an extended argument for the value of careful observation of the prophetic/apostolic interpretative method. While not providing a detailed exegetical method, Graves does outline a six-step process to guide the interpreter (pp. 177-179). The cornerstone of this method is Graves' assertion that readers interpret passages in accordance with the teachings of Christ and summative passages (p. 178). Graves concludes by arguing that the early Church Fathers employed this internal biblical hermeneutic in their own work. Unsurprisingly, he uses Jerome as an exemplar. Graves, however, does not believe his method perfectly aligns with the practice of the Church Fathers, including Jerome. Rather, he suggests their method substantively aligns with his (p. 186) Could it be that Graves is implicitly encouraging his fellow evangelicals to revisit the writings of the Church Fathers?

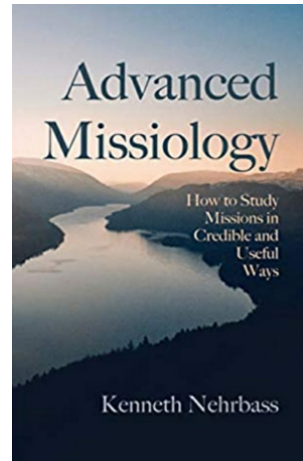
This reviewer's reaction to the book is decidedly conflicted. On the one hand, Graves has provided ample evidence for the internal coherence

within the biblical canon. His use of the biblical data and employment of modest conclusions should help break down barriers amongst those skeptical of a unity within the biblical witness. On the other hand, method-based exegetes will be disappointed by the general nature of his advice for how we can adopt the method. Surely, Graves is correct that to copy the hermeneutics of the biblical writers will require modern readers to become intimately familiar with Scripture even to the point of memorization (p.178). But how is a minister with a Sunday deadline to accomplish this? Could it be that the method must be caught and lived rather than taught as a formula?

Despite the lack of a detailed methodology, readers will benefit from this text. The book's focus on ethics will likely keep the attention of contemporary students looking to find something practical from their theological studies. Faculty will likely favor the flexibility granted by the author's non-dogmatic approach which is more in line with Richard B. Hay's *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* than Walter C. Kaiser Jr.'s *The Promise-Plan of God*. Readers will also appreciate the inclusion of thorough Scripture and topic indexes. While this book will not illuminate the path for copying the bible's internal hermeneutic, it certainly points readers in the right direction to assess biblical literature more thoroughly and deeply.

Kenneth Nehrbass.
*Advanced Missiology:
How to Study Missions in Credible
and Useful Ways*
Cascade Books, an Imprint of
Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2021.
ISBN 978-1-7252-7222-4

Reviewed by Martin Rodriguez, PhD
(Intercultural Studies)
Azusa Pacific University, Assistant
Professor of Practical Theology



Taking as his point of departure Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18–20 to make disciples of all nations, missiologist Kenneth Nehrbass contends that cross-cultural discipleship is both the essence of the practical missionary task and the concern that drives the academic discipline of missiology. Nehrbass has taught missions at Biola University since 2014, and both his teaching and his writing draw deeply on a decade of experience in Bible translation with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Vanuatu, an archipelago country in the South Pacific. *Advanced Missiology* is his third major missiological publication after *Christianity and Animism in Melanesia: Four Approaches to Gospel and Culture* (2012) and *God's Image and Global Cultures: Integrating Faith and Culture in the 21st Century* (2016). In all these writings, Nehrbass argues that missiology should address twenty-first-century realities by generating academically credible theories that are useful for missionary-practitioners. This pragmatic approach to missiology will be familiar to theologically conservative evangelical students seeking to navigate the space between the anti-intellectualism and biblicism of more sectarian evangelicals like John

MacArthur (cf. 241) on one hand and the relativism and religious pluralism of conciliar Christians like John Hicks (cf. 57) on the other. Informed readers seeking a general orientation to Nehrbass' missiology can peruse Nehrbass' sidebar profiles of influential missiologists to compare the author's treatment of John Piper (46), Don Richardson (226), Tom Steffen (92), and Enoch Wan (279) to his treatment of David Bosch (91), Lesslie Newbigin (59), Lamin Sanneh (259), and René Padilla (167).

