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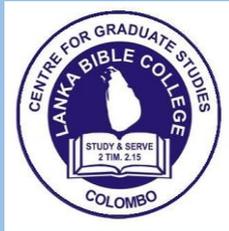
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LANKA BIBLE COLLEGE  
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*LBC Centre for Graduate Studies  
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**JOURNAL OF  
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## **Breaking the ‘donor-recipient’ Godlessness in International Relationships**

*Rev Dr Stuart Brooking*

I am honoured to be able to contribute to the first edition of this journal. I have a long held appreciation of Lanka Bible College and its various ministries. OCA has been a keen supporter of both campuses as they have sought to train men and women for contextually relevant ministry in Sri Lanka. It is a joy to see how God has been using the graduates to strengthen the church, plant new churches, and help show in word and deed the joy of knowing Christ.

My recent doctoral studies included field research in Sri Lanka as well as Papua New Guinea where I investigated the theological institutions of both countries. While this article is of a more general theological nature, it may be if the editors smile upon it, I can share some of the more specific findings from Sri Lanka in future editions. This journal is certainly an enterprise that I want to encourage, so that the local issues of ministry can be addressed for the Sri Lankan context.

As part of my doctoral studies and as a way to help OCA to think theologically and act in accordance with God’s word I developed some key theological ideas by which to test our international relationships. It is too easy as a funding organisation, or indeed as an indigenous ministry, to set aside our proper status as organisational siblings in the Lord, and revert to a godless ‘donor-recipient’ way of relating. The ‘donor-recipient’ idea implies and fosters relationships which embody one organisation as greater and the other as having to be perpetually grateful.

I hope these ideas can be challenged by better theology so our thoughts, conversations, promotional material and actions are refined as we all seek to explore what our obedience should look like at the personal and organisational levels. I set forth three theological ideals to guide the assessment of our relationships. These theoretical issues are just one part of the story of course. There are a many practical realities which need to be examined for us to truly submit all to the Lordship of Christ in the way we relate. Perhaps with an open conversation about these challenging ideas we can discover together how to better live as children of the same Heavenly Father, knowing the same Spirit in each of us.

## **1. Christology**

The first of these theological concepts is Christological and has been best articulated by the Twentieth Century Dutch theologian Hendrikus Berkhof (Berkhof 1962/1977). In his seminal work, 'Christ and the Powers', Berkhof draws on the Biblical teaching, particularly in the Apostle Paul's writing in the books of Ephesians and Colossians, to enunciate a theory of institutional life. He proposes the concept that there is a supra-human dimension to organisations and institutions which can be analysed at two levels. From a philosophical materialist perspective, they display the characteristics of structures and processes which can be analysed with the tools of sociological inquiry. On top of this however, is the concept that these institutions can take on a 'life of their own' which can work to either enhance life or dehumanise those within and without the institution. In the Pauline language these are 'powers' and 'authorities' which can stand in opposition to the power of God. At the extreme they become 'demonic', not only displaying the characteristics of self-justification and pretension, but in their wake destroying the lives of those involved with them. The Biblical message in this context is to assert the authority of Christ over all powers. The irony of the assertion of power is embedded deeply in the Biblical rhetoric of surprise, inversion and weakness. It is 'at the cross' that Christ subdues the evil of the world's institutions.

*“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Colossians 2:15)*

Numerous implications flow from this concept, but one implication of this Biblical theme is immediately relevant to our topic: Church leaders have the challenge to perceive the pretensions of all institutions including their own, to name their faults, and where possible, to work to make them life-affirming not life-destroying.

In the context of the present topic the implication of this Biblical theme will have a profound part to play.

By their very nature and purpose one would hope that theological colleges, mission agencies, denominational organisations and international Christian funding bodies would have at their core, a commitment to be self-analytical about the conduct of their relationships. Furthermore, one would hope that in their actual dealings with other institutions, they would have certain protocols of what to avoid and what to embrace, so that the core reality of Christ’s authority over these institutions is evident to all.

Such an approach to institutional activity is surely not mere idealism, but reflects a consistency of core belief with outward practice. It would also reflect a commitment of the leadership of institutions to analyse not just the intent of actions, but the actual outcomes they produce. Thus good intentions are a necessary but not a sufficient criterion by which one would examine a Christian organisation’s adherence to this theological concept.

Significantly, sadly, evangelicalism has been weak in the area of institutional analysis – the very task which is so needful for this for this topic (Noll 2009) (p59). Historically, critique of institutional life has been done by the theologically liberal elements of the church. In more recent decades however, the Lausanne Movement has focussed its attentions to redress this weakness and rebalance the evangelical part of the church towards this Biblical concept (Stott 1982).

In my thesis I sought to assess the interrelationship of institutions across international boundaries so that the Western influences on theological colleges in the developing world can be critiqued. Are these relationships life-affirming? Or to put it in the theological language of Berkhof: do they submit to the lordship of Christ in the way these Christian institutions relate together?

## **2. Pneumatology**

If the first underlying theme driving the research draws on the Christological concept of Christ's lordship over all powers, the second is drawn from a pneumatological concept. This theme seeks to draw out the implications of the Biblical concept that God's Spirit is to be understood as dwelling in each manifestation of the church. From a socio-historical perspective it calls into question the hegemony of the Western church's dominance over all the church. This hegemony is the result of the success of its mission enterprise in the past two hundred years which sat alongside the colonising success of the West – first from Europe and then in a financial rather than classic form, from the USA.

The Biblical theme is summed up in the radical concept of the 'democratisation' of the Holy Spirit's presence among not just the leaders but all believers in Acts Chapter 2. This is part of the New Testament development in the Biblical story (Peterson 2009). This concept is frequently reiterated in the insistent use in the New Testament letters of the exalted language addressing Christians living in various places as 'saints' i.e. holy ones (e.g. Romans 1:7, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1). The implication is that their spiritual status is equal to all other believers even if, as is evident in the New Testament letters, their errant behaviour needs to be redressed.

In the context of the international relationships between Christian organisations, the danger is to hold to an implicit paternalism that traces its roots to the earlier colonial period. This institutional paternalism may be in contradistinction to more equal personal relationships between leaders from different countries, or it may, unfortunately, also be operating at that level. What is of interest is the numerous ways the West

influences the theological enterprise of colleges in the developing world. The concern is that the Biblical concept may be affirmed at formal levels such as in publications and Memoranda of Understanding, but that the actual patterns of relationships may deny this ideal of democratisation.

Over against a pattern of paternalism, one would hope to see evidence of mutual accountability and deference from both the Western and developing world institutions.

### **3. Theology**

The third theological concept arises in the context of an ancient Biblical ‘fund raising’ program where a group of the first generation of churches were being encouraged to financially aid another group of believers. While the present topic is broader than merely the provision of funds from one group to another, that early funding drive nonetheless was based on a significant principle. The Apostle Paul wrote circa 48 AD to Christians in the Greek city of Corinth, as he explained why he wanted them to contribute funds which would be given to the poor churches suffering a drought in Judea.

*“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.” (2 Corinthians 8:13-15)*

This third principle focuses on the perennial Biblical concept of the benevolence of God the Father who provides for his people. Indeed Paul quotes from Exodus 16:18 reminding the Corinthian Christians when God provided for the Old Testament people in the time of their wilderness wandering, some 1,500 years beforehand. The former people experienced provision according to their need and this stands as an exemplar and confirmation of the pattern of the confidence that they should have, as they contribute to those with less.

This concept speaks deeply of the vagaries of history and for the present writer, the ‘existential accident’ of being a Western believer at the start of the twenty first century. It speaks not only of the current personal responsibility of living in a wealthy country, but also causes the anticipation, perhaps even the humbling expectation, that in some way there may come a reversal of circumstances in the years or decades ahead, whether in financial terms or on a broader front. This reflection is in some ways part of the background to Noll’s recent book ‘The New Shape of World Christianity’ (Noll 2009). He seeks to explore what the experience of American Christianity and its mission activity has to say about other parts of the church throughout the world. He notes the extraordinary change in the world Christian dynamic and the success in church growth and mission in many parts of the developing world. As Noll explains, in some ways this is disorienting for American Christians who are so used to their own past religious hegemony.

As the Apostle Paul understands the issue, there is a universal commitment of Christian people around the world to act towards other Christians in a manner that provides for their needs. One element of this is that it is driven by a deep sense of equality before their beneficent heavenly Father. The sense of mutuality and humility is evident in the formulation of the obligation and thus ought to direct the characteristics of the international relationship seen in the fund raising activity in the first century AD. (The broader commitment of Christians to care for all people would be anchored in other Biblical texts such as in the teaching of Jesus and Paul regarding those in need e.g. Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37 or Paul’s encouragements to wealthy people, 1 Tim 6:17-19.)

Thus these three theological concepts encourage us to seek a better understanding of the way a multiplicity of relationships function in the international theological scene.

The Christological concept enunciated by Berkhof encourages a profound examination by Christian leaders of their institutions and the ways they relate. The goal is to make the processes of institutions become life

affirming, not oppressively life denying – being under the rule of Christ, not displaying demonic characteristics.

The Pneumatological concept of democratisation encourages the recognition of the value of each expression of the church no matter in what country it is found. This concept works against paternalism in international relationships despite a history of colonial-style relationships over the past two hundred years. Rather it establishes a principle of mutuality and deference.

The theological concept of a beneficent heavenly Father leads to international relationships of mutuality and respect. This applies to financial interactions, but also speaks to the range of interactions between Western church organisations and developing world theological colleges.

So my prayer is that this Trinitarian response will help give a Biblical framework to counteract godless ‘donor-recipient’ type relationships. Of course the real challenge is not just to theorise what should be, but to analyse what is, and then have the courage to change what is wrong and establish new patterns. These patterns will be far more appropriate to a new era, but more particularly, appropriate to an old revelation. May we all have the courage to change the godless patterns in which we are tempted to exist.

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## **Christ and the Spirit in the Light of Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 15.7-13**

*Dr Danny Moses*

The practical goal of Paul's epistle to the Romans is found in 14.1 - 15.13, where both Jewish and Gentile Christians irrespective of their attitude to food laws are called to accept one another even as both God (14.3) and Christ (15.7) had welcomed them. Hence as a 'welcomed' community of believers, both Jews and Gentiles are to "glorify God". Paul's ultimate aim in writing the Epistle to the Romans and the goal for the church is spelled out in 15.5-6, "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". That this is the ultimate aim of the letter is verified by the appeal that follows (vv.7-12), where they are to welcome one another because Christ's justifying work was for both Jew and Gentile, and so that the OT promises given to the patriarchs might be fulfilled, and that thereby the Gentiles may glorify the God of Israel (Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 474).

Such a perspective is in keeping with Paul's introduction where he elaborates on his apostleship and spells out the gospel in terms of Christ as the messianic Son of God, he is of the seed of David but is now the exalted Lord (1.3-4). He is set apart (v.1) for this gospel of God promised by the prophets (v.2) and the Gentile mission being his primary focus (1.5-6). "Bringing about the obedience of faith among the nations" is a motif also seen in his doxology 16.25 - 27, where the gospel or rather 'my gospel' is closely associated with "the preaching" of Jesus Christ, and this "revelation of the mystery" is now disclosed through the prophetic

writings and is made known to all nations. This is “according to the command of the eternal God” and hence his express purpose. Paul saw himself as God’s eschatological apostle, engaged in the priestly ministry of evangelism (15.16), commissioned to bring about the ingathering of the nations as spelled out in so many Old Testament scriptures (Is 49.6 in Acts 13.46-47, Is 66.18-21 in Rom 15.16; 1.5; 16.26; Is 52.15 in Rom 15.21 cf. Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 516-530). The Gentile mission predicted in Jesus’ ministry (cf. Mt 8.10-22; 24.14; 28.19) is on the one hand something new, for it is in particular a commission and apostleship given to Paul - one born out of due time (Gal 1.15, 16; 1 Cor 15.9). But on the other hand, ‘it is the fulfilment of OT promise, not a Pauline innovation or invention’ (Rom 15.9-12, D. Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus of Founder of Christianity?* 180).

In keeping with God’s plan, the purpose of Romans is to show that God’s story of salvation which began with the Jews, now also includes Gentiles on the equal ground of faith. The Jews stand at the beginning of the promises of God that are now finding fulfilment at the end of the ages; for the church whether Jew or Gentile are by God’s grace alone the people of the End, i.e. “on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10.11). Through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ marks the turning of the ages; the old is on its way out, the new has begun (2 Cor 5.17; Rom 8.1-30; 7.6, 5; 14.17; 15.13). He has set the future irresistibly in motion (Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 459), for “the Age to come eternally existent in the Heavens had already appeared in its initial stages in the Resurrection of Jesus” (W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 317). And the church indwelt “by the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead” (Rom 8.11, cf. 2 Cor 5.5; 1.22; Eph 1.11-14) is that joint eschatological community which is to live in harmony and in accord with Christ Jesus, that both Jews and Gentiles may with one voice glorify the God and Father of their Lord Jesus Christ (15.5-6).

The question regarding the aim of Romans and as to what constitutes the heart of Pauline theology has long been debated. The traditional view stemming from the reformers was that ‘justification by faith’ is the key to Pauline theology. But it has been pointed out that this is too narrow, and

it is only one metaphor of salvation that has received emphasis to the exclusion of others (Fee, 12, Davies, 221-223). Other significant themes evident in Pauline theology include the church comprising of both Jews and Gentiles forming the eschatological community of the new covenant people of God, here Christ and the Spirit play a significant part. Paul also stresses the importance of the eschatological framework of God's peoples' existence and thinking. The focus of course is Jesus as Messiah, Lord and Son of God and God's eschatological salvation effected through his death and resurrection (Fee, 12).

Moreover, in all this the crucial role of the Spirit in Pauline theology has been increasingly recognised, with Romans contributing significantly. For example, except for 1 Corinthians, Romans contains the largest amount of Spirit material in the Pauline corpus – the Spirit being mentioned 31 (perhaps 33) times in the book of Romans 20 of which occurs in Romans 8 (Fee, 474-5). The role of the Spirit in Romans is not merely a matter of sanctification following justification but in keeping with Paul's theology elsewhere (Gal 5.13-18), the Spirit is to be seen as 'the fulfilment of the promised new covenant (7.5-6), wherein the Torah is now "fulfilled" in those who walk by the Spirit resulting in Spirit led ethical living (8.4). Along with Christ's death and resurrection the Spirit has brought an end to Torah observance by 'empowering its "fulfilment" under the new covenant, thus opening the way for Jew and Gentile together to be God's people, to have and to do his righteousness - but apart from the Torah' (Fee, 474-5).

With such a perspective on Pauline theology in mind we now turn to our passage in Rom 15.7-13, which in turn functions as a conclusion to 14.1 - 15.6 and contains a summary of major themes in this epistle (Thomas R Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 753).

**Paul's hermeneutical method:** Roman 15.7-13 refers to 4 OT passages which Paul takes predictive of the Gentile mission and ingathering and something he intends fulfilling (15.21 and Is 52.15). Also note Paul's personal application of Is 49.7 in Acts 13.47. Would he have drawn inspiration from his Lord who applied Is 61.1-2 to himself in Lk 4.18?

that will not be unlikely. The collection that he organised among the Gentile churches for the church in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16.1; 2 Cor 8 and 9; Rom 15.25-28) expressed the reconciliation between Jew and Greek. In Rom 15.16 the phrase “so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” might be the fulfilment of Is 66.18-21 where from some of the in gathered Gentiles, “some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the Lord”. It has also been suggested “Paul may even have seen the collection as a fulfilment of the prophetic predictions of the wealth of the nations flowing to Jerusalem (e.g. Isa 60.4-14; 61.6) (Wenham, *Paul*, 180-181). In light of this, some comments on Paul’s use of the OT are in order.

Paul’s hermeneutical techniques have been a matter of debate, and the influence of Rabbinic Judaism on Paul has been stressed by W.D. Davies and others (Davies, *Paul & Rabbinic Judaism, passim*). In his study of Romans 10.16 - 11.10, Harry A. Hahne, “Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in Romans 10:16 - 11:10 to Explain Israel’s Unbelief in Jesus”, makes some useful observations with regard to the innovative interpretive techniques used by Paul – some of which, as we shall see, are employed in 15.7-13 (also see Greg Forbes, “Would the NT writers have failed an OT exegesis examination? The Apostle’s use of the Old Testament”, and Sungkook Jung, “Towards Christ-centered communities of faith in Asia: Paul’s message to the church at Corinth”)

[a] At times Paul’s interpretation does assume the context of the original passage, and is only clear to readers who are familiar with the OT passage (e.g. note the use of Is 53.1 in Rom 10:16; Is 65.1-2 in 10:20; Ps 19.4 in 10.18;). Paul’s contrast between Jewish unbelief and Gentile belief in 10:20-21 is supported by the context of Is 65-66, whose eschatological overtones take it beyond the post-exilic period to suggest eschatological worldwide and cosmic blessing. [b] *In some instances Paul’s interpretation may imply an awareness of details from the Hebrew text, even though the Greek of the LXX is quoted* (e.g. 1 Kings 19.18 in 11.4-5; Is 65.1-2 in 10.20 where the details are clearer in the original Hebrew than the Greek of the LXX, such as the usage of *gôy* for the “Gentiles” in contrast to the covenant people (*am*) of God; Paul’s use of Deut 32:21 in

10:19 may in part be based on an awareness of the play on words between “non-God” (Heb. *Lo-el*) and “non-people” (Heb. *Lo-am*) in the original verse. [c] *He may also use a certain passage as an illustration or example of a principle.* This could also be called an argument by analogy. For example, note the use of 1 Kings 19:10-18 in 11:3-4. In 11:8, he uses the wilderness wandering (Deut 29:4) as an example of a judicial hardening of rebellious people. [d] *He may apply a biblical principle to the contemporary situation.* It is not that he is ‘reading into things’ but that he assumes the literal interpretation of the passage and then explores its significance for the current situation (e.g. use of Ps 19 in 10:18; Deut 32:21 in 10:19. As in times past Israel is disobedient (10:21) but since God promises to never abandon his people (1 Sam 7:22; Ps 94 [LXX 93]:14), he must not have rejected Israel today (11:2). God is working with a remnant today, even as he did in Elijah’s time (11:3). (e) *The biblical principle may provide a theological explanation for a contemporary situation* (e.g. the use of Is 65.2 in 10:21; Deut 29:4; Ps 69:22-23 in 11:7-10. (f) Some passages, according to Paul, contain predictive prophecy which has been fulfilled (see use of Is 53.1 in 10:16; Deut 32.21 in 10:19; Is 65.1 in 10:20-21).