Advanced Missiology has two major sections: Part One studies disciplines that have informed missiology (chapters 1–7), and Part Two studies “theories” and “models” that have emerged from missiological discourse (chapters 8–11). Using his “missiology is like a river” metaphor, Nehrbass describes Part One as an exploration of the “tributaries” that have fed into missiology, and Part Two as a study of the “distributaries” that have emerged from missiology. Each chapter ends with ideas for further reflection, review questions, and reflection questions that college professors are likely to find particularly helpful.

In Chapter One, Nehrbass promotes an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to missiology as an alternative to Allen Tippet's well known three-fold approach, which focuses on theology, social sciences, and history. The arguments of the opening chapter address students who insist on a static or siloed approach to missiology and its tributary disciplines. Chapter Two advances “systematic missiological theology” as a technique for establishing a biblical basis of missions. This technique “applies a missiological hermeneutic to scriptural themes [or traditional doctrines of systematic theology] to understand an overall approach toward missions” (43). According to Nehrbass, systematic missiological theology offers an alternative both to the proof-texting of evangelical missiologists (who “look for hints of cross-cultural evangelism under every stone in the Old Testament,” p. 37) and to the mission-of-God hermeneutical approach of conciliar missiologists (whose approach “eventually widens the term

mission (without the 's') to mean everything that God wills and does, thus diminishing the aspect of cross-cultural evangelism in missions (with the 's')" p. 37). Chapter Three addresses the tributary of history, outlining a missiological historiography that incorporates six ways to examine missions history from a missiological perspective—namely, by exploring God's guidance in missions, by following the lives of great missionaries, by celebrating legacies of missions organizations, by studying marginalized peoples, and by building missiological theory. Chapter Four examines how missiological anthropology helps exegete cultures to facilitate making disciples across cultures. Chapter Five addresses how intercultural studies is useful to missionaries who are making disciples across cultures. Chapters Six (co-written with Julie Martinez) and Seven (co-authored with Leanne Dzubinski) describe how evangelical missionaries have adopted development theory and educational theory to enhance missionary efforts across cultures.

In Part Two, Nehrbass turns to the "distributaries" (or frameworks and strategies) that have emerged from missiology. Chapter Eight examines the "fuzzy" (204) concept of cross-cultural discipleship—"the process of teaching people to obey all that Jesus commanded" (199) and helping people with "thinking like God does, valuing the things that God does, and treating others like God does" (200). Chapter Eight is a crucial chapter that could usefully have been included earlier in the book. Chapters Nine and Ten are arguably the text's most significant contribution as they provide a brief compendium of popular western protestant missionary strategies over the last century. Nehrbass argues that missiology should be considered a distinct discipline with its own unique and original theories and methods. Chapter Nine introduces and evaluates eight missiological frameworks ("theories") that have been influential among western evangelical missiologists. The chapter explores Andrew Walls' indigenizing principle and pilgrim principle, John Travis' C1-C6 spectrum, Ralph Winter's notion of people groups and his modality/sodality model, Luis Bush's (via Lausanne II, Manila) concept of the 10/40 window, Donald

McGavran's homogeneous unit principle, Kenneth Pike's emic and etic distinction, Paul Hiebert's theory of the flaw of the excluded middle, and Don Richardsons' concept of redemptive analogies. Chapter Ten evaluates frameworks ("models") that have more directly affected the strategies of western evangelical missionaries. Nehrbass cites Henry Venn's three-self model, popular models of contextualization, oral story-telling, David Garrison's church planting movements, Steve Smith's training for trainers model, Enoch Wan's diaspora ministries, Bible translation strategies, educational strategies, broadcast media models of missions (e.g., the Jesus Film), various forms of business as mission, and models of short-term missions.