On several occasions (g) *the historical event described in some passages points to an eschatological typological fulfilment* (e.g. since David is a type of the Messiah, the call for divine judgment on his enemies sets a pattern for the judicial hardening of the enemies of the Messiah (11:9-10). Israel’s rebellion that led to the exile is a pattern repeated in their eschatological rejection of the Gospel (10:21). The remnant in Elijah’s day points to the eschatological remnant that accept the Gospel (11:3). (h) *Christological presuppositions govern the interpretation* (e.g. the interpretation of Is 53:1 in 10:16 is governed by the belief that the Servant of Is 53 refers to the Messiah; Jesus is that Messiah; hence Israel’s rejection of the Gospel is disobedience to God (10:19; 11:8-10). (i) *He may use an adaptive paraphrase to emphasize a point.* In most cases Paul is very faithful to the wording of the LXX, with an occasional change of a word for emphasis (10:19; 11:2). These adaptations, however, do not change the basic teachings of the passage (Hayne, *passim*)

**Paul's use of the OT as a lead up to 15.7-13:** Romans is the most extensive and profound statement of Paul's theology. In it Paul made abundant use of the Old Testament in confirming his basic thesis (Rom 1:16-17) (Harington, *Paul's use of the Old Testament in Romans, SCJR*, Vol 4. 2). For example, he uses the OT to prove that that both Gentiles and Jews needed the revelation of God's righteousness in Christ (3:10-18), in developing his argument about justification by faith with reference to Abraham (4:1-25), i.e. by faith in Christ, and not Law as for the Teacher of Righteousness of Qumran (see Walter Grundmann, in *Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 99-114), in his Adam/Christ typology (5:12-21), on the place of the remnant in the mystery of salvation (9:1-11:36), and in presenting the love commandment as the summary of biblical commandments (13:8-10) (Harington, 2).

As a lead up to 15.7-13 I shall confine myself to his use of Scripture in 1.17, 3.21, 4.3, 10.5-20, [15.1-13], in order to get a general sweep of Paul's thoughts.

In **1.17** Paul cites Habakkuk 2.4b to prove that it is not by the law that one is justified before God but by faith (also cf. Gal 3.11). God's story of salvation which began with the Jews, hence "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1.16), now includes Gentiles on the equal grounds of faith (Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 237). In **3.21** the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, then Paul refers to the law as Scripture "although the law and the prophets bear witness to it". It is a 'righteousness of God' – i.e. a righteousness that characterises God which is also demonstrable through Spirit led ethical living (8.14; Gal 4.16-26) - through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For he [God] himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in [of] Jesus. God does this through the "propitiation by his [Jesus'] blood", whom he "did not spare, but gave up for us all" on the cross (8.32). In **4.3** Paul once again refers to Scripture "What does the scripture say?" and draws attention to the fact that Abraham was justified by faith and not by the rite of circumcision (Gen 15.8). God does through the gospel what he forbids in the Law, i.e. in forgiving grace he justifies the 'ungodly', and this is so because 'Christ died for the ungodly' (5.6). The example from David

further substantiates this point (4.7-8 cf. Ps 32.1-2 ‘So also David’). Circumcision was an external seal that came at a later stage in Abraham’s life (Gen 17.10-14). Thus Abraham is the father of ‘uncircumcised believers, for he was himself uncircumcised when his faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. But he is also the father of circumcised believers, not so much on the ground of their circumcision but on the ground of their faith (Bruce, 119). In Romans, real circumcision “is a matter of the heart, Spiritual and not literal” (Rom 2.29; Deut 30.6; Jer 31.33-34 a passage Paul alludes to in 2 Cor 3.3; Ezek 36.25-27). In **10.5-20**, the argument is that according to Lev 18.5 (Rom 10.5; Gal 3.12) “the man who practises the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. But from experience Paul the Jew knew that this was futile, he could not do it (Rom 7.14-25), for the law was “weak” (8.3) does not rest on faith (Gal 3.21 “for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law...”).

For Paul, the ‘life’ promised in Lev 18.5 maybe experienced only by the ‘justified’ person enabled by the Spirit (Rom 8.4 “in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”, who have experienced “Spiritual circumcision” (Rom 2.29); also cf. Rom 5.18, 21 “reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”). God has done what the law weakened by the flesh, could not do, i.e. by sending Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8.3-17). The law could not bring life. “Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified” (Rom 10.4); so also the Spirit brings an end to the law (8.4, 2, 13, 14), for the just requirement of the law is fulfilled by the Spirit (8.4) and just as much as Christ dealt with sin and “condemned sin in the flesh” (8.3), the Spirit is the antidote to sin (8.13-14; Gal 5.16-26) for “by the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body” and “live”. All this is in keeping with fulfilling what God had promised the patriarchs (Rom 15.8). And hence in the earlier Galatians, Paul’s allusion to the OT in Gal 3.14 (Gen 12.3) is illuminating, for there he concludes that “the blessing of Abraham” comes through Christ Jesus and the Spirit “that we [Jews and Gentiles] might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3.14).

For Paul righteousness is through faith and not by adherence to the law. The coming of Christ *and* the Spirit have made the difference and Paul's use of the OT go to prove this.

**Some exegetical comments on Paul's use of the OT in Romans 15.7-13:**

**13:** If 15.5-6 summarises the goal for which Romans was written, then v.7 with its "so then" takes its cue from the preceding argument in 15.1-6 and calls to follow the example of Christ. As W.D. Davies puts it, "Paul's greatest doctrinal statements subserve his ethical exhortations, when Paul wants to stress the importance of certain ethical duties he appealed to what Jesus essentially was and did (Davies, 147). Christ did not please himself nor assert himself but put others' interest first (Phil 2.5-8). The citation in Ps 69.9b "The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me" implies that Christ put the will of God first of all in enduring the cross. In 11.9-10 too Ps 69.22-23 is being cited, for this psalm was widely used in the early church 'as a *testimonium* of the ministry - and especially the passion of Christ' (Bruce, 211, cf. Ps 69.9a is cited in Jn 2.17 "Zeal for thy house will consume me"; Ps 69.4 in Jn 15.25 "they hated me without a cause"; and there is an allusion to Ps 69.21 in Mt 27.4 "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink").

**15.7:** *The welcoming Christ:* It is in consequence of his death on the cross (Rom 5.8), despite our weakness (5.6-10) that he welcomed Jews and Gentiles without discrimination "for the glory of God", so also both 'the strong' and 'the weak' (Jewish Christians, so Dunn, 845-46, Rom 15.1) need to make room for the other without discrimination – i.e. welcome them wholeheartedly and warmly (*proslambano*, 14.1, 3, Philemon 17, Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 502, n.36). In 15.3 Paul cites Jesus as someone who "did not please himself", fulfilled Ps 69.9 in terms of insults and taunts he experienced during his passion (e.g. Mt 27.44; Mk 15.32, see Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* 369 esp. n.80) and hence accepted people – which may be compared with Jesus teaching on "receiving" people in Mt 18.6-9 (Wenham, 176). The phrase "To the glory of God" (v.7) is closely connected to "glorifying the Father (v.6) (J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 204) and Jesus has welcomed both Jews and Gentiles in order to

promote the glory of God (*eis doxan Theou*), in Phil 2.11 the object of Christ's glory is to promote the glory of God the Father (Sanday & Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 397, also cf. Jn 14.4). It is the welcoming and accepting Messiah who is the agent of divine glory (Mark A. Seifrid, *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, 688).

**15.8:** *The service of the Messiah which effects the reality of hope among Jews and Gentiles:* Christ became (perfect tense indicating a permanent state – his function as a Jewish Messiah is permanent, Morris, 503) a servant (*diakonos*) to the circumcised. Some see this as a possible allusion to Jesus' comment on his mission in Mt 15.24 "sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Wenham, *Paul & Jesus*, 176; W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 100-101, esp. n.8). Christ became a Jew to save Gentiles and Jews need to realise that Christ came among them in order that all the families of the earth might be blessed (Sanday & Headlam, 397). Coming to the Jews was in order to 'confirm' (*bebaiosai* – a legal term denoting certainty, Schreiner, 755) the "truth of God", God's faithfulness in terms of God's covenantal "promises to the fathers" (Gen 12.3; 18.18; 22.18; 26.4; 28.14; cf. Acts 3.25; Mic 7.20). The fulfilment of the promises to the fathers (Gen 12.1-3) included the whole world (in Rom 4.13 Abraham is "heir of the world") that the Gentiles as undeserved recipients of God's saving grace may "glorify God for his [covenantal] mercy". Mercy to the Gentiles is the design of Christ's being made "a minister of the circumcision" (Murray, 205). It is this message of mercy and grace which was given to Paul ever since his Damascus road encounter with Christ. It was a 'big bang' experience for Paul – shaking up all his previous ideas (Wenham, *Paul and Jesus: The true story*, 18). From that day Paul believed that he was called to gather in the Gentiles 'outsiders' (Rom 15.8-20). The creation of the church comprised of Jews and Gentiles who 'with one voice' may 'glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' – it is this welcoming God (14.3) who is instrumental in the formation of such an eschatological community (15.13), and this through his welcoming Son (15.3, 7-12) and through his sanctifying Spirit (15.16).

Moreover, as in 15.3-4 - where the scriptures predicted in the breaking of the *eschaton* through Christ's fulfilment of it and triumph through the cross and resurrection (Seifrid, 686-7) - "the promises given to the patriarchs" in v.8 (cf. 9.4, 5) is in vv.9-12 amplified by means of four OT citations, i.e. from the 'law', the 'prophets' and the 'writings' i.e. the 'Psalms' (twice); a selection from the entire Hebrew canon (Luke has the resurrected Lord doing something similar in Lk 24.27, 44 indicating that the OT pointed to him).

The use of 'just as' (*kathos*) in 15.9 (also v.7) suggests that Gentiles as well as Jews ('all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus' Gal 3.28) were to be beneficiaries of God's covenantal mercy, for in v.10 the Gentiles are called to rejoice "with his people" (citing Deut 32.43). By noting this catena in 15.7-13, in addition our comments on vv.3, 4, 8 and 9, Paul's prolific use of the OT in Romans (and elsewhere) needs a few comments. After all he begins his letter by stating that the gospel of God which is also the gospel of his son came in fulfilment of that which 'he [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures' (1.2) which is further amplified in 1.17; 3.21; 4.3, 6-25; 10.5-20; 15.9-12 and 21 which occur in crucial places in Paul's argument.

**15.9b:** *The praise and song of the Messiah:* 'Therefore I will praise (*exomologesomai*) thee among the Gentiles, and sing (*psalo*) to thy name' - a quotation taken from 'The writings' i.e. Ps 18.49 (LXX 17.50, 2 Sam 22.50) where David considers those non-Israelites whom he has incorporated into his empire as now belonging to the heritage of the God of Israel (Bruce, 256). Paul reads this passage typologically (see Hayne, *passim*) and messianically, where David's Lord (Mt 22.41-45 cf. Ps 110.1) albeit "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1.3), and 'a servant to the circumcised' (15.8) - hence a 'Jewish Christ' (9.5) - reaches out to the Gentiles, and acts on their behalf. Not by military conquest and incorporation (Ps 18.31-42, 46-48 on account of which David praises the Lord among the nations and sings praise to his name) but via the cross and resurrection (15.3). Of course the motif of holy war by means of his death and resurrection against sin, where God radically wages war against sin through his Son Jesus, i.e. through his death and resurrection (Leslie C. Allan, *Vox Evangelica*, 3 (1964) 9-19) may play a

part in his interpretation. That is, the nations that opposed this Christ (cf. 3.9-18) have been defeated in his resurrection and “they enter into his saving lordship as conquered enemies (cf. 1.5 “obedience of faith for the sake of his name” (cf. Seifrid, 689). This being so, the risen Messiah confesses and praises the divine name among the Gentiles, thereby bringing them salvation.

The motif of acting on behalf of the Gentiles may echo the Isaianic Servant Song, in which the Servant’s mission to Israel also includes salvation for the nations (Is 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 52.13-53.12, so Seifrid, 688, The gospel remains “for the Jew first, and also for the Greek” (1.6). Paul’s typological use of scripture in 15.9b-12 suggests that he derives his understanding of the mission of the messiah from Scripture (note 15.21 where he wishes to fulfil Is 52.12 and in 15.24, 29 he speaks of his intended mission to Spain. Significantly, this ‘praise’ and ‘song’ is set on the lips of Christ Jesus (“I will praise thee” also 15.10, 11. In 5.3 too it is the Messiah who speaks “the reproaches ... fell on me”, see Seifrid, 688, Moo, *Romans*, NAC, 479, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 878-9, contra Schreiner, 757-8). “Among the nations” implies that the Gentiles have a part in this praise (Boice, 1829; Schreiner, 757-8).

**15.10:** *The Messiah invites the Gentiles to rejoice with his people:* “and again he (Messiah) says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”. This is a quote from ‘The Law’, the Song of Moses (Deut 32.43). ‘Praise his people, O you nations” (MT), where it is a call on the nations to rejoice over the salvation of Israel (Sanday & Headlam, 398). But this has been adapted by Paul to express his own theology (leaving out the threatening Deut 32.34-42, 43b). In Rom 10.19 Paul cites Deut 32.21, to imply that God will provoke his people to jealousy by a nation without understanding. Before he judges the nations, he judges his own people [32.19-33], thus both the nations and his people would know who he is (Deut 32.39 “I put to death and I make alive, I smite and I heal...”, Seifrid, 689, In Is 45.7 “salvation follows judgment”). Now he holds out this salvation to the Gentiles, judgment has passed, the Messiah now invites them to salvation and calls them to join in his song of praise (15.11, cf. Seifrid, 689). In God’s original purpose and promise to

Abraham (Gen 12.3) the nations were to be blessed through Abraham, hence here Gentiles are invited to praise God with the Jews (Boice, 1830) and this is now made possible through God's mercy to them in the gospel (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 879). In the application of Gen 12.1-3 in Galatians 3.14 in Christ the realisation of 'the blessing of Abraham' [cf. Gen 12.1-3] includes Christ *and* the Spirit: "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith".

According to God's original purpose and promise the covenant made to Israel is now open to all who believe (Dunn, *Romans*, 9-16, 849) and Abraham's 'faith reckoned as righteousness' is an example to both Jew and Gentile (Rom 4.1-25; Gal 3.6-29). Paul has quoted from the same song in 10.19 (Deut 32.21); 11.11 (Deut 32.21) and 12.19 (Deut 32.35). Paul's use of Deuteronomy is significant, for in 10.5-13 he creatively/analogically uses Deut 30.11-14, however, while in the latter Moses is speaking about the 'commandment' that he is handing down to Israel, i.e. 'the law' (Deut 32.10) – after prophesying in Deut 28-29 that Israel will disobey God and face the curses of the covenant - Paul, on the other hand, is speaking of its replacement with 'the word of faith which we preach' i.e. the gospel of the crucified yet resurrected Lord, and in 10.13 echoing the words of Joel 2.32 for "everyone who calls upon the Lord will be saved". Moreover, this analogical usage is not farfetched, since in just a few verses earlier, i.e. in Deut 30.6 Moses predicts that there will come a time when "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live". And this seems to be echoed by Paul in Romans 2.29 where he specifically applies it to Gentile believers (2.13-16, 26-27) "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, Spiritual [by the instrumentality of the Spirit] and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God" (also cf. Jer 31.31-34 in 2 Cor 3.3; Ezek 36.25-27).

Dunn observes that "praise" (*euphaino*) is little used by Paul; two out of the three uses occur in OT quotations – Gal 4.27 and here, the only other reference is 2 Cor 2.2. He further notes that the note of eschatological rejoicing is present in Deut 32.43 (as in Ps 96 [LXX 95]:11; Is 44.23;

49.13; Rev 12.12; 18.20). Hence Paul seems to imply that the final events are being fulfilled in the conversion of the Gentiles (Dunn, *Romans*, 849, *TDNT* 2.774-75). This rejoicing in hope empowered by the Holy Spirit is expressed in Rom 15.13.

**15.11:** *Universal praise of the Lord:* “and again, “Praise (*aineite*) the Lord, all Gentiles, and let all the people praise him” (*epainesatosan*) - verbatim from LXX Ps 117.1. As in 15.10, the elliptical “and again” is used when linking a series of scriptural quotations (1 Cor 3.20). Paul understands that Ps 117.1-2 has universal scope and that the whole world is called upon to praise the God of Israel for his steadfast love and faithfulness and applies it to the church comprising of Jew and Gentile. In 15.9 the Gentiles glorify God because of his “mercy”, and here in Ps 117.1-2 for his “steadfast love toward us” (Heb. *hesed*) and “faithfulness” (*emeth*) endures for ever – i.e. in Rom 15.11 it is extended to the Gentiles - “let all the people praise him” - without weakening its enduring validity to Israel (cf. Rom 9-11, Dunn, 850 who observes that this is the only time Paul uses these verbs *aineite*, *epainesatosan*). His love for everyone is also due to his love for Israel in fulfilling the promises of blessings made to Abraham by sending Jesus Christ to be the world’s Saviour (Kidner, *Psalms* 73-150, 412, Boice, 1830-31). The reference to “the Lord” is emphatic, recalling the Messiah in 15.9 praising God’s name, but here “Lord” seems to denote Jesus, as in 10.11-17 where those who call on the name of the Lord [Jesus cf. v.9] shall be saved (citing Joel 2.32); moreover, in 15.12 (Is 11.10) the Messiah himself is the hope of the nations. All this adds to the theme of eschatological praise in 15.10 culminating in 15.13.

**15.12:** *The root of Jesse shall rule the Gentiles:* “and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentles; in him shall the Gentiles hope” (or “set their hope”, verbatim from the LXX Is 11.10). In his redaction Paul omits “in that day”, since for him that day has arrived; i.e. we are eschatological people upon whom the end of the age has come (1 Cor 11.11). Paul reserved the phrase “in that day” for the final day 2.5, 16; 13.12; 1 Cor 1.8; 3.13; 5.5 etc., (Dunn, 850). Is 11.10 represents the promise of restoration after judgment, where the Lord will

begin afresh through new David (11.2-5); he will restore Eden on earth (11.6-9), the remnant of Israel will be restored from the nations (11.11-16) and the nations will seek this new “root of Jesse”- who (according to the MT) will stand as a standard (*nes*) for the nations (Seifrid, 690). Isaiah also seems to envision a transformed world and a second exodus (11.11-16) initiated by the “root of Jesse” (11.10). How the same person can be both the *shoot* stemming from *Jesse* (11.1) and the *root* from which *Jesse* comes is an enigma unexplained until Luke 1.32 (A. Motyer, *Isaiah*, TOTC, 105). Jesus did see himself as “the anointed one” (Is 61.1-2 in Lk 4.8-21; Is 11.1-9, 10) “the one who is to come” of John’s query (Mt 11.5; Lk 7.22) whose messianic ministry was a Spirit-inspired ministry of restoration where “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Mt 11.5 fulfilling Is 35.5-6; 61; 11.1-9), and who by the Spirit of God cast out demons (Mt 12.28). Jesus was conscious of his own role in the eschatological kingdom and his “kingship” in terms suggested by Isaiah 61 and Isaiah 11 “A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse...The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him...with righteousness he shall judge the poor...” – and this was not to be viewed in nationalistic terms, but was to be founded on his words and actions, whose reception results in the creation of a new society and a new order based on and around his own teaching and person (Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or founder of Christianity?* 108, 224). Rabbinic literature, though, interpreted Isaiah 11 nationalistically and militarily, i.e. Gentiles are enemies of Israel and the Messiah will rule by the sword. In contrast, assuming the context of the passage (see Hayne, point [a]), Paul’s point is that Jesus, the shoot of Jesse, the new David, by his resurrection from the dead (1.1-7) has inaugurated the salvation promised in Isaiah and has begun to rule over the Gentiles (Schreiner, 758, Seifrid 690, Dunn, 850).

It may also be significant to note that Is 11.10 is read at the Passover (Michael in Dunn 850), for in Jesus this ruling of the ‘root of Jesse’ (a title for the royal messiah cf. Isa 1.1-5; Rev 5.5; 22.16 cf. Jer 23.5; 33.15; cf. Sir.47.22; 4 *QFlor* 1.10-13; cf. *TDNT* 6.986-87) is not as a tyrant but through his death and resurrection (3.25; 5.8, 12-21; 6.3-4; 15.3 cf. Is

69.9). In 15.21 Paul wants his ministry to be an extension of that of the Servant of the Lord (Is 52.15), the message of the cross and the resurrection were vital for Paul. The term *anistemi* “he who rises” – for the MT *omed* “one standing” in 15.12 (Is 11.10) occurs in the context of the resurrection (Acts 17.3; 1 Thess 4.14, [only other reference in the Pauline corpus 1 Thess 4.16, Eph 5.14]). Hence, it seems likely that Paul is also hinting at Christ’s resurrection (also cf. Acts 3.22, 26; 7.37, Dunn, 850). The nations enter into the salvation that the resurrected Lord brings as they place their hope in him, and submit to him – a theme also seen in Mt 12.18-21 which, in the context of Jesus’ healing ministry, refers to Is 42.1-4 and concludes “in his name will the Gentiles hope”, in Is 42.4 it is “the coastlands [that] wait for his law”. Paul’s mission of effecting the “obedience of faith” (1.5; 15.18; 16.26) is embedded within this citation. “His apostolic “priestly service” [*hierourgeo* (15.16-18; cf. 1.9)], by which Gentiles are reclaimed, is thus an echo of the Messiah’s “service” (*diakonos* [15.8])” (Seifrid, 691).

**15.13:** *The God of hope and his eschatological people:* “Now (*de*) may the God of hope fill (*plerosai* - no niggardly supply, Morris, 507) you (Jews and Gentiles) with all joy and peace in believing”. As in 5-6 Paul interjects a little prayer, as he comes to the end of his extensive argument in the epistle as a whole, the rest of it is taken up with personal matters. “Now” (*de*) marks a transition to something new, distinguished in some way from the preceding (Morris, 506). The nations enter into the salvation that the Messiah – “the root of David” brings as they place their hope in him. The mention of “set their hope” (v.12 cf. Is 11.10) prompts the title “God of hope” who in 8.20 has subjected creation “in hope, that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God”. In Paul’s own prior understanding of things “resurrection”, hinted in relation to Christ’s resurrection in 15.2 “he rises to rule the Gentiles” – the first fruit of the resurrection of the dead (8.23, where we too have the “first fruits” of the Spirit) and the gift of the Spirit are two primary events that marked the end of the ages. Hence the mention of the Spirit (15.13), which in Paul’s theology is the realization of the eschatological promise suggests the Pauline theme that God himself has set the future “inexorably in motion,

so that everything “present” is determined by the appearance of the future” (Fee, 801).

*Hope in terms of their final inheritance:* “Hope” (15.13), prompted by its occurrence in v.12 therefore, has an eschatological dimension to it, and a cosmic goal to the concept of redemption (8.18-27), in which “our resurrection” is assured by the gift of the Spirit (8.23-27). In Ephesians 4.1-3, the “one body” formed by the “one Spirit” lives in “one hope” of their calling (v.4) precisely because through the Spirit the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs with Jews of the final inheritance (1.13-14). And in Rom 15.13, since Christ is the fulfilment of Is 11.10 and is the one in whom the Gentiles now hope, Paul prays that the Gentiles will “abound in hope [of their final inheritance, including the resurrection] by the power of the Holy Spirit”. Thus the Spirit for Paul “in the key to the present fulfilment of the eschatological inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God” (Fee, 812).

15.13 also links up with v.5 “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement”, for these sets of verses (5-6 and 13) form a sort of *inclusio*. In 14.17 “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” are blessings of the Kingdom of God, and in 13b it is by “the power of the Holy Spirit” God’s eschatological people experience this in life the blessings of the life to come, for by the Holy Spirit they “abound” or overflow (*perisseuein* cf. 3.7; 5.15) in hope”. For Paul “with the coming of Christ the Age to Come had become present fact the proof of which was the advent of the Spirit” (Davies, 223).

Moreover, ‘joy’ is one of Paul’s great concepts, which occurs 21 times and is the most in the NT (also cf. Phil 1.25 where it is linked with faith, a ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in Gal 5.22-23). Joy is the actualisation of freedom, which takes concrete form in fellowship, cf. Rom 12.15, and the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy (Rom 14.17, *TDNT*, IX, 369). Joy and peace, both stem from faith and are the results (Sanday and Hedlam, 399) and by-products of believing in God’s great promises (Schreiner, 759, also see Murray, 207). And this “glorifying” (*doxasai*, v.9), elaborated by parallel terms “praise” (*exomologesomai*, v.9b), “sing”

(*psalo*, v.9b), “rejoice” (*euphranthe*, v.10), “praise” (*aineite*, v.11a) and “give praise” (*epainesatosan*, v.11b) occurs in joint worship (15.5-6, 8b, 13 also see Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 386).

Each believer takes the other forward, to the complete freedom of the children of God, into the new world of hope (Dunn, 851 and citing Schmidt). The “abounding” in this ‘common’ hope (mentioned three times in vv.12-13) includes the resurrection (in v.12 implied of our Lord “he [Christ] who rises to rule the Gentiles”, Dunn, 850). And according to 5.2 “the grand object of their hope is the glory of God” (Bruce, 257, in Col 1.27 “Christ in you, the hope of glory”), which includes their resurrection (Rom 8.11 “[he] will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you”, 23b). Furthermore, this ‘hope does not disappoint us’ (5.5), literally ‘does not put to shame’ (as in Is 28.16 quoted in 9.33 and 10.11). This hope is assured of fulfilment, and in 8.24-25 it is explicitly related to our “adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” for which we have the “first fruits of the Spirit” - the Spirit himself (8.23b), and have had God’s love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit ‘which has been given to us’ as his indwelling pledge of that glory to be attained (5.2).

This has a practical side too which Paul stresses in Romans, since love is the Spirit’s “primary ‘fruit’ (Gal 5.22) and has its origin in God and is reproduced within the eschatological community. In Rom 15.30 the church’s love for Paul is ‘engendered by the Spirit’, in Col 1.8 “your love in the Spirit”, Eph 3.18-21 where the Holy Spirit “at work within us is able to do [i.e. enable the Jewish and Gentile believers to love each other cf. v.18] far more abundantly than all that we ask or think”; 1 Jn 4.7-12).

**The Spirit and the eschatological people of God:** 15.13 indicates that God in Christ (15.7-12) and the Spirit has created an eschatological community justified by the son and sanctified by the Spirit (cf. 15.16b) serving not under the old written code (7.6), but walking in the new life of the Spirit (6.4b). And in 8.2 experiencing “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”; having the “Spirit of Christ” (8.9), being “led by the Spirit”

into righteous and ethical living (8.14) having “received the Spirit of sonship whereby crying “Abba! Father” (8:16).

The church awaits its consummation, i.e. glorification (5.2) “in hope” (5.4-5,) looking to and receiving from the “God of hope” (15.13, 5) and the Christ in whom “the Gentiles [and Jews] hope” (15.12). The church, an “eschatological miracle”, where the acceptance of the Gentiles is for Paul a decisive eschatological event (Kasemann, 384, 386) is made an experiential reality by the empowerment of God’s eschatological Spirit (15.13; 12.1-2; 1 Cor 10.11, see G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 407-411).

### Conclusion

Hence, Paul’s use of the OT in Romans 15.7-13 contributes to the thesis that if at all one looks for the elusive centre of Pauline theology it involves God through his ‘welcoming Christ’ (15.7) and the empowering Spirit (15.13; 8.1.27) who has created a Torah -free, but not lawless (8.4,14; 2.13-18) eschatological community comprising of *both* Jews, and Gentile. This new eschatological people (8.23-27; 1 Cor 10.11), live together in such harmony, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together and with one voice (5.5-6) glorify the God and Father of *our* (both Jew and Gentile) Lord Jesus Christ. Even as Isaiah envisioned a new Eden (Isa 11.6-8), for which all creation awaits with eager anticipation (Rom 8.11-25), we too look forward for this as “we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (8.23b), but the resurrected Lord, who is now the “designated Son of God in power according (*kata*) to the Spirit of holiness” (1.4) has entered into this mode of existence, and is “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15.20, 23). Through Christ *and* the Spirit, we have already Spiritually entered Eden, for we have “the first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8.23), and we experience the transforming power of the indwelling eschatological gift of the Spirit (Rom 12.1-2, Ladd, 409), and are God’s new people “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (*ta tele ton aionon*, 1 Cor 10.11), and hence anticipate “the redemption of our bodies” (8.23b), our final “glorification” (8.30). And “in this hope we are saved” (8.24). The “root of Jesse” has already come (15.12a; Is 11.10).

He has been “raised to rule the Gentiles” (15.12). In him shall the Gentiles continue to hope (8.13; Is 11.10, and “by the power of the Holy Spirit [we] abound in hope” (15.13). Therefore, like Paul, let us extend his kingdom through “the priestly service of the Gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles [and Jews] may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (15.17; 1.9 cf. Is 66.18-21; Ex 19.3-6). Let us win obedience from the Gentiles [and Jews], by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit” (15.18-19; 1.5; 16.26) and participate in the mission of “the Servant of the Lord” – our Lord Jesus Christ, by fulfilling Is 52.15 (Rom 15.21) “They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him”. In him “shall the Gentiles hope” (15.12).

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# Driving Jesus out of Gerasenes<sup>1</sup>

*M Alroy Mascrenge*

## Abstract

In Mark chapter 5 we read the unusual story of an exorcism by Jesus. In every exorcism Jesus had done he had simply exorcised the demons out of someone. There was never a case of the demon being exorcised out of someone and *into* something else. But in this narrative the demons ask Jesus to be sent to the pigs and Jesus does exactly as they requested. The immediate result is that the pigs die and the final result is that Jesus is asked to leave that area. This is striking because the demons actually asked Jesus not to be sent out of the country (5.10). But now he is forced to leave the country. At surface level it appears that the demons actually managed to drive Jesus out of Gerasenes and stop him from ministering to the people in that area- thereby keeping the area in their control spiritually. This article takes a narrative approach to this story as explained in the gospel of Mark and argues that although it appears like a temporary defeat eventually Jesus succeeds and is able to minister to the people in that region.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material for this article has been taken from the commentary I wrote on the gospel of Mark.

## Introduction

To understand the narrative better, we need to put it in the context of the narratives that precede and follow this one. The motif of death appears in these narratives.

The narrative following the exorcism narrative is in chapter 5 verses 21-43. Jairus<sup>2</sup> daughter was sick and he is keen to get Jesus to come to her before she dies. This shows the understanding those Jews had about Jesus – Jesus was able to heal the sick but he cannot raise the dead. Death puts an end to his healing power. On the way Jesus gets delayed because of the woman with severe bleeding – another indirect motif for death – although she was alive her body was dead – and Jesus heals her despite her body being dead for many years. Continuing the journey Jesus meets the people from Jairus' house who are very concerned about not wasting Jesus' time. 'Your daughter is dead' they tell Jairus. Don't bother the teacher<sup>3</sup> anymore – after all he is only a *teacher* who could only heal minor illnesses. When people die they pass out to the realm which is out of everyone's including the teacher's control. But Jesus tells Jairus to have faith and he finally raises his daughter from the dead. Jesus does not only have the power to heal but also has authority over death. Victory amidst seeming defeat.

The other narrative is in chapter 4 – we see the death motif there too. The disciples say they are dying (4.38) and they really would have died if Jesus had not intervened. Jesus who was asleep in the boat (the only place in the gospels where Jesus was sleeping) waited till the storm grew strong enough to kill them. Not only was he asleep but he was asleep on a cushion. Waves started breaking into the boat and water was filling already. The wind and the storm was very strong. It appeared for a moment that all was lost. Death was imminent. But just when all hope was

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<sup>2</sup> Jairus is one of the few people whom Jesus healed and who has been named in the gospels. Some of the rulers of the synagogues are named in the NT – Acts 18.8, 17.

<sup>3</sup> The word for teacher is *didaskalos* used 12 times in mark.

lost Jesus rose up rebuked the wind and the sea and the wind ceased. Victory amidst seeming defeat.

This last narrative ends with an important question. Who is this Jesus?

### **Who Is Jesus?**

Many people in the gospel stories have asked the same question. Who is this Jesus. The gospel of Mark is written as one of its purposes that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God and the long expected messiah. The book begins with a note that this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, son of God. (1.1). The book ends with the centurion claiming that Jesus is the truly the son of God (15.39)<sup>4</sup>. While the length is too long to claim this to be an *inclusio* one cannot but notice the striking parallels.

The secret is another motif that runs through the gospel of Mark right through out. Who Jesus is also a secret.

In chapter 8 – in what could be considered as the mid-point in the gospel Jesus himself asks this question. Who do people say that I am? Peter confesses that he is the messiah.

If the storm story concluded with that question, ‘who then is this?’ (4.41) the exorcism narrative answered that question.

*‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?...’ 5.7*

The demons knew who Jesus was and his power and authority.

The demons seem to have known who Jesus was and they confess it publically. Usually, whenever they are encountered by Jesus they make the confession loud. In my opinion the purpose was to disturb Jesus’ ministry – because if such public confession continued the Jewish leaders

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<sup>4</sup> The centurion becomes the only man in the gospel to confess that he is the son of God. If the target audience was Roman Christians this would certainly be looked at very favorably by them.

would have been more upset and would have found a legal reason to put an end to Jesus' ministry much earlier than they did. And the Jews thought it blasphemy for anyone to call himself as the son of God – which was punishable by death. Which is why Jesus didn't allow the demons to speak and rebuked them immediately.