Nehrbass' bibliography is admirably inclusive, though missiologists representative of other streams of missiological discourse are notably absent in Nehrbass' compendium of "major theorists and perspectives that have shaped the study of how Christianity spreads across cultures" (1) (cf., Johannes Hoekendijk, Steven Bevans, Roger Schroeder, Orlando Costas, Petros Vassiliadis, Scott Sunquist, Kirsteen Kim, Darrell Guder, and Craig Van Gelder). Of course, these absences should be attributed to the limited scope of the text and the target audience. Students of mission(s) looking for an advanced missiology textbook with sustained discourse on, for instance, the profound influence of global pentecostal-charismatic missiologies or on the massive changes in missiological ecclesiologies in the wake of Vatican II, will need to look elsewhere.

Nehrbass insists that missiology must be useful to missionaries. "By focusing on the sorts of research questions that missionaries are actually interested in, and not just the problems that academicians are interested in, missiology can remain alive and relevant" (291). It's no surprise, therefore, that Nehrbass is at his best when posing challenging questions to missions-oriented evangelicals: What are the core culture-transcending tenets of the gospel? How might we go about determining such culture-transcending tenets? How does your own community hybridize Christianity? *Advanced Missiology's* greatest contribution is that it helps evangelical students of

missions ask better questions.

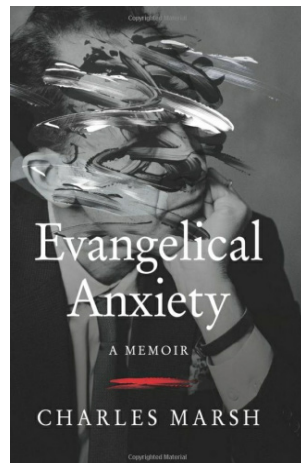
Yet there are other pressing missionary questions at the forefront of our evangelical imaginations that are not broached in *Advanced Missiology*—questions like: How is growing access to the internet in even the most remote areas of the world reshaping cross-cultural discipleship? How is the Holy Spirit challenging our traditional conceptions of church planting movements amid the proliferation of virtual communities and online relational networks that span the globe? How is the Holy Spirit helping us imagine short term missions in the wake of a global pandemic? How is the Holy Spirit creating new opportunities for business as mission (BAM) amid volatile online markets? What new approaches to mission(s) research are needed in light of the growing power-asymmetries between missiologists of the West and missiologists of the global south? How are non-western disciples of Jesus helping expose the underlying values and priorities that are deeply embedded in western missiology? How is the Holy Spirit inspiring multicultural communities of disciples to rethink missiology in light of the unraveling of foundationalism, objectivism and propositionalism that have for so many years been tightly woven into the fabric of modern missiological studies? Of course, word counts don't allow Nehrbass to engage every question, yet these are the kind of questions this reviewer hopes will continue to inform cutting-edge missiological discourse in the coming years.

Advanced Missiology provides academically-minded missionaries with an annotative orientation to theoretical and methodological frameworks popular among western evangelical missionaries during the second half of the twentieth century. Retrospective in orientation, *Advanced Missiology* tends to focus on pre-Bosch (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 1991) missiological conversations. Many missionary methods and strategies (cf. chapter 10) were profoundly affected by the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019. Some readers will wonder at the absence of any mention of the massive disruptions experienced by western evangelical missions in a book that debuted on

Amazon in April 2021—particularly a book that opens with the claim that “by the end of this book, you should know...current and emerging global issues that impact missionary strategies” (1). The unfortunate timing of its publication may limit the long-term viability of *Advanced Missiology* for future missiological discourse.

Charles Marsh,
Evangelical Anxiety
New York, NY: HarperOne, 2022
ISBN: 978-0062862730.

Reviewed by Noah R. Karger
MDiv student at Gordon-Conwell
Theological Seminary
and Research Assistant at the Center
for the Study of Global Christianity



Charles Marsh, Commonwealth Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia and Director at the Project on Lived Theology, has written a fascinating spiritual memoir. *Evangelical Anxiety* is like the author’s description of home movies, “not a compendium of facts, but a deluge of impressions” (222). Journeying inward, Marsh reconciles views on faith and mental illness. Raised in the Deep South, what he came to believe about sexual desire, selfhood, and sin became the basis for a lifelong struggle with acute anxiety. Analyzing these deep-seated notions and their effects, Marsh gives us a fresh look at what it means to be human.

The memoir is structured without strict linearity and yet maintains total coherence. Marsh's story unfolds like a memory – or a session of psychoanalysis – back and forth in time, up and down the latter of abstraction. Still, it always moves forward. The narrative's structure is a testament to its author's self-understanding, evincing a profound grasp of life's interconnectedness – each person, event, and place deriving context from the other. Marsh discusses his childhood as the son of a Baptist minister in Mississippi and Alabama, his theological studies at Gordon College, Harvard Divinity, and the University of Virginia, and his work as a professor up to the present.

The book contains 6 parts. The first part contains chapters on “Martin Luther on Prozac”, “Harvard Divinity School: Fall 1981”, and “Dry Leaves Tumble Down University Circle”. The second part contains the chapters titled “On Fire” and “The Pursuit of a Literary Life”. The third section contains the chapters “HDS, Redux” and “Christian Anxiety: A Short Theology”. The fourth section contains “Charlottesville: The First Sojourn”, “Cathedral Light”, “Outtakes from an Evangelical Analysis”, “Summer in Laurel”, and “Years of Wondering and Longing”. The fifth section deals with “Depression”, “The Grace of the Strong Sin”, and “On Christian Counseling”. The sixth and final section concludes with “Oh, Merton” and “Quiet Days in Charlottesville.”

The narrative begins in *media res* with Marsh's time at Harvard, a time defined by his assumption that finding God required “sailor-diving into guilt and shame” (22). A preacher's kid raised in the Deep South, Marsh's experiences of sex, God, the Bible, and race induced more than culture shock. Despite appearing “an evangelical virgin hoping to redeem the secular world,” (21) his inner life was nothing short of macabre. As Marsh walks us through memories of immense detail and depth, no topic is off limits, and this is part of *Evangelical Anxiety's* restorative power. Telling the whole story, he acknowledges his need for healing and lives to receive it, and thankfully for us, lives to share it, too.

In Marsh's case, healing first came in the form of psychoanalysis.

One night, circled around a campfire with fellow congregants, his Evangelical minister asserted that “there’s nothing more intense than following Jesus” (117). After a lifetime of harrowing anxiety, this was the last thing Marsh wanted to hear; he wanted peace, not intensity. Around the same time came the opportunity for psychotherapy, which he took, albeit hesitantly. In *Evangelical Anxiety*, Marsh delineates his struggles – psychological and spiritual – in a dialogue with his past and present self: the apocalyptic Evangelical and the compassionate analysand (and everything in-between). For Marsh, psychoanalysis and faith “follow parallel tracks into the mysteries of being human, where all truth is God’s truth” (131).

One of the topics most frequently explored in this dialogue between his past and present self, is sexual desire. Marsh does not euphemistically tiptoe around it like a nervous pastor in the pulpit. Rather, he speaks of it untrammelled by niceties, arriving at neither crassness nor flippancy but fidelity to actual lived experience. Neither does he harangue nor bemoan. Instead, he is kind to himself, a kindness which does not make undue allowances, but which is determined to understand and thereby be made whole. Marsh depicts the road to healing as requiring the realization of one’s imperfections and subsequent acceptance of God’s grace. This, according to Marsh, is freedom. It is an act of integration, requiring that you “put yourself into the place you’ve always associated with terror and alienation and there feel God” (197). For Marsh and many Evangelicals alike, this place of terror and alienation involves sexual desire and its distortion. Discussions on sex are too often a sprint to the finish line, shoving difficult topics into theological Tupperware, saving the leftovers for another day. Marsh, however, is slow and nuanced in his approach; his theology is better for it. While his mother admonished that “premarital sex leads to psychic ruin,” (55) Marsh teaches that psychic ruin is more likely a product of placing sexual desire and the imago Dei at odds.

While Marsh is always authentic and deep, if he means to directly

engage the dialogue concerning theology and psychology's intersection, the book sometimes falls short on a conceptual level. At one point, Marsh says of psychoanalysis and faith that, "it's more than fine that they neither merge nor collide" (131). He argues here that the two can live and let live, but later reflections seem to imply a kind of interdependence. Describing the importance of feeling "the bodily effects and reassurances of forgiveness," he says that in this "psychoanalysis needs theology" (197). He illustrates how he had reached a "dead end" with psychoanalysis and needed to experience profound grace. It seems the two do in fact merge and collide, as he argues that the road to healing requires analysis and grace. This intersection could be acknowledged more explicitly.