If the gospel tells who Jesus is, it also tells about the devil. Who is this Satan?

### **Who Is Satan?**

There is quite a lot of things about Satan in the gospel of Mark. We actually find Satan trying to hamper Jesus' ministry from the beginning – so much so that the gospel of Mark can be read - in one possible thematic reading - as a struggle between the powers of darkness and Jesus.

Satan tempts him after God himself had testified that Jesus is the son of God (1.13) – it is important to note not only the fact that Satan tempts him after this confession but that it happens before Jesus' ministry. Had Jesus failed in the temptation his ministry would have been stopped. So the devil's actual purpose was to stop his ministry.

The first miracle he does in the gospel is exorcising a demon in Jewish territory. And the first miracle he does among the gentiles is the incident reported here – exorcising the demon<sup>5</sup>. Maybe Mark is portraying Jesus' words that unless you bind the strong man you cannot enter his house and plunder his goods. Satan first needs to be bound before the people could be delivered.

His first preaching in the synagogue is disturbed by the man with an evil spirit (1.23), here too the demons confess that Jesus is the son of God - as we saw this would have put an end to Jesus' ministry.

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<sup>5</sup> There are in fact other places where Jesus ministers to the gentiles even in the gospel of Mark – the Canaanite woman for example. He encounters them in 11 places – 3.7, 5.1-20, 7.24-30, 7.31-37, 8.1-9, 8.22-26, 9.14-29, 15.1-15, 15.16, 15.21, 15.39.

Jesus gives authority to his disciples to exorcise demons (3.15), Even the scribes who come from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of being demon possessed (3.22cf), In Gerasenes Jesus is unable to minister because of the demons, the Canaanite woman's daughter is demon possessed which drives her to Jesus (another gentile who has demon possession experience), even after seeing the glory of Jesus in transfiguration the disciples are unable to cast out a demon – the mountain top experience is disturbed by the valley experience with the demons.

In the chapters that follow the transfiguration Satan mainly acts through people – mainly through the Jewish leaders. Satan also persuades Judas to betray Jesus. Eventually Satan nails Jesus to the cross and thinks that victory has been won. Well temporarily yes – the powerful ministry he had been doing was stopped and his disciples are scared and scattered. However the power of God reigns and Jesus is raised from the dead. The very death which outwardly appears to have been engineered by Satan is accepted by God as a ransom for many. Victory amidst seeming defeat.

### **Demon Possessed in the Tomb**

Now when we turn back to the exorcism narrative we find the story having similar motif and structure to the other two stories. In the gospel of Mark (for that matter in all the gospels) Jesus' ministry among the gentiles is very limited. He mainly ministers among the Jews. Gentile territories remain in dark until the time of the apostle Paul and the New Testament Church. And in the gospel of Mark Jesus mainly ministers in Galilee and visits Jerusalem only once where he is crucified to the cross.

Whenever Jesus visits a new territory he preaches and heals the sick. That was his ministry. Gerasenes was a gentile territory – the presence of such huge number of pigs raised for meat also confirms this fact.

The way this demon possessed person is introduced alludes to the binding of the strong man in Mark chapter 3. No one was able to bind this demon possessed man, Mark tells us (5.4). No one had the strength to subdue

him (v4b) – so he was the strong man. However, the strong man kneels before Jesus.

When Jesus commanded the demon to come out of the person he begged him (Jesus) earnestly not to send them out of the country. Notice the use of persons in this sentence. *He* begged him not to send *them* out of the country. Though the man is used a mouthpiece the real confrontation was between the demons and Jesus.

Mark paints a good picture of the landscape there – there are tombs, mountains, sea and pigs in this countryside.

Finally, Jesus grants the request of the demons and sends them into the pigs. The pigs, about two thousand in number (5.13) roll down the steep bank and drown in the sea. The herdsmen report this to the people and they come to see the demon possessed man sitting at the feet of Jesus and the pigs drowned in the sea. Two thousand dead pigs is a huge economic loss – something that the owners would not tolerate. Luke tells us that great fear seized them (8.37). The great fear didn't come only because of the exorcism – the fear came because of 2000 dead pigs. As Jesus had exorcised many demons – but this reaction was unique. The city people ask Jesus to leave - and the ex-demon-possessed asks to join Jesus. Jesus grants the first request and rejects the latter.

There are many unusual twists in this story. Deviations from the typical 'type scenes' – to borrow a phrase from Robert Alter.

### **Deviations from the Type Scene**

The demon-possessed man was uncontrollable compared to the first account of exorcism in Mark. The man who was in the synagogue was controllable – he came to the synagogue – but in this man's case his entire life was taken up by the demons. Maybe because there was a legion inside him.

Demons revealing the identity of Jesus is not new – but what is new here is that Jesus doesn't rebuke them immediately. He doesn't ask them to be

silent. This is perhaps owing to the fact that this is gentile territory and being labelled as the son of God doesn't necessarily cause death in these regions.

The next unusual twist is that Jesus has a conversation with the demon possessed. He even asks his name. The name given is legion<sup>6</sup>. Probably the only demon with a name in the gospels.

The purpose of Mark describing the conversation is to lead to their request of sending them to the pigs. And the purpose of the name is to show that there were many demons inside this one man. Legion is typically a 5000-6000 soldier unit.

Demons requesting Jesus to go into the pigs is also unusual. Usually Jesus exorcises demons out of someone – but never into something or someone. If the purpose had been simply to find another place to stay demons wouldn't have killed the pigs. We cannot argue that the pigs lost control and accidentally drowned because if there were many demons and if they could control a man – definitely they can control the pigs. So the drowning of the pigs seems purposeful. We cannot say that the demons died with the pigs because demons which don't have a body do not die in water. So the only purpose seems to be to antagonise the natives. And this is actually what happened.

We may wonder why Jesus granted the demons' request. But we must note that the demons didn't ask Jesus to go into the shepherds (who were also present when all this happened 5.14). If that were the case Jesus would have refused. Jesus may have granted the request to show that even with seeming defeat God will finally triumph and people will glorify God. This is the reason why God granted Satan's request to deal with Job.

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<sup>6</sup> Some have claimed that the reference to legion is written with an anti-Roman attitude. The messianic expectation is that he will deliver Israel from the Romans who have possessed their country, just like Jesus exorcising the demon named legion out this man. However nothing in the context supports this.

After seeing the miracle the town people asked Jesus to leave their land. This is unusual because whenever people see someone being healed, they usually bring their own dead to Jesus. So here is a miracle having the exact opposite effect. Rather than drawing more people to Jesus this miracle has a repellent effect and distances people from Jesus. Maybe the region was in the control of the demons in more than one way. The man in the tombs acted as a sentry point stopping any possible Christian influences from entering.

We see a stark contrast between the attitude of the demons and that of the natives. Demons accepted Jesus' authority. They didn't go into the pigs until Jesus gave permission. According to them Jesus had the authority to tell them where they should remain and should not remain. The natives didn't see Jesus as someone with authority. They actually wanted him out of their country. In one sense the town people are like the seeds that fell along the roadside<sup>7</sup>. The seed is thrown – they actually hear the good news about Jesus through what happened here. But the message is immediately taken away by the devil. Jesus is asked to leave immediately. The territory is under the control of Satan – and unless he is bound the people cannot be delivered.

When the ex-demon-possessed man wants to follow Jesus, he stops him from coming. Mark tells us why Jesus did that:

*Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 5.19.*

In many places Jesus tells people and demons to be silent (1.24, 1.44, 3.12). But here is a place where Jesus commands a person to tell everyone what he had done to him. This is a major deviation from other type scenes and is the key to understanding the narrative and for our thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> In my opinion another possible thematic reading would be to see the gospel of mark as the examples for each kind of seed – each encounter with Jesus is an example for a type of seed. This is a *possible* thematic reading of the gospel of Mark.

Just like the stories that preceded and followed here is defeat. Jesus is asked to leave the country and cannot preach in the region. Satan has successfully blocked Jesus from entering the premises. But Jesus leaves his witness behind. And he is given a mission – to tell everyone.

*And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.*  
5.20

And he goes around telling people about Jesus and what He did to him. Victory amidst defeat.

We may object to this view because to say that demons stopped Jesus from entering a region might sound like blasphemy. But so is the fact that Satan tempted Jesus. A creation tempting the very creator himself. So is crucifixion – Satan crucified Jesus to the cross and temporarily stopped him but the power of God prevailed. So is the fact that God did what Satan asked in Job's story.

### **Conclusion**

Demons tried to stop Jesus from entering the land of the gentiles by drowning the pigs and turning the locals against Jesus. As a result of this miracle, Jesus couldn't minister in this region but had to leave immediately. However, Jesus finally triumphed through his witness. We drew our conclusions by the unusual twists and deviations, Mark has left in the narrative.

So we must remember that evil might prevail temporarily. But the God we worship is all powerful and will prevail against evil and gain final victory. Victory when all hope is lost. Victory amidst seeming defeat.

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**Youth Ministry as Missiology**  
**“Cross-Cultural Outreach:**  
**A Missiological Perspective on Youth Ministry”**

*Dr Paul Borthwick*

**Abstract**

Youth ministry is cross-cultural work. Youth workers require the skills of missionaries, taking biblical truths and applying them to specific cultures. Increased secularization, post-modern thinking, and post-Christian cultural influences have set youth in a culture distinct from that of adults. A youth worker desiring to reach both churched and unchurched youth undertakes the role of a missionary.

*An Associated Press article over 15 years ago (June 5, 1999) featured a collection of case studies of “churches trying to reach out to youth by speaking their language.” The authors described youth-oriented services that featured “rap hip-hop style”, a “pulsing beat”, and “multimedia sermons” – all designed to “connect kids to an ‘awesomely cool God.’” Although written long ago, the same is true today in many churches: how can we reach the younger generation?*

Although the writers of that article never referred to the youth workers designing these youth-culture oriented services as “missionaries,” they effectively described cross-cultural outreach. Recognizing that youth reject a Gospel packaged in the trappings of older-person cultures and styles, the youth leaders set out to do the work of any good missionary – to present the Gospel in ways that were theologically sound, yet culturally relevant and contextually effective.

## I. Foundational Assumptions

Referring to youth work as cross-cultural missions assumes that effective youth ministry builds on three foundations:

- 1) It assumes that youth ministry means **reaching teenagers where they live**. It takes youth culture seriously, and tries to understand that culture. Reaching teenagers where they are means meeting them on their campuses, entering their worlds, listening, and wrestling with their issues. In contrast, youth ministry that only seeks to press young people into the church-culture mold of adults focuses more on behavioral conformity rather than reaching youth where they are.
- 2) It assumes that youth ministry means **commitment to evangelizing the unchurched**. Many (if not most) youth ministry models focus on discipling church youth in an effort to keep from losing the children of the church. While this model is a necessary part of discipling the next generation, it often fails to wrestle with the missiological mandate to seek out the lost (Luke 15). Youth ministry as cross-cultural outreach is dedicated to training these church youth how to be missionaries within their own cultural contexts, but it also actively desires to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) even if the existing local church is apathetic about it.
- 3) It assumes that youth ministry means **commitment to integrating youth into the local church**. As such, the cross-cultural aspect of the ministry goes two ways. First, the youth worker seeks to understand the culture of youth – so that the Gospel can be presented in culturally understandable terms and images. Second, the youth worker seeks to understand the culture of the church into which these youth with their new cultural distinctives will be integrated. The youth worker as missionary becomes the bridge between two cultures.

## II. Youth Ministry As Missions

Youth workers undertake a variety of roles. As counselors, they address the acute and chronic problems that youth and their parents face. As teachers, they dedicate themselves to communicating God's truth. As

sociologists, they examine cultural trends, the media, and the other influences on youth and families. As theologians, youth workers endeavor to know God and make Him known to youth in concepts they can comprehend. As missionaries, youth workers become anthropologists, studying the culture that they are trying to reach, and then looking for ways to present the Gospel lifestyle in ways that truly connect with that culture.

Daniel Offer and his associates were among the first to recognize the need for worldwide youth ministry “missionaries” by identifying the phenomenon of a developing global youth culture. In *The Teenage World*, they propose a new paradigm that undermines the basic traditional assumptions of what constitutes a “culture.” Rather than the typical model which views culture as based on vertical-line distinctives of nationality, ethnicity and language, they identify a horizontal-line cultural distinctive based on the experiences of adolescent life. Offer and associates conclude that youth in Hungary, Israel, Bangladesh, Japan and elsewhere have more in common with each other (based largely on the impact of the media and marketing) than they do with the generations before them. A new youth culture has emerged globally based on the adolescent experience.

Although cultural anthropologists might see their definition of “youth culture” as superficial, Offer *et.al.* underscore the reality that youth leaders around the world must learn to identify and address the cultural realities of the young people. Youth ministry is not entertaining youth with high-energy pacifiers designed to hold them over until they enter into the adult world. Youth ministry is reaching out to a foreign culture in culturally relevant ways so that the youth culture encounters the Gospel as it speaks to them.

The cross-cultural aspect of youth ministry includes the following issues that we once reserved primarily for missionaries:

***Cultural adaptation.*** Abbot Mulago observed that to formulate and communicate the Christian message to people effectively, we must penetrate “the outlook, culture, and philosophy” of that people (cited by Ngindu Mushete, *African Theology En Route* (Orbis, 1981), p. 28).

The introduction of the term “youth culture” sets the tone for the missionary work of the youth worker. As soon as young people – with their distinctive music, symbols, attire, attitudes, worldviews, and norms – are identified as a distinct “culture,” the work of the adult youth leader becomes cross-cultural. He or she must investigate, understand, and then seek to adapt to the youth culture in an effort to reach them.

In this effort at cross-cultural adaptation, however, youth leaders learn that they, like missionaries, never lose their own culture (in this case, their adult culture). They can identify with the culture that they’re trying to reach, but they can never become identical to it – primarily because the most basic cultural distinctive of youth – namely, their age – is out of the youth worker’s control.

In youth work, leaders who try to *become* teenagers through dress, language, music, etc. are usually rejected by the youth. Young people want to be validated as culturally unique, but they don’t want adults becoming exactly like them. Youth leaders adapt and seek to come into youth culture (see the principle of “Incarnation” below), but they remain outsiders.

***Language learning.*** One of the principle expressions of culture is speech. This is why missionaries spend six months to three years learning their new languages. This is why missionary candidates read books like Mayer’s *Communicating Christ Cross Culturally* and Brewster’s *Language Learning and the Missionary Task*.

In youth culture, where youth create words to distinguish themselves from the adult world, an effective youth worker must learn to listen and ask

questions to discover the meaning of phrases, terms, new words, and unique usage.

Although a youth worker does not necessarily need to attend the Wycliffe Bible Translator's Summer Institute of Linguistics in order to understand adolescent jargon, the underlying principle of Bible translation must be applied to youth work. The youth worker must be able to show youth that God speaks their language.

While the degree of linguistic expression in the teenage world varies according to the sub-cultures of the youth world (i.e., some youth sub-groupings like urban gangs have virtual dialects and cannot even understand each other), language learning for the youth worker includes speaking the Gospel in understood concepts. It means modifying our own understanding of basic words according to what their meanings are to the youth. We must make a concerted effort to present the Gospel in language the young person understands.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of this language learning process in action occurred years ago in the Picadilly section of London. A husband and wife determined that they wanted to plant a church to reach out to the "Punk Rock" culture of the disenfranchised youth of that community. They dedicated themselves to learning "Punk Rock" dialect, and then applied it to their church. They re-wrote prayers in terms the youth used, and they translated the Gospel of John into Punk Rockese. The familiar language connected with the youth, and young people responded to the God who spoke their language.

***Sitz-in-Leben:*** a missionary modifies his or her work according to the cultural "life situations" of the disciple, especially those life situations which are beyond the disciple's control. Youth work's cross-cultural nature necessitates the understanding of the phase of life that youth are going through in all of its experiential dimensions. When we understand the world and world view of youth, we then look to address these issues in culturally specific and relevant ways.

Issues like family, puberty, sexuality, peer pressure, and the “in-betweenness” of life as a young person must play a part in how the leader presents the Gospel. For youth raised in single-parent homes, identifying God as a “loving father” may have no meaning. Discussing sexual purity must take into account the raging adolescent hormones that the older youth leader has probably forgotten about. Telling Christian students to stand up for their faith must be balanced by the reality of a world where Christianity is a minority religion and where acceptance by peers is an ultimate cultural goal.

Bruce serves as a missionary to urban youth, many of whom come from destructive homes. In a conversation with a 17-year-old who was obviously using crack cocaine, Bruce warned him: “Don’t you realize that by using crack cocaine you might die?”

The young man responded, “Yea... so what?” Bruce realized that the young man’s life situation made him willing to flirt with death. He had had friends die in street violence. He didn’t know his father. He had dropped out of school. Bruce discovered through that conversation that he needed to address the young man’s hopelessness before he could address his drug-related habits. He learned to modify his own work with this young man according to the cultural life-situation factors that were out of that young man’s control.

***Thought-processes/Decision Making Across Cultures:*** any missionary will tell you that cross-cultural adaptation’s most difficult adjustment is learning how other cultures think and make decisions. Any adult on a high school campus realizes quickly that teenagers do not think the same way as he or she does. Values, priorities and attitudes differ widely from those of an older person. A 30-year-old’s idea of “acceptable behavior” can be quite different from that of a 13-year-old’s.