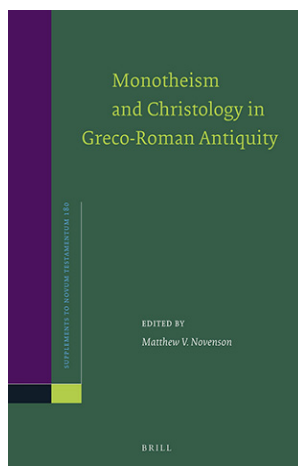
That said, perhaps Marsh is all the wiser to refuse getting too caught up in a theoretical debate, seeing his work as essentially existential, focused on real events and their highly personal interpretations. After all, the strained polemics between psychologists and biblical counselors appear peripheral in the fresh light of Marsh's very human discovery: "I received the gift of moral life: the freedom to be imperfect, to have fears and face them, to accept brokenness, to let go of the will to control all outcomes" (133). Marsh trades the psychological intensity which colored his experience in the Evangelical Church for the buoyancy of grace. One is reminded of Steinbeck: "*And now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good.*" What Marsh finds is freedom *from* perfection and *to* goodness.

Neither Marsh's anxieties nor that which spawns them are uncommon. What is uncommon is his capacity to see, analyze, and relay it lucidly, and furthermore, his resolve to experience wholeness when all is said and done. Evangelical and non-Evangelical Christians alike who struggle with anxiety – or any form of mental illness – will find encouragement in Marsh's wisdom. Exploring mental illness and spirituality in the form of memoir, Marsh offers a *lived* response. Rather than choosing a side in the longstanding Evangelical psychology vs.

faith debate, he argues it is a false dilemma. If the reader takes nothing else from *Evangelical Anxiety*, they will be certain of this: Marsh is a hopeful person, a virtue surprising and precious in the wake of acute psychological pain of, literally, religious proportions. Regardless of one's leanings in the debate over the intersection (or lack thereof) of psychology and theology, learning the tender hope of Marsh is surely a move nearer to Christ, nearer to wholeness.

Matthew V. Novenson, Ed.
*Monotheism and Christology in
 Greco-Roman Antiquity*
 Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020.
 Series: Novum Testamentum,
 supplements, 0167-9732;
 Volume 180. 978-90-04-43797-5.
 359 pages hbk.

Reviewed by M.L. Volpp, Graduate
 Student at University of Chester



This book is dedicated to the late Larry W. Hurtado, Professor of New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology at the University of Edinburgh. *Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity* is a collection of twelve essays by leading scholars, edited by Matthew Novenson (who now holds Hurtado's position), covering divergent perspectives on "early high Christology" within the ancient Greco-

Roman world with a focus on the issues raised in Hurtado's previous works, including *One God, One Lord* (Fortress, 1988) and *Lord Jesus Christ* (Eerdmans, 2003).

Following Novenson's *Introduction*, the first essay (Chapter 2) begins with *The New religionsgeschichtliche Schule at Thirty: Observations by a Participant* by Hurtado. Here Hurtado lays out the difference between the older and newer *Schulen*. The former believed that early Christianity and Jesus-devotion lay in oriental mystery cults, whereas the newer *Schulen* turned towards Second Temple Judaism to understand its development (pp. 9-15). He highlights some of the scholarly contributions to the newer *Schulen* throughout the years including Stuckenbruck, Bousset, and Dunn, and goes on to project its continuing development and influence on Christology and Christian origins.