Effective youth ministry across cultures means trying to understand what makes young people “tick.” The youth worker missionary listens to students talking to each other, reads their magazines or blogs, watches

their popular television shows, and goes to their movies. The youth worker becomes a student of the youth culture, always asking questions like, “How do young people make their decisions?”, “How do they determine priorities?”, “What do they value?” and “Why do they find this appealing?”

As a person in cross-cultural ministry learns to adapt, understand, and modify his own thinking according to the culture, so must the youth worker. By investigating decision-making and thought processes, the youth worker learns how to adapt a presentation of the Gospel and an understanding about the Christian life that can be understood by the contemporary adolescent mind.

***Ethno-musicology:*** missiologists can earn a Ph.D. in a specialty called ethno-musicology. As the name indicates, the discipline involves the study of a specific ethnic or cultural group and its unique music. The goal in ethnomusicology is to examine culturally specific musical expressions in order to discover windows into that culture which can then help the missionary connect the Gospel to the people. Ethnomusicology also assumes that music offers a unique way to reach the hearts of people.

Any youth worker knows ethnomusicology. She knows how to listen to the music the youth are listening to (no matter how foreign or offensive it might be to the her) in an effort to understand and get illustrations for communicating God’s love in phrases used by contemporary musicians. He knows that you reach “rock’n’rollers” with Rock music, rappers with “Rap” music, hip-hoppers with hip-hop music, and “Rave” music fans with Rave music.

Missionaries of one hundred years ago believed that reaching a culture meant translating Western hymns into local dialects, using Western instruments like pianos or organs – often while rejecting indigenous musical expressions and instruments as “pagan.” The error of these ways has been discovered over time, and now it is generally agreed that an

ethnic group is not truly “reached” until they start writing music in their own linguistic, instrumental, and rhythmic styles.

An effective youth worker already knows the fruitlessness of trying to force one culture’s music onto another’s. The songs in the hymnbook simply do not mix well with synthesizers and “Rave” rhythms. The best and most effective music communicates God’s truth in culturally accepted music styles.

***Equipping Indigenous Leadership:*** any student of modern missions will soon encounter the mandate to “train the nationals” because they’re the most effective in reaching their own culture. In the analogy of youth ministry to missions, the teenagers are the “nationals,” the people within the culture trying to be reached who need training on evangelizing and discipling their peers.

In world missions, one of the great crimes has been well-meaning missionaries who vastly underestimated the leadership potential of indigenous Christians to lead themselves. The same can be true in youth ministry. Youth leaders can underestimate young people’s ability to lead, and in so doing, they produce students who know how to be ministered to but who don’t know how to minister.

Effective youth ministers learn from the best examples of missionaries. They see themselves as equippers (according to Ephesians 4:11-13) who train the saints to do the work of the ministry. They equip young people to reach their own culture and to lead their own ministry. Rather than winning students for Christ and immediately removing them from that culture so that they can serve in the church, the equipping youth leader desires to send youth back out into a culture that students alone might be able to reach.

Youth leaders who truly equip youth as ministers in their own culture will face many of the same challenges a missionary faces in a foreign culture. First, the students may resist leadership – in the same way that first-

generation Christians preferred to keep the missionaries as their pastors rather than assuming the responsibilities themselves.

Second, the youth leader will suffer through the tension of giving away a ministry. In the same way that effective missionaries need to endure the frustration of watching fledgling leaders err and learn through their mistakes, the youth leader will need to let go of the reigns of the ministry to assist students' development as leaders.

Third, the youth leader may confront the same spirit of paternalism which missionaries demonstrate when they fail to entrust the leadership to national believers. The youth leader, desiring to look good or be successful (or under the pressure of doubting parents), may hesitate to delegate leadership to students because he or she thinks that they are not competent (which they may not be!). That same youth leader will struggle with letting go of personal control of the ministry in an effort to develop a new generation of leaders.

Finally, the youth leader desirous of "equipping the nationals", will need to learn how to change roles in the ministry – just like the effective missionary who endeavors to work himself out of a job. The youth leader will transition from the "person in control of everything" to the coach and co-worker of aspiring younger leaders. The young people may become teachers to the youth worker as they proclaim their opinions on what will work best in reaching their own culture. The youth worker may struggle with an undefined role, or with the role of being the source of other people's money – just the veteran missionary from the Western world who seeks to serve the church in the poorer world.

***Cultural Bridge-Building:*** one of the greatest challenges a missionary in a new country faces pertains to the actions of Christians who have preceded them. "Why did your forefathers make us sing Western songs?" "Why did they try to make us into 'cultured' Westerners?" Missionaries find themselves serving as bridges between two cultures, one of which (their own) often comes under fire.

In the same way, perhaps the greatest issue youth workers face in trying to reach out to youth culture is, “How much of our Christian expression is culturally defined versus biblically defined?” Teenagers, who are much less acculturated into the ways of the church, will not be afraid to ask questions:

- Why do we need to dress differently for church?
- Why do we use old songs written before 1950?
- Why do we need two different language services when we’re together in our classes at school?
- Why do we call ourselves a community when no adults ever want to talk with us and all they do is glare at us during their boring services?

When youth workers struggle for answers, it may be because we have no credible answer other than “Well we’ve always done it this way.” Youth workers find themselves becoming intermediaries – trying to explain youth culture to the adults and church culture to the youth. They become bridges between two cultures, trying to help both cultures see their own blindspots and evaluate their cultural traditions and values according to the Bible.

Perhaps the greatest tension here occurs in the realm of music. Can the Lord be praised with rowdy, electronic music? Do the magnificent words of ancient hymnody have no place in the spiritual lives of youth? Does God speak through contemporary choruses or only through 18<sup>th</sup> century hymns?

Youth leaders who wrestle with these questions find themselves confronting two distinctive worlds. They will need to confront youth with the reality that adults are part of the Church too, and as a result their music must be honored, but they will also need to confront adults with the reality that youth and their music are equally part of the church.

**Contextualization: a missionary in a pioneering outreach confronts a new culture. In the endeavor of spreading the Gospel, that missionary must decide what part of that culture is salvageable as a reflection of the common grace of God and what needs to be discarded as distinctively unbiblical or anti-Christian.**

This is contextualization – wrestling with the implications of the Gospel in a distinctive cultural context.

Paul illustrates it in Acts 17, the sermon on Mars Hill. He draws from the statues and poetry of the Greek people in an effort to contextualize the Gospel and communicate Christ to them. The need for such contextualization of the Gospel provoked Jose Chipenda, an African theologian to write, “A theology that does not take culture seriously is doomed to failure” (*African Theology En Route*, p. 71).

The urban youth worker Bruce (referred to above) confronted this in his outreach to gang members. As he brought young men together, he realized that many of them had joined gangs in an effort to create a family, a place where they belonged and received unconditional acceptance. For Bruce, the question of contextualization meant trying to preserve the “family” aspect of gang life while losing the violence.

Every youth leader asks this as they enter youth culture: what do I want these young people to become in Christ? What does it mean to be a 13 or 14 or 17 – year old follower of Christ? What aspects of their existing culture should be preserved? What needs to be challenged?

Youth ministry is a theological and a missiological discipline. It involves many of the skills once reserved for cross-cultural missionaries. The effective youth worker must see himself or herself as an evangelist to a foreign culture so that the Gospel can be presented in culturally relevant terms, concepts, and language.

Having concluded this, we now ask, “what does a cross-culturally relevant youth ministry theology look like?” What common theological foundations will every youth ministry build upon?

### **III. A Cross-Cultural Theology of Youth Ministry**

As a result of trying to identify key biblical principles (the Word) and integrate them with the realities of youth ministry in the world today (the World), a practical theology arises. Five biblical principles repeatedly emerge as the foundation of an international youth ministry theology.

Though the implementation of these principles varies widely in various countries and ethnic contexts around the world, the principles themselves transcend culture. Youth workers in diverse cultures need to ask, "How do these principles get expressed in our youth ministry? At the 'grass-roots' level, what impact will the theological implications of these principles have in our youth ministry practices and programs?"

**Principle #1: Incarnational Ministry.** The biblical foundation for youth ministry centers on the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He experienced our pain (Hebrews 5:8), resisted the same temptations that lure us (Hebrews 4:15), and demonstrated first-hand the love of God to us by offering His own life (Romans 5:8).

The incarnational model of Jesus Christ finds its greatest summary in Philippians 2:5-11:

- even though Jesus enjoyed all of the benefits of the eternal godhead
- He emptied Himself
- He became one of us
- He became even lower than us, coming as the example of a leader who serves (willing to wash the feet of His followers - John 13)
- and to add to it all, He went to the Cross, fully identifying with us in our sin so that He might absorb the punishment that our sin warranted under the absolute justice of God (I John 4:10).

The incarnation of Christ celebrated at Christmas sets the example for youth ministry. Ministry to youth, who - like us with God - are often disenfranchised, alienated, and alone, starts with the imitation of the incarnate Christ. Imitating the incarnation means that we go into their world, listen to their cares, attempt to understand their perspectives, join them in their pain. The incarnation of Christ establishes the model of compassion, loving others so much that we give ourselves on their behalf.

Much of church ministry builds on the assumption that young people must come into the adult world - worship and church tradition dominated by adult traditions, adult language, and adult concerns. Incarnational ministry reverses this and says, "We must go into the world of the young person so that we can first understand and then respond, attempting to communicate the love of God in ways and with words that they can comprehend."

Incarnational ministry towards youth means coming into their environment - family, social, educational, economic. It involves intense listening, and approaching youth "culture" as missionaries: seeking to understand and then looking for Gospel entry points. It means "contextualization" so as to communicate in culturally relevant ways.

Incarnational youth ministry goes beyond the limited "cognitive" approach to youth ministry, by which I mean the style of youth ministry which focuses on the communication of facts, imperatives, and moral truths. Incarnational youth ministry touches students' lives and says to them, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (see I Corinthians 11:1).

In light of the various uses of the "incarnational" concept in Christian discussions, it must be noted here that incarnational ministry - coming into the world of youth, for example - is *not* an end in itself. Incarnational ministry is intended to establish both relationships and understanding to enhance the effectiveness of *proclamational* youth ministry. Incarnational youth ministry fosters empathy *so that* the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving power can be communicated. Empathy as an end itself may foster

compassion, but it will not lead to changed lives in Christ unless the Gospel is proclaimed.

While this type of youth ministry is difficult within the church, it is often overlooked altogether outside the church. In an article entitled "Challenges of Youth Ministry", the Malaysia Evangelical Christian Fellowship attempted to stir readers to evaluate the challenges of truly incarnational youth ministry outside the church:

*"Youth work must be flexible and creative enough... to reach youth not normally reached by traditional methods of ministry - like juvenile delinquents, street youths, and abused, poor and unschooled youths." (summary report of the National Youth Worker's Conference, p. 2)*

A profound example of incarnational youth ministry involves Rebecca and Ramez Atallah in Cairo, Egypt. Over the past few decades, they took action with compassion towards the "garbage pickers" of that great city.

Describing her work in her message, "Loving the Urban Poor," at one of Inter-Varsity's Urbana Student Missions Conventions, Rebecca summarized,

"You may have noticed that most of the people I've spoken of tonight are young teenagers. Perhaps that is because an increasingly large percentage of the urban poor are under age 25."

She went on to describe incarnational youth ministry in action - which involves going into their world, looking for ways to meet both physical and spiritual needs, and presenting Christ by deed first, then word. She concluded with this exhortation towards incarnational ministry:

"<Like the garbage pickers of Cairo>, Jesus is also in the recycling business!... and He calls us to join Him in this adventure, to incarnate Him in the vast garbage areas of the world where others rarely dare or care to go.

This may be risky and costly, but it will lead to a joyful reason for living that we cannot find anywhere else! And you know, someday in heaven there'll be people whom we once helped out in some way, with whom we felt we were just 'sharing a cup of cold water', but through it all found God and His passionate, life-changing love for them. And there they'll be, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us before God, whole, singing His praises, and no longer poor or needy!"

**Principle #2: Holistic Ministry.** Following the principle of incarnational ministry comes the need for ministry to the whole person. Effective youth ministry in any culture builds on the multi-faceted nature of a young person's growth.

The description of Jesus' growth as a young man in Luke 2:52 surveys the gamut of holistic growth: Jesus increased in wisdom (intellectual growth), stature (physiological growth), in favor with God (spiritual growth), and in favor with man (social growth). All of these areas must be addressed if Christian youth ministry aims to serve the whole person.

*What are the implications of holistic growth?*

Jesus grew in wisdom: effective youth ministry means intellectual growth, which implies that we engage the minds of the young people we touch. In some contexts, intellectual growth means wrestling with theological and apologetic questions so that students do not get the message that Christian faith means (in the words of one American writer) "checking their brains at the door."

In some situations, intellectual growth means youth ministry that offers tutoring to help students academically. In other contexts, it means literacy training for students whose reading skills suffer. Some youth ministries expand their outreach through assisting students in their preparations for comprehensive exams. Others train youth in the skills of defending their faith in non-Christian settings.

In all of these situations, the goal is the same: to teach young people that Christian faith engages their minds.

Jesus grew in stature. This reference to Jesus' physical growth identifies the second aspect of holistic ministry. It affects youth ministry in several ways. It means making accommodation for youthful metabolism, providing opportunities for worship and learning that meet their energy level (in contrast to adult-styles of worship and learning, which often bore young people, not because they are unspiritual, but because these adult styles conflict with their physiological energies).

In crisis situations, accommodating youth in their physical growth means intervention to care for issues like hunger, malnutrition, and other maladies related to extreme poverty or to complex humanitarian emergencies (refugee situations, natural disasters, war, etc.)

In less-than-crisis situations, holistic youth ministry addresses issues like sexuality with honest and at times confrontative talk. Sexual activity increases amongst teenagers worldwide every year, resulting in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, to say nothing of the psychological impact.

As a result, Christian leaders are compelled to offer students biblical teaching and honest discussion about their own sexuality and sexual behavior. In many cultures, such frank discussions are still considered "taboo", but the biblical example (Song of Solomon as one illustration) combined with current reality demand that youth leaders and parents deal with these issues head-on.

One more example: bodily growth means confronting issues like smoking, drugs, and alcohol:

*"Youth worldwide are drinking at increasingly earlier ages. Alcohol is associated with all the leading causes of death among teenagers: automobile accidents, homicides, and suicides. It is also a major factor in unplanned pregnancies and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS. Six thousand young people die each year in the U.S. from alcohol-related causes."<sup>8</sup>*

Jesus grew in favor with God. We assume a focus on spiritual growth in Christian youth ministry. We work to produce followers of Christ who grow in their ability to pray, understand and apply the Scriptures, and speak in the world as witnesses to God's love.

But we must be careful to make sure this spiritual growth in students is real. In many Christian traditions, our measurements of spirituality for young people too often concentrate on what students know rather than on their character development. If they can complete the catechism, recite the verses, or "fill-in-the-blanks" on the test, we often deem these students as spiritually growing or mature.

Effective youth ministry looks to build both vertical and horizontal growth into the definitions of spirituality. Vertical growth involves their relationship with God - do they understand God's love for them? Can they respond to God in worship that goes beyond emotion alone? Have they understood what prayer is?

Horizontal growth refers to character-development and living out the Christian faith. Have we factored into our "curriculum" opportunities for service? Do we provide growth experiences which put young people into situations where they learn how to really trust God? Do they know how to

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara R. Thompson, "Global Binge," *World Vision* (December 96-January 97), p. 7.

articulate their faith to others who are outside of their own church or Christian sub-culture?

Jesus grew in favor with man. Most young people live lives dominated by their social network. From youth in affluent families and elite schools, to vagabond youth on the streets of Rio, Nairobi, or Manila, young people live in a social network.

Effective youth ministry applies the Gospel to that network. Social growth includes development in relationships:

- ... with each other, covering issues like teamwork, community, love and forgiveness;

- ... with the opposite sex, so that young men and women apply their Christian faith so as to treat each other with respect and humaneness;

- ... with their families, building what Mark DeVries calls *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, helping students relate to the most influential people in their lives: their less-than-perfect parents and their less-than-perfect families;

- ... with older adults, building bridges between separated generations;

- ... with society, addressing issues like racial tensions and reconciliation, disenfranchisement, empowerment, war and its effects, and unemployment.

Who has a truly holistic youth ministry that I can point to as an example? The answers almost always come in the poorest or most oppressed or most difficult contexts of the world. Why? Perhaps youth ministry to the more affluent does not try to be as holistic because families cover more of the growth areas. Or perhaps it is because material comforts have caused us to reduce Christian faith to a series of beliefs rather than a complete dedication to lifestyle. Wrestling with the answer to this question requires another paper.

Consider the "Christian Happy Home" in Chiang Rai, Thailand. This residential program for Thai youth draws students out of prostitution and drug addiction, offers them a new "family," trains them in literacy and job

skills (so as to give them a future in society), and exemplifies the restorative love of Jesus in the process.

Or consider Youth Alive in the townships of South Africa. For these dedicated staff, youth ministry means tutoring, racial reconciliation, family intervention, and job-skill training. They present a relationship with Christ with an emphasis on real-life, daily living, and no area of practical living is left untouched. In this ministry, students learn that faith affects relationships, economic priorities, and political perspectives.