In Chapter 3, *The Universal Polytheism and the Case of the Jews*, Novenson focuses on how ancient Greek and Roman writers portrayed God. He explores a counter-example of Robert Parker's hypothesis on universal polytheism; the belief that the same gods and goddesses were worshiped under different names, also known as *interpretatio*. He concludes that Zeus was equated with YHWH by certain Hellenistic Jewish writers and that it was acceptable, stating that the problem is not the difference in the names of the god(s) but the individual rituals the people practiced for their god(s). For example, the changes Antiochus IV made in Jewish temple worship, causing the rebellion of the Maccabees. Granted there were people, whether pagans or Hellenistic Jews who described YHWH to fit their frame of reference; yet it does not infer that all religious Jews would relate YHWH to Zeus or any other god. Even if Antiochus IV allowed the Jewish rituals to continue but dedicated the temple to Zeus, it would be unlikely that the Jews would claim Zeus as the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Not only does it go against the Jewish *Shema*, but it also disregards the motif of punishment for idolatry, which is a major theme

in the Hebrew Bible.

In *The Divine Name as a Characteristic of Divine Identity in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (Chapter 4), Gieschen advocates that the possession of the divine name equated identification with the God of Israel for first century Jews. Gieschen elaborates with three examples of individuals possessing the divine name from Second Temple Jewish writings (pp. 65-73): 1) Son of Man (1 Enoch), 2) Yahoel (Apocalypse of Abraham) and 3) in the writings of Philo of Alexandria where the *Logos* is defined as the “visible image of the High God above” (p.72). He continues with more examples, citing evidence found in the New Testament where the divine name indicates divine identity (pp. 74-80). Gieschen’s analysis provides the reader insight on how divine name theology influenced early Christianity.

In *Jesus’ Unique Relationship with YHWH in Biblical Exegesis: A Response to Recent Objections* (Chapter 5) Capes discusses some of the objections to Paul’s use of YHWH texts that refer to Jesus (pp.88-98). He defines a successful analogue as something that must contain an Old Testament reference to the divine name, whether YHWH or *kyrios*, with a clear application of a figure being identified with that name. Without these two conditions being met a true analogue does not exist.

In *God and Glory and Paul, Again: Divine Identity and Community Formation in the Early Jesus Movement* (Chapter 6) Newman gives a splendid overview of Paul’s use of δόξα (glory) in his theological rhetoric ranging from social, doxological, theological, Christological, physiomorphic contexts, including Christian glory. Chapter 7 continues with an analysis of Paul’s works in Bauckham’s essay, *Confessing the Cosmic Christ* (1 Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:15-29), which gives two examples of high Christology. The first is a Christian version of the Jewish *Shema* (Deut 6:4), which incorporates Jesus Christ with the one God of Israel. The second is typically defined as a hymn with similar poetic

techniques also found in the Psalms. Both passages employ numerical composition, numerical patterning, and gematria to embed additional meaning into a literary text (p.141), as well as prepositional theology, the usage of Greek and Latin prepositions to distinguish different types of causation (p.144). Bauckham demonstrates how both methods can be applied to exegetical interpretation. Space permitting, it would have also been nice to read Bauckham's analysis of prepositional theology found in Jn. 1:3,10 and Heb.1.2.

Niebuhr and Frey, Chapters 8 and 9, focus on other books of the New Testament. Niebuhr focuses on James, which is typically not used as an example of high Christology in the New Testament and is even infrequently found in Larry Hurtado's work *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Yet Niebuhr argues in his essay, *One God, One Lord in the Epistle of James*, that the religious practices exhorted in the letter convey early Christ-devotion and worship (p. 187).

In *Between Jewish Monotheism and Proto-Trinitarian Relations: The Making and Character of Johannine Christology*, Frey does an excellent job at providing an overview of the high Christology found within the gospel of John covering such phrases as "the Son," "Son of God," "Son of Man," and "The Logos." He concludes that John's Christology falls somewhere between "Jewish" binitarian monotheism and a "Christian" proto-trinitarian view, where Jesus is considered as one with the Father, and the Holy Spirit is viewed as a divine personal figure but not yet in fusion with God the Father and Jesus (pp. 218-221).

In Chapter 10 Bremmer offers a glimpse in *God and Christ in the Earlier Martyr Acts* of the possible beliefs from early Christianity by analyzing the accounts of martyrs in *Acta Martyrum*, official records of the trials of early Christian martyrs, including Ptolemaeus and Lucius, Justin and his companions, and Apollonius to name a few. His focus is on what the individuals confessed during their trials. From their confession Bremmer

is able to derive possible values found within second century Christianity such as the belief that God is in heaven and the creator of the world and that martyrdom is an “imitation of Christ.” While it is impossible to say to what extent these beliefs were shared, a trend can be found among the martyrs. Bremmer’s historical analysis is an insightful contribution to understanding the conception of God/Jesus during second century Christianity.

Other essays include *Gnosis and the Tragedies of Wisdom: Sophia’s Story* by PHEME PERKINS and *The One God is No Simple Matter* by APRIL D. DECONICK. Both touch on theodicy and the problems of identifying the high god with the creator (p.8). The last essay, Chapter 13, is *How High Can Early High Christology Be?* by PAULA FREDRIKSEN, where she emphasizes the importance of history in theological interpretation.

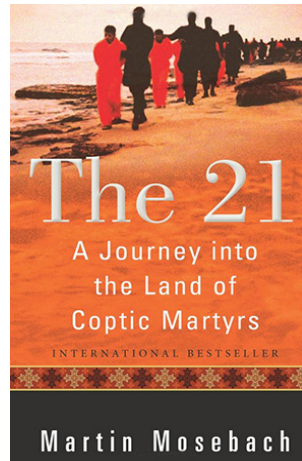
Overall, one gets an overview of early high Christology as a topic with Novenson’s *Introduction* and Hurtado’s beginning essay, while the individual essays give the reader a more microscopic view of the debates found within early high Christology. The key categories that are addressed include: 1) the relation between Judaism and Hellenism and its effect on early Christology and the attribution of “pagan monotheism” as a new contestant in this field; 2) how to understand the word “divinity” and its application in regard to Christ, 3) defining the one god and which role the act of creation plays; 4) and how Jesus’ divinity is understood in the primary sources (pp. 3-6). This edited volume fulfills the goal of addressing some of the issues raised in Hurtado’s previous work and subsequent reception, yet its coverage is very broad. The book is recommended as a starting point into the world of early high Christology which will point readers in the right direction for further research.

Martin Mosebach.
*The 21:
A Journey into the Land
of Coptic Martyrs*
Walden NY: Plough Publishing
House, 2020. iii + 239 pages

**Reviewed by Israel A. Kolade,
Fuller Theological Seminary**

Martin Mosebach is a German Catholic novelist/poet and winner of the Kleist Prize in 2002. In *The 21*, Mosebach investigates the backstory and lives of the twenty-one men, who prior to their martyrdom were unknown to much of the world. On the 15th of February 2015, a horrific video was released showing twenty-one men in Libya wearing orange jumpsuits and taken along a beach to be beheaded by an ISIS-affiliated militia group. This video, widely viewed on the internet, was met with global denunciation for the brutality of Isis, as well as words of condolences and sympathy for the persecution of Coptic Christians. While the video captured the attention of many and became widely discussed, relatively little was known about the twenty-one men themselves. Mosebach is not merely concerned about knowing more factual details about these men but is driven by the phenomenon of martyrdom itself. How was it that these men were so calm and peaceful in the final moments leading up to their death? What was the socio-religious context of these otherwise ordinary men that enabled them to face martyrdom with peace and strength? Was there something in their villages that foreshadowed their readiness to be martyrs for Jesus Christ?

The book is divided into twenty-one chapters, each chapter beginning with a picture of one of the twenty-one men. The first four chapters serve as an introduction into Mosebach's investigation, addressing his desire to learn more about the lives of these martyrs, the video that brought their



story to global attention, and the perceptions of martyrdom by those in Egypt. Chapters five to nine take us into the Upper Egyptian village of El-Aour to learn more about their village, homes, families, and church where thirteen of the martyrs were from. Chapters ten to twelve take a detour to Libya, the place where the twenty-one men had gone in search of work and were subsequently kidnapped. We also learn that one martyr, Matthew, a Ghanaian Christian, refused to be let go and chose rather to suffer with the Coptic men. Chapter thirteen to eighteen take us back to El-Aour and continues to explore the socio-religious context of the martyr's land. It is in these five chapters that Mosebach also does more theological and sociological reflection into the implication of the men's stories for the global church and the world at large. Chapters nineteen to twenty-one serve as a pre-epilogue devoted exclusively to a reflection on the significance of the Martyr's land for the world at-large and the future of the Western Church. The book concludes with an epilogue on the perseverance and growth of the Coptic Church (the self-described 'Church of the Martyrs') amid persecution.