A conference met to discuss holistic ministry in the city of Oxford, England. They focused their attention on holistic ministry towards the 100 million street kids in the world. Youth and children at high risk, like the estimated 15,000 youth under age 15 who fought in the war in Liberia (*World Vision* (December 96-January 97), p. 11) demand that effective youth ministry touch all areas of living. Holistic ministry is a must.

**Principle #3: Team Ministry.** From the interchange of Moses and Jethro in Exodus 18 to the teaching on spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12, the Bible affirms two fundamental truths about ministry: first, no one can assume all of the responsibilities of leadership. Jethro's comment, "the thing that you're doing is not good" applies to any who try to lead a myriad of people from a solo platform.

The second truth affirms the diversity in the Body of Christ. We each possess gifts and abilities by which we benefit each other and those outside the church. Yet none of us has every gift, thus requiring a healthy interdependence which requires that we work together.

This teamwork principle fits with youth ministry because the extraordinary diversity of young people requires a diversity of youth leaders. Building on this diversity has two positive results. In the lives of leaders, the team prevents any one individual from growing exhausted and discouraged. Like Joshua and Hur with Moses, we "hold up each other's arms" during the long battles that may come with caring for young people, especially those with chronic needs.

In the lives of youth, the teamwork principle benefits them because it presents them with a wide variety of personalities and lives to emulate. Rather than producing "photocopies" of one leader, the team enables students to learn from a wide variety of older adults.

The staff of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka exemplifies teamwork beautifully. Leaders are young and old, experienced (over twenty years) and novices. In a country torn in the past by civil war based on ethnicity, their leadership represents both ethnic groups working in unity. Several are "up-front" types, excelling in speaking and serving as very public figures in the Body of Christ. Others remain behind-the-scenes, content to let their partners shine, without any apparent jealousy or in-fighting. Some serve specifically as spiritual "pastors" to the group, while others focus their attention on micro-enterprise development and job-skill-training for poorer youth. Working together, they paint a picture of the answer to Jesus' prayer - that His disciples would be one so that others might know who He is (John 17:23).

**Principle #4: Maturity in Christ.** In the international realm, the youth ministries that thrive focus on the ultimate goal of influencing young people towards maturity in Christ. Like Paul with the Colossians, these leaders teach and admonish, encourage and exhort to the end that young people develop in Christ towards spiritual maturity (Colossians 1:28).

This principle highlights the biblical priority of Christlikeness - that every follower of Jesus Christ would grow to reflect His character and love in society. This principle also reminds us that we do not as our priority the goal of developing youth social clubs, nor young "moralizers," nor religious "finger-pointers" at society, nor Christian alternatives to every dimension of non-Christian culture.

While youth ministry can serve social, prophetic, and moral functions, our top priority remains influencing youth towards Jesus Christ. We work so that young people grow in Christlikeness as it relates to their stage in life. In other words, we are not trying to produce "adultified" youth who imitate the older members of the church in speech, dress, and musical tastes. Instead,

we desire to encourage youth to understand how following Christ influences them - at their age, in their culture (or sub-culture), in the face of their specific temptations.

In all of this spiritual development, we face the dramatic challenge of integrating youth back into the established church. Teaching spiritual maturity must include instruction on how every Christian is commanded to be involved in a local congregation; the challenge intensifies if churches are unreceptive to youth or offer young people no significant opportunities for involvement.

The Albanian Youth Network provides an exciting example of youth leaders devoted to maturity in Christ. In a country where almost every Christian leader could be described as “younger,” youth push the church ahead. They emphasize life-change in Christ and seek to address the Gospel to the realities of living in a post-Communist country still deeply affected by poverty. Youth carry spiritual responsibility for each other, helping each other press towards maturity in Christ as it applies to the church, the school, the community, and the workplace.

**Principle #5: Equipping Ministry.** Perhaps the greatest problem with church youth work around the world is viewing young people only as the "future" of the church, rather than effective participants *right now*. In many contexts, youth ministry means babysitting youth until they get to be adults, or keeping them out of trouble, or putting them into a "holding pattern" until they age some more, get married, and survive the obscurity of youth.

Such a perspective on youth violates the teaching of Ephesians 4:11-13. In this passage, Paul exhorts those who serve as pastors and teachers (a spiritual role that youth leaders play in the lives of the students they serve) to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ."

If young people have a personal faith in Jesus Christ, then the Bible calls them saints. They are not "saints of the future," but rather they are part of the fellowship of the saints *right now*.

If they are saints, then we leaders, who serve as "pastor-teachers" in their lives, must aim to equip them to do their ministry. How? By encouraging them to cultivate and use their own spiritual gifts. Why? So that they can fulfill their ministry potential so that the Body of Christ might be built up.

Equipping youth presents one of the greatest challenges of youth ministry, especially in cultures that assume that youth must remain silent, "seen but not heard" in the life of the church. In more traditional cultures, equipping youth for and involving them in ministry goes against the historic practices of giving all leadership to the elders of the church, a practice that causes young people to conclude that the church is not a place where they can be involved. Young people often view the adult-dominated church culture as either irrelevant to them or exclusive from them.

Equipping youth, in contrast, means helping them understand their gifts and responsibilities as full participants in the Body of Christ. It means, in the words of the Youth for Christ mission statement, "Discipling youth into the church."

In Buenos Aires, Argentina, the youth ministry of one of the largest Baptist churches in the country caught the vision of equipping youth. An active youth ministry helps young people develop spiritual gifts of teaching, preaching, worship-leadership, prayer, and counseling. With adult mentors assisting as "equippers", young people share a sense of true ownership in the church. Outside-the-church youth are drawn to the church as they see their peers in leadership. Within the church, those who are being equipped sit with elder brothers and sisters in Christ and formulate the vision for the church. Because the leaders of this congregation equip each "saint" for ministry (regardless of age), the Body of Christ is being built up - both qualitatively and quantitatively.

### **Conclusion:**

The practical out-working of cross-cultural youth ministry will be as varied as youth culture around the world. But, as the percentage of those under the age of 20 increases - both in the world and in the church - the most fruitful and effective youth ministries will demonstrate local, culturally relevant expressions of these five trans-cultural principles from the Scriptures:

- Incarnational Ministry
- Holistic Ministry
- Team Ministry
- Ministry Dedicated to Maturity in Christ
- A Ministry of Equipping

Vincent Donovan served as a missionary to the Maasai people of East Africa. He chronicled his own growth during that cross-cultural ministry in the book *Christianity Rediscovered*. Upon returning from East Africa, he discovered more cross-cultural ministry in his own community:

*“I realized that here on the home front I had left behind me one of the most exotic tribes of all – the young people of America. They have their own form of dress, symbolized by the omnipresent blue jeans; their own food, not always the most nutritious; their own music, which I confess, I do not understand; their own rituals enacted as they listen to their music in concert; their own language; their own values, remarkably similar from New York to California. Dress, food, music, ritual, language, values – these are the things that make up a tribe, or a sub-culture as they have been called. It is to that tribe, as they are, that the gospel must be brought”* (Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Orbis, 1988), p. vii)

The youth worker, missionary to the culture and sub-cultures of today’s youth, enters these cultures as Jesus entered the world – to identify, understand, and personally deliver the awesome message of God’s love.

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*character and ministry development of leaders in the under-resourced world ([www.daintl.org](http://www.daintl.org) ). Paul served as an adjunct professor in Global Christianity at Gordon College([www.gordon.edu](http://www.gordon.edu)) for more than 25 years and he has served as an Urbana/Missions Associate with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship since from 1999 until 2016 ([www.urbana.org](http://www.urbana.org)). Paul and Christie's ministry together focuses on encouraging leaders and developing "world Christians" in the church. During their twenty-two years of service on the staff of Grace Chapel (Lexington, MA) – where Paul is ordained – they coordinated over 100 short-term service teams that served all over the world. Through DAI, they now spend two to four months each year in ministry in other countries, mostly in the “Global South.”*

# **The Foundations of Theological Thought**

*Dr Peter Mead*

## **Abstract**

The study of theology is the great privilege of every Christian. The study of theology involves observation of creation, awareness of numerous disciplines, and particularly the study of Scripture, the broad field of theology and the history of Christian thought. Some will have access to vast libraries of relevant information, while others will have very limited opportunity to access the thoughts of others. But there is one factor that should be considered carefully by every theologian: our own underlying assumptions.

In this article we will see that there is a foundational layer of belief that goes deeper than the traditional stratification of primary, secondary and tertiary issues. It is the unseen layer of foundational assumptions upon which any belief system is built. Like any foundation, its importance is not determined by its visibility, but by the influence it has on all that is built on top of it. The foundation of every belief system is made up of answers to the four questions presented in this article: which god is God? What is it to be human? What is the problem between God and humanity? What is the solution to that problem?

## **Keywords**

*Theology*

*Gospel*

*Trinity*

*Foundations*

*Grace*

## **Article**

The study of theology is the great privilege of every Christian. Whether our study is restricted to personal Bible reading and church-based learning, or whether we have opportunity for formal instruction and research, it is a privilege to think about God and His dealing with humanity. The study of theology involves observation of creation, awareness of numerous general disciplines, and particularly the study of Scripture, the broad field of theology and the history of Christian thought. Some will have access to vast libraries of relevant information, while others will have very limited opportunity to access the thoughts of others. But there is one factor that should be considered carefully by every theologian: our own underlying assumptions.

It is possible to study theology at length and never evaluate our own underlying assumptions about key elements of the subject we are studying. There are many in the Christian community who learn theology, but never learn to think theologically, precisely because these underlying assumptions remain largely unengaged in our studies.

Christian beliefs are often stratified in three layers of importance, and rightly so. There are the primary beliefs around which we must agree if we are to have any Christian fellowship at all. The primary beliefs would include a high view of Scripture, the deity of Christ, God as trinity, salvation by grace alone, and so on. Where there is disagreement at this level, there is distinction between Christianity and some other cult or religion.

Then there are so-called secondary beliefs. These are matters addressed in Scripture that Bible-believing evangelical scholars disagree on, and therefore are not issues that should cause a break in fellowship. Secondary beliefs would include timing and mode of creation, details of eschatology, mode of baptism, church polity, and so on. It is important for Christians to study and come to their own conclusions on these matters, but disagreement is not a reason to doubt the faith of those with which we disagree.

Finally, there are tertiary or third-level beliefs. These are matters that are not directly addressed in the Bible that tend to reflect our own experience and preference rather than theological positions. Tertiary matters include style of worship in church, dress codes, positions on morally neutral matters, and so on. Differences at this level will tend to result in differing expressions of church, but do not determine theological trustworthiness on primary or secondary issues.

In this article we will see that there is another layer of belief that goes deeper than the traditional stratification of primary, secondary and tertiary. It is the unseen layer of foundational assumptions upon which any belief system is built. Like any foundation, its importance is not determined by its visibility, but by the influence it has on all that is built on top of it.

The foundation of every belief system is made up of answers to four questions. Everyone has answers to these questions, even if they have never consciously considered the questions. As we read the Bible and study theology, whether formally or informally, it is vitally important that this foundational level of assumption be engaged and shaped. In this article we will work through these four foundational questions and demonstrate their importance for Christian theology and life.

The four questions are sequential. Our answer to each one will have ramifications for what follows. The first question is the God question – which god is God and what is He like? As A.W.Tozer wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tozer, A.W., *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 1.

The second question relates to humanity – what does it mean to be made in God’s image? To begin our study by engaging the question of God and then the question of humanity is not original, of course. John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his introduction to his commentaries, followed this same sequence, as have other theological works.

The third question which naturally follows is this: what is sin? There is obviously a distance between God and humanity since we do not all have daily and plain sight interactions with God. So what is sin? What is the problem?

The fourth question is the complement to probing the problem, what is the solution. That is, what is grace? What is salvation?

These four questions are inherently theological, and at first sight do not appear to be unseen in Christian theological study. Surely to study theology is to study these very questions? Indeed it should be, but often there are foundational assumptions with all four questions that, if left untouched, will significantly hinder our understanding of the Bible and grasp of true Christian theology.

In this article we will seek to scratch the surface of each of these foundational questions and demonstrate the value of consciously pursuing answers upon which a healthy belief system can be built.

### **The First Foundational Question – God?**

Which god is God? What is God like? There is no more important question to probe than this. How we view God will influence how we understand humanity, the problem between humanity and God, and the solution to that problem. How we view God will mark every aspect of our entire belief system, and consequently, our life. Yet it is too easy for many people to make assumptions about the Christian God.

In most of the world, for most of history, people have known that there are many options on the menu when it comes to identifying the divine being. For most people the label “god” is not sufficient to identify the particular god being referenced. And yet a significant amount of Christian theology has come out of the West where a theological complacency is possible. For the past few centuries, in the West, it has been possible to assume that when people reference God they are referencing the Creator God defined in the Bible, the God who later sent His Son into the world to save sinners. With this complacency about identifying which God is being referenced has come a complacency with defining the nature of that God. Many people assume that certain facts about God are common knowledge – His infinite power, knowledge, timelessness, etc.

So assuming the identity of God is the God of the Bible has also meant assuming the nature of that God is generally defined biblically.<sup>10</sup> This is not the case. Even within the theological tradition of the West there has been a longstanding debt to Greek philosophical assumptions when it comes to defining the nature of the divine being. Ever since Thomas Aquinas sought to blend the biblical content of Christian theology with the theological categories of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Christian theology has tended to define God in line with Aristotle’s assumptions.

Irrespective of whether we ourselves are “Western” or whether we have studied Greek Philosophy, there is a widespread assumption that the first thing to be said of God is a reference to His power. This is typically followed by an elaboration on a list of abstract attributes before getting to God as Trinity in any meaningful way. Indeed, much of the theological tradition would tend to emphasize God’s unknowability, even though the Bible is clear that while no-one has seen God at any time, the only begotten God, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known to us (John 1:18). Is it possible that our theological assumptions about God can overwhelm the plain teaching of Scripture? It is not only possible, it is typically exactly what happens.

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<sup>10</sup> See Michael Reeves, *The Good God: Enjoying Father, Son and Spirit* (Paternoster, 2012), xiv.

Let us go back to the very beginning of the Bible, to Genesis 1. The creation account presents truths about God that are often hidden by a theological assumption that shouts louder than the text before us. That is, the theological traditional has educated us about the pre-eminence of God's power. So when we read the creation account, we will typically notice the power that is displayed in creation. God spoke, and it was. Creation *ex nihilo* is undoubtedly uniquely powerful. But what about the text? The text of Genesis 1 repeatedly points to God's generosity, the abundance of creation, the goodness of creation. God is good and abundantly generous, and by the end of the chapter, evidently relational too, as seen in the creation of mankind. Yet for some theologians, the only point to emphasize in Genesis 1 is the power of God.

Furthermore, how does God's role as lawgiver relate to His grace? A study of the text of Genesis 1 will lead the careful reader to recognize God's gracious giving comes before any restrictions placed on humanity. However, once we let a theological system direct our reading, many will determine that God's role as lawgiver is primary, with grace only subsequent to it.<sup>11</sup>

God's power or his role as lawgiver will tend to be elevated when a theological assumption derived from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is in play. While the term Trinity is a theological label that is not in the Bible, it is an attempt to describe what is revealed there of God's relational, triune nature. If we diminish the Trinity to a postscript on our systematic theology, then we will lose so much of what the Bible is revealing to us of God's nature.

The study of theology is preeminently the study of God Himself. To be good theologians we must make the answer to this first foundational question the quest that shapes our lives. Which God is God? What is He like? And we would do well to keep our Bibles open throughout this

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 137.

quest. Let us never assume that there is a sophistication in the theological discipline that merits an overriding of the biblical text.

### **The Second Foundational Question – Humanity?**

What is a human? This question follows on from the first question about God. We are essentially offered two answers to this question. Either humanity is the highest level of development in the random chance of evolutionary biology, or humans are made by God. The Bible makes it clear in the first chapter that we are made in the image of God.

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? That really depends on what God is like, our first question. If God is primarily defined by His power, or by His intellect, then we will likewise be defined by our power or intellect. So some will see the image of God as being essentially a matter of our capacity. Humans have the most developed ability to think abstractly and to take charge of their environment. This is not too far removed from a humanity made in the image of evolutionary theory.

Pushing into the first question further, what if God is essentially defined by His self-concerned pursuit of glory? Then humanity will likewise be defined by some philosophy of life wherein the pursuit of the individual is for the good of that same individual. Yet however we may couch this pursuit in theological terminology, surely our own spirits within us must witness that God is not, as Feuerbach put it, “a projection of our own ego on the clouds.”<sup>12</sup> To engage with the Bible is to be engaged by a God who witnesses to His own peculiar glory – a majesty that is marked by meekness.<sup>13</sup>

What if our study of the Bible leads us to a God who although exalted and worthy of all praise, is actually a God who humbly stoops to care for the lowly? (See Psalm 113) What if God is not perpetually grabbing glory,

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come* (Eerdmans:1982), 107.

<sup>13</sup> John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (IVP: 2016), 17. See the discussion on God’s glory in Jonathan Edwards thought in Michael Reeves, *The Good God*, 98-102.

but rather is forever giving of Himself gloriously in a loving others-centredness that can only ever seem alien to our fallen world? What if the great story of the Bible is God's giving of His Son for the benefit of the undeserving, swallowing death by entering into death, conquering evil not by sheer despotic force, but rather by self-humiliation on a Roman cross? (See Isaiah 25; Romans 5; Galatians 2:20-3:3; Colossians 2:13-14)

What would such a view of God imply in respect to the nature of humanity? While our world will always only reinforce a capacity-based view of human being – ie we are defined by what we own, what we know, how strong we are, how attractive we are, what we can achieve, etc. – the Bible offers an entirely different vision of God to us. Consequently, our view of humanity will need to change in line with our answer to that first question. If God is triune and inherently relational, as well as always other-centred and self-giving, then we are made in the image of a God entirely different than a projection of our fallen egos on the clouds. Humans are created to enjoy relationship with each other and with God. We are defined not by a measure of our own capacity, but by the richness of our relational bonds.