While the book sets out to learn more about the lives of these twenty-one men, now Saints in the Coptic Church, Mosebach's goal is rather to provide a profile of the communities that shaped these men. We never learn personal details such as what trade each man held, how many brothers and sisters they had respectively, and so on. While this may be a disappointment to some, the noticeable absence of such particularities serves the purpose of accentuating the centrality of the wider community in their lives. As Mosebach reports on his conversations with the people from their villages, the topic of the Church in the life of the village and the formative practices of the Coptic liturgy is significant (pp. 55, 81, 135, and 233). The picture that is painted for the reader is one of a Coptic Christian community that sees itself as the heirs of a great tradition; a tradition which continues to sustain life for the people through its liturgy and provides a rubric for their self-conceptualisation. In other words, the people see their lives through the lens of the Church. For example, in the

Coptic Martyrs frequent trips to the monastery in Gebel-el-teir, founded in the 4th Century and believed to be one of the sites where the Holy Family (Jesus and His parents) stayed during their flight into Egypt, the Coptic Martyrs not only experienced the events of redemptive history anew but saw themselves as heirs of this rich heritage. The visit to the monastery strengthened their commitment to the faith.

While there is much to benefit by simply learning more about the land the Coptic Martyrs came from, there is also something to be said about the reflections that Mosebach offers throughout his book. The stories of these men aren't simply facts to be registered and filed, rather Mosebach attempts to consider the implication of their stories for his life and his community, and by extension invites the reader to do the same (p. 213). For example, in chapter 19, Mosebach imagines a history of the Coptic Church that never experienced the harsh and consistent persecution that has made up much of her story (p. 210). Would that Coptic Church be a stronger, more vibrant Church? It is difficult to come to such a conclusion, Mosebach suggests (p. 212). It appears that the persecution and hardship faced by Coptic Christians was a means by which they were able to rely more on God and deepen their faith. It is exactly this experience which invites the reader to apply the story of the Coptic Church to the future of Christianity. Mosebach envisions this application specifically for the future of Western Christianity, which is increasingly finding itself in hostile territory (p. 212). What might the history of the Coptic Church have to say for the future of the Western Church concerning a rich, vibrant, deep, and immovable faith amid a hostile and intolerant society? In pursuing this application, Mosebach commends the history and communal vitality of the Coptic Church to the Western Church as she faces her own challenges in an evolving late-modern society (p. 212).

Mosebach does well in offering an ethnographic and journalistic profile of the lived theology of the Coptic Christian community, which shaped the lives of the twenty-one martyrs. His reflections, however, on Western Christianity in light of the story of the Coptic Church, while being

instructive, are incomplete. After reading *The 21*, one might easily be left to conclude that the Coptic Church is the embodiment of the Christian ideal; the supreme model of all churches for ages to come. However, this belies a degree of romanticism on Mosebach's part. Any sustained application of one context (the Coptic Church) to another context (Western Christianity) would do well to be a critical application; an application wherein lessons are offered considering the Church's successes (as Mosebach does well) and failures (as is unexplored in this work).

Notwithstanding the lopsided application of the story of the Coptic Church to Western Christianity, Mosebach's *The 21* stands as an excellent work of explanatory journalism. This is a work that students and scholars of church history would find to be an informative and stimulating read. Additionally, to Mosebach's credit, *The 21* would benefit both clergy and laity within the Western Church who desire to expand their vision of the historic and global Church in strengthening their communities within an increasingly hostile environment.



Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes



The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

ISSN: 2053-6763

Copyright © 2023.

All material is copyright protected and may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted without written permission (except where a licence exists to do so).

Typesetting :: Ash Design (UK)

Minion Pro & Times New Roman 10.5pt on 14.5pt