This view of humanity is supported by both experience and by Scripture. We know that the greatest achievements always feel empty if they come at the cost of key relationships. And we see even in Genesis 1 that the text points to our image-bearing as that of male and female united in relationship – diversity united by the Spirit into loving harmony. Even the language of dominion is to be understood in the context of the earlier description of God's abundant generosity and goodness, rather than under the imposition of later fallen versions of domineering dominion.

If we are not conscious of these foundational questions and pursuing rich biblical answers to them, then we will continue our theological pursuit while building on unquestioned assumptions more influenced by a fallen world than by God's revelation. In this world it is clear to all that humans must be understood in respect to their individual capacity, or their individual contribution to a collective whole, depending on the culture. In

this world it is clear that humans will be motivated by what they perceive to be best for themselves. In this world it is clear that humans make their own decisions and are therefore responsible in their autonomy for the actions they take.

Again, while we may never have studied the stoicism of Xeno, or the derivative work of Aristotle's translator, Boethius, our world has stoic assumptions in its very DNA. This is not because of pervasive study of philosophy, but because so much of this philosophy is an articulation of common sense – that is, of what makes sense in this fallen world, what we see all around us every day. We do not assume autonomy based on advanced Greek studies, but because it is the driving assumption from Genesis 3 onwards. And to that passage we must turn next.

### **The Third Foundational Question – Sin?**

What is sin? Apparently everybody knows the answer to this question. This might explain why so little consideration this question is given in many systematic theologies. For instance, in one respected Systematic Theology of over 2000 pages, only 2 pages are given to present the definition of sin.

When many are asked to define sin, they will typically answer with a list of sins. That is, with a list of specific manifestations of sin, such as murder, adultery, lying, stealing, etc. This is a typical list of what we might term negatively perceived sins of action. But what about sins without action – such as lust, jealousy, envy, etc.? And what about sins that are perceived positively, such as actions taken in pursuit of praise or recognition, self-righteousness, etc.?

In his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther wrote of the “black devil” and the “white devil” – that is, the work of the enemy to catch us in sin.<sup>14</sup> The “black devil” is all about promoting overt evil, while the “white devil” is much more subtle, and much more dangerous, as he stimulates us

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1-4* in Luther's Works translated by Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia: 1963), 40-41.

to autonomous acts of goodness. Sin is lawlessness, (1John 3:4) but sin cannot be only lawlessness. Jesus took the Old Testament Law and brought clarification at the level of motive (e.g. Matthew 5:27-28).

Jesus also shone a light on the insidious danger of self-righteous sin in Luke 15 where we see two lost sons, both alienated from their father, not wanting relationship with him. One son goes off into overt rebellion before being won back by the extravagant grace of the father. The other manifests his hatred in an entirely different manner, working religiously hard at home and yet ending the story obstinately refusing the father's extravagant grace. Virtue and vice are not opposite ends of the moral spectrum. They are opposite ends of morality in the fallen world, but praise God there is a new axis added by His grace – whether we are diligently virtuous or disgustingly vicious, both the religious and the rebel can find relationship with the Father because of His gracious initiative.

The human problem is not an inability to consistently keep the law. Our problem is that in Genesis 3 a vicious seed was sown in our hearts – that God cannot be trusted, that we should define what is good for us, that we find our own autonomy a delicious proposal. In Genesis 3 the problem began with a twisted view of God's goodness, and the devastation occurred through the incurved desires of the human heart. The deepest issue is not human behaviour, but human disaffection toward God and driving affection for self. The heart of the human problem is the human heart.

If we begin our quest for answers with a view of God as preeminently a powerful lawgiver, then we will see ourselves as autonomous lawkeepers who have failed to live up to a standard. This is almost true, but even those elements which are true here only add up to a very thin understanding of the human problem before God.

The Bible witnesses to a richer view of God – the triune God of grace who is relational in His very nature, and therefore a creator of a relational reality. The Bible witnesses to a richer view of humanity – we are not

autonomous self-starting individuals who must perform at a certain standard. We are created for so much more than that, but there is a problem.

The Bible witnesses to a more horrific view of sin. It is not mere lawbreaking. It is a heart-level despising of God and pursuing of so-called good for self. We do not just fall short once in a while, we are devastated by sin and dead in our sin – fully separated from the life of God and playing out a continual manifestation of that death in how we live our lives apart from Christ.

Sin is so much worse than we tend to realize. Thus we must seek biblical answers to these foundational questions. If sin is a greater problem than we realized, then God's solution will have to be suitably impressive in order to deal with the problem. Thankfully, it is.

#### **The Fourth Foundational Question – Salvation?**

It is a fundamental premise of medicine that the cure has to be both sufficient and relevant to the disease. It is no good to have a powerful cure for the wrong disease, or a weak cure for the right disease.

When we begin our theological quest with a view of God that is diminished and restricted to His role as lawgiver (question 1), then we will follow on with a diminished view of humanity as lawkeepers who have failed (questions 2 and 3), and end up with a view of salvation by God's grace as a solution of legal provision alone. That is, the gospel will increasingly focus on forgiveness alone.

The forgiveness of God for our sin based on the substitutionary atoning death of Christ is a glorious reality worthy of our full efforts in proclamation – the world needs to hear about it. However, the good news of what God has done in Christ is not restricted to forgiveness for sin. This cure, albeit glorious, would be inadequate for the depth of our problem.

A solution that is purely based on forgiveness will be very limited in terms of life transformation. When our gospel is reduced to a legal provision of forgiveness, then our theology will tend to focus on justification, but make inadequate provision for sanctification. Either we will celebrate God's kindness and entrust our spiritual growth to our gratitude for God's grace, or we will accentuate God's commandments and entrust our spiritual growth to our diligent and responsible efforts to mature. Either way, an inadequate view of God will lead to a self-focus in our pursuit of spiritual growth.<sup>15</sup>

When our theological understanding of the gospel becomes focused on the legal aspects of salvation, then we have indication that our foundational assumptions are inadequate. Our answer to question 4 (salvation) can be traced back to its headwaters in question 1 (God). But what if our answer to question 1 is not firstly that God is the lawgiver, but rather that God is Trinity? That is, that before anything was, God existed in loving communion. That God has a certain kind of spreading goodness that issues forth in both creation and redemption. That God is doing more in the gospel than pardoning the guilty.

Let us just step back one question to the problem of sin. Sin is not only about our guilt (the legal dimension). Sin is also about our hearts (the motivational dimension), and our lack of the Holy Spirit (the relational dimension). Any solution to the problem of sin has to deal with our guilt, our stone cold hearts and our lack of the Spirit.

In the provisions of New Covenant this is exactly what we find (Jer.31:31-34; Ezekiel 36, and various other Ezekiel passages; Isaiah 40-66, plus numerous passages in the Minor Prophets). The New Covenant is God's promise to deal with sin – that we might be forgiven fully, finally, freely, forever. This is glorious. And, there is more.

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<sup>15</sup> For an extended discussion of how our view of God relates to our approach to spiritual growth, see Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ* (Crossway, 2016).

The New Covenant is God's promise to transform our hearts. Instead of dead and cold hearts of stone that are unresponsive to the external pressure of God's Law carved in tablets of stone, now we have hearts of flesh that are alive and that have God's Law written on them – they are motivated.

The New Covenant is God's promise to more than restore our relationship with Him. Adam walked with Christ in the Garden of Eden and shared some level of fellowship by the Spirit. Now we are united to Christ in a spiritual marriage – we know the Lord.

In the New Testament (Covenant) we find a fully and targeted solution to the three-fold problem of our spiritual death. In the forgiveness, transformed hearts and indwelling Spirit we now have life, the life of God. God so loved the world that He gave His Son for us. Christ so loved us that He has given us His relationship with the Father. The Father and the Son have loved so much that through the cross the price has been paid that we might now receive the promised Spirit (see Gal.3:14).

The fourth question is really the question of God's grace – is it sufficient for the task at hand? A close study of the Bible will demonstrate that God's grace is more than sufficiently abundant to save sinners like us, and to grow us into the people God has called us to be. The fourth question is not just about salvation, that is, conversion. It is about salvation to the full – how we get in to God's family, and how we get on in the process of spiritual growth. As Paul argued in Romans and Galatians, it is by faith from first to last, we must never turn from Christ back to our own efforts (Romans 1:16-17; Galatians 3:1-3).

### **Conclusion**

The Christian life is a life to be lived in sweet fellowship with the Son to whom we have been united by the Spirit. It is a life to be lived with our gaze fixed on the One who reveals the Father's heart to us. Because we live in a fallen world we will always feel the pull to set our gaze on false alternative deities. Because we still live in a fallen flesh we will always

feel the pull to set our gaze on ourselves. But if we become alert to the biblical teaching on these four foundational questions, then we should find a better alternative to my idols or my ego.

There is a richness to these four questions. God's grace is wonderfully powerful and gloriously targeted at our profound needs. Our sin is so much worse than we ever realized – it is not just about some guilt on my record. Our sin is about overwhelming guilt, stone cold hearts, rebellious self-reliance and spiritual death. Our problem is worse than we ever imagined, but God's grace is greater and deeper than we ever dared to dream. And these two questions flow from the first two.

We humans are not designed to be self-defined. We were never intended to be the sum of our individual capacities (knowledge, power, skills, etc.) We all know that we were designed for something far more profoundly relational. Despite all that the world tells us, we know that the greatest joys are always relational joys, and the fallen world only accentuates that the greatest hurts are always in the context of relationships. If we are so relationally wired, then something must be wrong with a view of God that has Him as distant, unknowable, a self-concerned dispenser of law concerned only with His own fame.

As we study theology, both formally and personally, let us pray that God will give us eyes to see the wonder of who He is. May we have eyes to see the glorious love of the Trinity as we read the Bible, as we study theology, and as we engage life. Let us pray that the revelation of the heart of the Father in the Son by the Spirit will so stir our hearts that we will gaze neither at idols, nor at self, but always more and more at the beauty that can only be found in our God.

Our study of theology may be extensive, it may be profound, it may even be in some ways sophisticated. But it will never be stronger than its foundation because there is no more important question than the God question – what is God like? – and the three other foundational questions that flow from that.

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# **Some Ways Christians and Muslims Can Work Together**

## **For Peace and Harmony in the Nations**

*Dr Bruce Nicholls*

### **Introduction**

I love my Muslim neighbors and I respect the truths in the Qur'an and in Sharia law, but I recognize that some of the ideological differences between our religious faith systems are irreconcilable. These should not, however, lead to acts of violence between Christianity and Islam. I am committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in society, and therefore I approach the problem of harmony with a Christian bias. This is inevitable. It is an illusion to think that I or my partners in dialogue can stand above or outside the present conflicts. We come to listen and respect each other and to seek that together we can find ways, however small, to reduce the violence in our midst and to work for peace and harmony. Although I have had a long relationship with Hindus I am limiting my contribution to the Muslim-Christian dialogue. This is an issue for Christians in Sri Lanka where the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil communities, and the religions that motivate them, did not end in 2009 with the end of the civil war. It has only entered a new phase.

We are living in a world of escalating violence, with the destruction of life and property and with the suffering of an appalling number of people — people who are forced to emigrate or become powerless refugees, a world of women and children being abused and many becoming sex slaves, of millions of children dying of poverty and water-borne diseases. Greed and

the lust for political power and economic control by religious minorities dominate our world. Terrorist acts by the radical and fundamentalist Islamic minorities, motivated by both political power and religious zeal, have become global.

As religious and political leaders we must accept our responsibility to become agents for peace and harmony in our societies. Let the sense of accountability of Harry Truman, the president of the USA in the climactic years of World War II, be our inspiration. The plaque on his desk read: “The buck stops here.” But at the same time we must identify with the prophetic vision of Martin Luther King, “I have a dream...” and let the compassion of Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela inspire and motivate each of us. We are accountable to Almighty God, to our people, and to ourselves, whether we live and work in Europe or in the Middle East or in Asia. Jesus’ farewell message to his disciples was “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

I want to outline five components of our Christian call for Christian peace and harmony in the nations.<sup>16</sup>

## **I. A Call for Freedom of Conscience**

*A case study:*

A global Charter of Conscience was launched in the European Parliament in Brussels in September 2012. Its purpose was to protect and promote freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It aimed to bring religious tolerance into the centre of public life in accord with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN General Assembly, Paris, December 1948, which states:

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<sup>16</sup> I have adapted this unpublished paper from one I prepared for the Area Study Centre for Europe, of the University of Karachi, for the Director of the Centre, Dr Uzma Shugaat. It was prepared for in international conference on “The issues of Religious Harmony in Europe, South Asia and the Middle East, October 2014. My paper was entitled, “Some Ways Forward for Religious Harmony in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.”

“Everyone has the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either in community with others or in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observation.”

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion are the inalienable human rights of every human being. Conscience is the innate understanding of the difference between right and wrong. A good conscience enables one to live at peace with God, one’s neighbor and oneself. A sensitive conscience enables us to relate general rules to particular issues. For Freud and behaviorists, conscience is only the internalizing of the norms of society and of parents in particular. It rationalizes and excuses bad behavior on these grounds. For the religious person, Christian or Muslim, conscience is a gift of God, innate in our creation. It is an integral element of human personality. Christians see conscience as integral to being “created in the image of God.” (Gen. 1:27).

Dr Isma’il Al-Faruqi appeals to this element common to all humanity as *din al-fitrah (religio naturalis)* which is already fully present in man by nature. He says, “It is innate, as it were, a natural constituent of humanity. The man who is not *homo religiosus* and hence not *homo Islamicus* is not a man. This is Allah’s branding of His creation, namely that he has endowed all men as his creatures, with a *sensus numinous*, a *fitrah*, with which to recognize Him as Allah (God), transcendent Creator, ultimate Master, and One.”<sup>17</sup> We agree that all are *homo religiosus* but not all are *homo Islamicus*.

Paul expressed the innate knowledge of God as “For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature

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<sup>17</sup> Isma’il Al-Faruqi, *International Review of Mission*, Vol LXV, No. 260, October 1976. He was formerly professor of Islamics at Temple University, Philadelphia, USA,

— have been clearly seen, being understood by what has been made, so that men are without any excuse.” (Romans 1:20). He then added “They [non-Jews] show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” (2:15).

Because we are all weak and have gone astray (or in Christian terminology we are sinners who are in rebellion against God), our conscience is not an infallible guide. It can easily be manipulated to satisfy human greed or selfish ambition. Conscience must be tested against divine law, as revealed in the givenness of Scripture, the Qur’an or the Bible. Conscience needs to be educated if it is going to be both a reliable judge of right and wrong and a guide to right behavior. Education is all important. Those who teach in the *madrasas* or primary state and religious schools have an awesome responsibility to educate youth in the laws of right and wrong and how to live with a good conscience. Teaching the values of truth and righteousness from preschool centers through to universities is fundamental in preparing each generation to live and work for peace in society and to develop respect for the views of others. Wrong education engenders arrogance and self-centered pride and encourages hate and rebellion. It turns youth with the potential for good into terrorists. The leaders in the mosques and in the churches need to be held accountable by their own communities for their teaching.

Faith in God, the lawgiver, and a good conscience will enable believers to denounce the injustices of their societies, including the greed of the rich at the cost of the poverty of the poor, the oppression of women in family and in society, the reckless destruction of the environment and the evils of terrorism and civil war. Who will speak with prophetic courage for those who are suffering in the tragedies of our present crises in Syria and Iraq, or Israel and Palestine? Our hit-and-run global politicians are no prophets for justice. Round-table negotiations will not produce lasting results unless there is a change in the hearts and minds of the negotiators. When western politicians, obsessed with liberal democracy, impose it on people who only know the rule of powerful leaders, it shows an ignorance of

history. The guided democracy of present-day communist China might be a better model.

The harshness of punishment in Shari'a law shares the harshness of the Mosaic punishment by stoning. It will not restore justice. In the *Injil* Jesus taught a better way. To be angry with someone without just cause was murder; to look lustfully upon a woman was adultery. Jesus urged his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them (Matthew 5:21-44). In summary, social justice will not be accomplished without a change of heart and mind.

## **II. A Call to Restore Honor**

*A case study:*

On September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave a lecture at Regensburg University, Germany. He quoted an unfavorable remark about Islam made at the end of the 14th century by Manuel II, the Byzantine emperor. As the English translation of the Pope's lecture was disseminated across the world, many Islamic politicians and religious leaders protested against what they saw as an insulting mischaracterization of Islam. Their global response was immediate and violent. Mass street protests were mounted in many Islamic countries. Churches were damaged and Christians killed. An apology was demanded. A month later 38 Muslim scholars sent an open letter to the pope, correcting his error in misrepresenting Islam. The Vatican replied that the pope's intention was to call for cooperation and dialogue with Muslims.

A year later, on 13 October, 2007, 138 Muslim scholars sent an open letter to world Christian leaders entitled, "A Common Word Between Us and You." It was sponsored by the Royal Aal al-Bayr Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan. Scholars have disagreed as to the motive and purpose of the letter. Christian leaders, mainly evangelical Protestants, welcomed the letter and wrote a positive response, "Love God and Love Your Neighbor — a Christian response to A Common Word Between Us." Over 300 leaders of institutions, churches and missions, nearly all from

USA and Europe, signed it, hoping this was the beginning of reconciliation between Christianity and Islam.

The Barnabas Fund (UK) took a different view, however, believing it to be an example of Muslim *da'wa*, directed towards Europe and America. They said what appeared to be common ground, “in reality turned out to be a missionary pamphlet extolling Islam and denigrating the very heart of Christianity.”<sup>18</sup> Whatever view we take, it does call for tolerance, and restraint in violence. At the same time, the flow of correspondence and violence shows that the issue is both ideological and societal.

This particular issue is only one of many where whole communities have responded in violence to the words or actions of one person. Other examples include the Rushdie affair and the publication by a Danish newspaper in September 2005 of twelve cartoons lampooning Muhammad. As a result, ambassadors of several Muslim countries protested, and complaints were made to the UN. Christian minorities and western embassies were attacked.

Again, in Pakistan the passing of the law against blasphemy has led to much abuse of justice and violence against the Christian minority communities.

On the other hand, violence in the west between religious communities has normally been settled by dialogue between political leaders and appeal to the courts. This was seen in Ireland in the reduction of sectarian violence between Catholics and Protestants. The same is urgently needed within Islam, between Sunnis and Shi'as and now Kurds.

A common cause of inter-religious violence in Asia and the Middle East is the culturally accepted value of “honor and shame.” This historic value goes back to the laws of Moses, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” and the punishment is as severe as stoning. Honor is the

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<sup>18</sup> Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Challenge of Islam to the Church and Its Mission*, (McLean, Va., Isaac Publishing, 2008) 123

maintenance of reputation, dignity and respect by whatever means, whether legal or illegal. Shame is a social phenomenon involving humiliation and the loss of face. When a person converts from Islam to another religion, the whole family is shamed and they feel deeply that honor must be restored —by physical violence if necessary. “Honor killing” by shamed family members, is common.

The feelings of honor and shame are inevitable in human relationships. The way they are dealt with need to change. This has become a major issue in the relationships between Christians and Muslims. One way forward is for the accused to make every effort to meet the accuser, directly if possible, or if not through a mediator, in order to listen and respond with dignity and if possible with love for the other. Appeal must be made to the civil courts to adjudicate above the religious courts. Also the courts must hold the police accountable for their action, or the lack of it. This is essential in Pakistan where apostasy and blasphemy laws are being abused. It is also true in countries where Hindu, Buddhist or Christian abusers are not being dealt with justly.

The dynamic relationship between honor and shame is a deep-seated factor in the present conflict in the Middle East. The Arab-Israel conflict needs to be understood in the context of honor and shame. In 1948 the Arabs experienced intense shame over losing Palestine which had been their possession for centuries. Then their overwhelming defeat by Israel in the wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973 intensified that humiliation. The PLO were willing to negotiate, but not the Hamas of Gaza. In each case Hamas knew that the military victory was with Israel, but they have kept up their rocket fire knowing that their resistance would win global and media support in condemnation of Israel, and above all that the UN would secure a resolution against Israel and that Europe would impose harsher sanctions against her. They have seen media and political warfare to be more powerful than tanks and bullets.

Similar case studies in the conflicts of Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, and now Syria/Iraq, point to the determining influence of honor and shame. The

way forward is to appeal for patience, mercy and forgiveness. Public apologies are humiliating but without them there is no way forward. Only then is there hope of restoring honor and negotiating the restitution of human rights and of property.

### **III. A Call for Responsible Dialogue**

*A case study:*

Dr George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, who had the oversight of 77 million Anglican Christians, gave an address entitled “The Challenges Facing Christian-Muslim Dialogue” at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1996. He said: “The fact is that both Islam and Christianity are missionary faiths. We make absolute claims and we are anxious to promote our faiths. This is integral to both our religions, and there is nothing to apologize for. Muslims are commanded in the Holy Qur’an to ‘act as witnesses for mankind,’ just as Christians are commanded in Holy Scripture to ‘go into the world and preach the Gospel.’<sup>19</sup>

In their religious faith and daily life, Muslims and Christians have many things in common, but they also have some areas of belief where they sharply differ. The issue we all face is how to enable people in our own community to live together in peace and harmony with those who disagree with us. Most ordinary Muslims and Christians, especially those who live under stress as minority communities, want to be able to live their lives in security and prosperity in order to protect their families and ensure their children have the best possible education and lifestyle. Both ordinary Muslims and Christians seek to be creative in their homes and workplaces, to be rational in their judgments, and to be honest and compassionate in their relationships. They agree that people are created by God to be his *khalif* or vice-regents on earth to worship and enjoy the sovereign

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<sup>19</sup> George Carey, “The Challenge Facing Christian Muslim Dialogue,” Al-Alzar University, Cairo, 4 October 1996, cited in Colin Chapman, “Time to Give up the idea of ‘Christian Mission to Muslims’ in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, July 2004, vol. 28.

Creator and to care for and restore the environment for the good of all humanity.

We are by nature insatiably religious. We pray daily to God and we want to know his will. We are willing to make sacrifices to defend what we believe is necessary for salvation.

At the same time all human beings are self-centered, boastful, greedy, have gone astray from the path of right living, and have rebelled against their Maker. The Apostle Paul said, "God's anger is revealed from heaven against all the sin and evil of people whose evil ways prevent the truth from being known.... they say they are wise, but they are fools; instead of worshipping the immortal God they worship images made to look like mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles." (Romans 1:18, 22, 23 -- Today's English Version.) In their waywardness, all people are idolaters and need to be rescued from this evil.

Muslims believe that Adam, the first man, and his wife Houwa (Eve), though created pure and free, were tempted by Satan to go astray. They made a mistake and turned away from the right path. Then they repented and Allah forgave them (S2, S37). By contrast, Christians believe that Adam and Eve rebelled against the law of God and sought to make themselves equal to God. They became sinners and their sin was passed on to all future generations. Hence Paul says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Christians believe that only Jesus through his death can save them. This different perception of our human dilemma is the watershed between us. It must be addressed if we want to have peace in our societies.

The heart-rending escalation of violence in the Middle East and in Asia cannot be solved by military action. The leaders will only be able to negotiate for a lasting peace when injustices are put right. Politicians must be helped to acknowledge that their approval of violent actions are sins against God. They must be pressed to humble themselves, put aside their shameful past, publically apologize for their cruelty, and ask for

forgiveness. To do this will be a miracle! Only the mercy and grace of God can change the human heart and mind.

Christians feel a closer identity with Muslims than with most other religious communities/. We share many beliefs and practices, despite our irreconcilable differences. The Qur'an acknowledges Musa (in Tawrat or Torah), Dawud (in Zabur or Psalms) and Isa (Jesus, in the Injil or Gospels.) These are true prophets, speaking the Word of God. (S.3:113; 5:43), These texts belong to the Jews and Christians, the *ahl al-Kitab*, or "people of the Book." Christians reject the accusations of *Tahrif* (falsification of the biblical text), the principle of *naskh* (abrogation) and the lack of *Tawatatur* (reliable transmission).

Other major commonalities and disagreements between us concern the person of *Isa al-Masih*, Jesus the Messiah, his death and resurrection and his return on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an has a high view of *Isa*. He is a Word from God and a Spirit from God. He was without sin. He was a true prophet of God. The Hadith goes beyond the Qur'an in its own interpretation on the nature of Christ and in declaring he will return as a Muslim on the Day of Judgment.

Understanding the principle of *credo ut intelligam* ("I believe so that I can understand") is crucial to our relationships. This principle was first articulated by Augustine (354-430 AD), and then by Anselm (1033-1109) who added, "I am not seeking to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand." This principle rightly argues that we can only understand the perplexities of a religion from the inside. We have to believe and belong before we can understand. This means that Christians can only understand the distinctives of the Islamic faith by becoming Muslims. Likewise, for Muslims to understand the apparent contradictions of Christian belief they must first convert and become disciples of Jesus Christ. Only then will they be able to understand the deity of Christ and the necessity for his death upon the cross.

What, then, is the hope for dialogue between Muslims and Christians? This becomes possible only when, first, partners in dialogue are able to

respect each other as equal persons; secondly, when they see dialogue as an opportunity to learn from each other, to reduce and overcome the unnecessary misunderstandings which history has accentuated and culture affirmed; and thirdly, when partners can respect irreconcilable differences and yet work together for the common good of all people, especially in times of national disaster.

Dialogue is needed at all levels of society. Dialogue between academics and between scholarly organizations is not enough. Further, dialogue between individuals is not enough to bring peace and harmony. It must be between local communities, and between the church and the mosque. It must also be between warring nations, and ultimately at the international level of the United Nations and its subsidiary organizations. Responsible dialogue for truth and justice is a necessary step in the way forward.

#### **IV. A Call to Da'wa and to Mission**

*A case study:*

Carl Medearis, an American who lived in Beirut, Lebanon, for twelve years, worked with international government and business agencies and was an advisor to the US government on Arab affairs. He was known for his openness and friendship with his Muslim neighbors. He was invited by a Salafi Muslim to visit him in his home in Tripoli, Lebanon. On a pitch dark night he went down winding lanes and with two friends arrived at the door, to be welcomed by his host. Inside he was shocked to see about fifty men who looked and dressed exactly like Osama bin Laden. All had vowed to live as Islamists. They had invited these three Christians to debate the differences between Christianity and Islam. Within minutes the conversation turned to talk about Jesus. They listened for three hours while Carl talked about Jesus Christ, his life with the poor and oppressed, his teaching on the law and the love of God, his death and resurrection. He finished by saying he loved them and he knew God loved them too. The consequence was unexpected. The terrorists kissed and hugged the visitors

and the leader walked them to the street with these words in classical Arabic: “You have broken down our stereotypes of what a Christian looks like and how they think. Would you please come back so that we can talk more about Isa al-Masih. We love you and what you stand for.”<sup>20</sup>

From their inception, both Islam and Christianity have been missionary faiths. The Prophet Muhammad sent messages from Medina to the rulers of Abyssinia, Egypt and Persia, giving them the opportunity to accept Islam or face conquest. Within a hundred years of Muhammad’s establishing his rule in Medina, Islamic forces and missionaries had conquered the whole of the Middle East and North Africa and spread from Spain to India.

The Crusades began as a result of Islam’s conquest of the Levant, Palestine and Jerusalem, the holy city for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Over the next two centuries the Crusading movement degenerated into a political and abusive force, only to be defeated by Saladin in the battle of Hattin, near Tiberias, in 1187. The Crusades have been rightly condemned by each following generation of Muslims.

A contemporary turning point in redefining *da’wa* was when Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from exile in France to overthrow the corrupt and secularized rule of the Shah and to establish Shari’a law over the nation. This revolution gave Islam new confidence and a sense of destiny. The tragic event of 11 September 2001 in New York awakened Islam to its call to *da’wa*. Criticism of this act of terror has inspired Muslims to defend Islam, to legitimize jihad and to make *da’wa* the personal obligation of every Muslim. The social media is being used by al-Qaeda and now by IS to globalize Islam and neutralize criticism. Islam has never considered itself a minority movement.

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<sup>20</sup> Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians and Jesus* (South Bloomington, MN, Bethany Publishing House, 2008) 128-129.

Both Islam and Christianity have global visions for their faith. Islam envisages the *summa*, the community of believers, enveloping the whole world. This is to be achieved through shari'a law. Where resistance is experienced, da'wa depends on the aid of jihad which ranges from a spiritual struggle for moral purity to military action. The radical Islamic movements all have the same goal, but they differ in their interpretation of how this is to be achieved. For some, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, it is working through the democratic process. Others, such as al-Qaeda and IS, see it as a call for immediate violence. An example of working within democracy is the steady islamizing of the largely Christian states of Sarawak and Sabah in Malaysia and Papua in Indonesia by providing better education for children, creating employment through development and influencing political elections. At the level of the United Nations, the member states of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are pressing for the recognition of the 1990 Cairo Declaration of Human Rights which they claim has higher authority than the 1948 Charter of Human Rights. They want the latter declaration to replace the former Charter.

On the other hand, Christian missions have focused primarily on education, hospital and rural health programs. In most of the larger cities of India the most prestigious university colleges are Christian in origin. Because of the widely-held Christian belief in the separation of church and state, Christian missions have generally failed to influence the spheres of political and economic power. Is this true in Sri Lanka?

Growth through suffering has been a major factor in the expansion of Christian missions. Jesus taught his followers, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." (Matthew 5:11) Fortified by this hope, Christians have been willing to suffer abuse, persecution and even martyrdom.

Osama bin Laden, a symbol of ruthless Islamism, warned Christians to convert, accept the status of *dhimmi*, or die. In many cases, the more

strident the Islamists have become, the more accommodating the West has become, and more Christians have died as martyrs.

It is clear that Islamic *da'wa* and Christian mission both have the goal of globalizing their faith and both are succeeding. Large numbers of conversions are taking place from Christianity to Islam, and vice-versa. This is a sign of strength, not weakness, of a depth of conviction about truth and life. Tolerance and inclusiveness lack the direction and power to change the world. They have little impact on a robust dialogue about agreements and disagreements. Only the love which has its source in God can overcome their hate and disunity and move the world towards peace and harmony,

## **V. A Call for Moderates to Unite**

*A case study:*

In June 2011 Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, the prime minister of Malaysia, addressed the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, UK, where he said: "It is for people who cherish moderation, dignity and justice everywhere to stand firm, t stand proud, and to dissipate the pool of terror and deny those at the margins a foothold in this middle ground... modernization and moderation must go hand in hand."<sup>21</sup>

Then in preparing for the international conference on the "Global Movement of Moderates in Pursuit of an Enduring and Just Peace," held in Kuala Lumpur in January 2012, the prime minister, stated: "In this period of great calamity, where acts of extremists reign supreme, and somewhat capture the imagination of the masses, a concerted effort involving both state and non-state actors is imperative. The threats facing our civilization at the moment recognize no geographical, religious or cultural boundaries. It is time for moderates of all countries, of all religions, to take back the centre, to reclaim the agenda for peace and

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in *Forbes Asia*, July 2011, 14

pragmatism, and to marginalize the extremists.”<sup>22</sup> Yet in his own country, Razak is under great pressure from the extremists to make Islam the only religion of the nation.

However, these calls from the prime minister for moderates of all countries and religions to reclaim the centre stage and marginalize the extremists is a necessary step if peace and harmony are to be established everywhere.

The recent events in Egypt are a sign of hope as well as of caution. In January 2011, before the Arab Spring, Dr Tawfik Hamid, formerly of Al Azhar University in Cairo, and 23 leading scholars in Egypt published a document advocating the renewal of Islam with a new understanding of jihad, the payment of jizya tax by non-Muslims, the separation of mosque and state, and the place of women in politics.<sup>23</sup>

During the one-year rule of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from June 2012, the president reneged on his election promises, gave himself dictatorial powers, and tried to enforce Shari’a law on the whole nation, including the large Christian minority. The economy further collapsed. Disillusioned moderate Muslims, supported by Christians (predominantly Coptic Orthodox) protested, across the nation. The army, rightly or wrongly, intervened. The president was deposed, the Muslim Brotherhood banned, and a new constitution based on the freedom of religion was introduced. According to a BBC report, an estimated 30 million citizens —Muslims and Christians — came into the streets, not to protest but to rejoice together. This is a moving example of moderates uniting for the overthrow of the extremists.

Members of the shamed Muslim Brotherhood later expressed their humiliation and shame in defeat by attacking Christian churches and killing Christians. On 14 August 2013 they destroyed 85 churches and

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<sup>22</sup> Prospectus of contents of the international conference, page 3

<sup>23</sup> <[www.tawfikhamid.com](http://www.tawfikhamid.com)>

their institutions. One such act of revenge was the destruction of the evangelical church of Beni Mazar in el Minya, Upper Egypt. Its community centre which provided care for all in need, was destroyed. The following Sunday the Christians gathered together in the ruins of their church to praise God, and they publically forgave the rioters who had wronged them. This act of forgiveness of a suffering people illustrates the costliness of the pursuit of an enduring and just peace. The success of moderates depends on each religious community being inspired by their religious convictions but being willing to withhold them in order to achieve a common objective.

Times of extreme political oppression and religious persecution come in waves. After 70 years of harsh communist rule in China and Russia their governments collapsed internally, although their nationhood was retained. Marxist ideology failed to hold the support of the people. At present radical fundamentalist movements in the Middle East and Asia appear to be widening their control, but eventually we can expect them to fragment internally as terrorists kill one another. The present extremist movements in the Middle East and Asia are religious motivated but driven by a political lust for power and absolute control. They will eventually destroy each other.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo warns, “Unless Muslims make a stand and reclaim Islam from the Islamists, then future generations of Muslims will adopt a political ideology as their religion.”<sup>24</sup>

The call is for moderate Muslims and Christians to work together in unity for peace and harmony to be established in our suffering world. The challenge for Christians is, however, to purposefully dialogue with their Muslim neighbors without compromising their evangelical faith. In Sri Lanka this is a crucial issue for research. Your several theological colleges must give a lead to the churches if change is to take place.

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<sup>24</sup> *Pulling Together to Defeat Terror*, Quilliam Foundation, 2008. Cited in Patrick Sookhdeo, *Fighting the Ideological War*, 37

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