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## ABOUT THE JOURNAL OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

*The Journal of Global Christianity* seeks to promote international scholarship and discussion on topics related to global Christianity. The journal addresses key issues related to the mission of the Church in hope of helping those who labor for the gospel wrestle with and apply the biblical teaching on various challenging mission topics.

Understanding that there is a lack of trained and theologically educated leaders around the world to lead the Church and prepare future leaders, JGC targets an audience of pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers. The educational level of our audience ranges from those who have completed a bachelor level degree to those who have completed a master level as well as those in school preparing for ministry. We realize that there are theology students, professors, and other scholars who will read and take interest in the content of this journal, but our main focus is on those working with the global church or those who are considering work with the global church. The journal assumes a high level of education among its audience but is not strictly academic.

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Articles should generally be about 4,000 to 7,000 words (including footnotes) and should be submitted to the Managing Editor of *The Journal of Global Christianity*, which is peer-reviewed. Articles should use clear, concise English, following *The SBL Handbook of Style* (esp. for abbreviations), supplemented by *The Chicago Manual of Style*. They should consistently use either UK or USA spelling and punctuation, and they should be submitted electronically as an email attachment using Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx extensions) or Rich Text Format (.rtf extension). Special characters should use a Unicode font.

## REVIEWS

The book review editors generally select individuals for book reviews, but potential reviewers may contact them about reviewing specific books. As part of arranging book reviews, the book review editors will supply book review guidelines to reviewers.

## Encouraging Women to Do Biblical Studies at the Graduate Level

Darren Carlson

**W**hen I was in seminary, a godly woman recounted to a few of us how she had been asked multiple times by male students why she, as a woman, had come to seminary. The questioning was aggressive in nature, not for general understanding. Another woman recounted how a passive-aggressive but zealous seminary student wrote a long message one early morning on the white board where the female students were getting together for prayer, encouraging them to not continue with the MDiv (Masters of Divinity). I think I may have encouraged him to do the same.

What is a complementarian to do? When I say complementarian, I am referring to people who believe that men and women are created equal in God's sight, but in His sovereign choice he has designed different roles for them. This is most clearly seen in the affirmation that only men should be elders/pastors (Baptist/Presbyterian) or bishops (Anglican) in a church. Many see complementarians as people who only say "no" to women. Here, I want to give a few reasons why complementarians of many stripes should encourage as many women as possible to get a Masters degree (or its equivalent) in biblical studies.

### 1. Being Honest Up Front

The struggle for many complementarian men and women begins with the belief that women are restricted from the role of elder/pastor. This would then prohibit them from many of the teaching roles in the church. That being the case, the focus of many schools that lean complementarian is the training of men for future positions in churches. The MDiv for example is primarily meant for people who are headed to the pastorate. It makes sense that the majority of students who pursue this degree would be men.

Moving ahead I must note that complementarians are split on whether women can teach men outside the role of elder. There are basically two camps:

- Piper<sup>1</sup>/Schreiner<sup>2</sup>—women should not teach theology and biblical studies to men in a formal position in the church or in schools due to the pastoral/elder like authority that comes with teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Piper. "Can a Woman Preach if Elders Affirm It?" *Desiring God*. February 16, 2015. Accessed February 1, 2016. <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-a-woman-preach-if-elders-affirm-it.html>.

<sup>2</sup> T. Schreiner. "Why Not Have a Woman Preach?" *Desiring God*. May 7, 2015. Accessed February 1, 2016. <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-not-to-have-a-woman-preach.html>.

- Carson<sup>3</sup>/Keller<sup>4</sup>/Frame<sup>5</sup>—women are only restricted from the role of elder. Women are free to teach men in Sunday school, at conferences, in bible studies and more.

I, of course, am not doing justice to the nuance of each position, but it is helpful to alert the reader of the streams within complementarian thinking. The details of exegesis will be left for another time. All of these men deserve careful consideration and honor. Both of these streams should be able to agree to much of what follows.

## 2. God Makes No Distinction About Who Must Be Trained

Maybe this is obvious, but I don't hear too many people complaining about women in a Sunday school class or pursuing an undergraduate Bible degree. Why is there anguish when we get to the Masters level? It could be because some Masters degrees in theological studies are shaped for pastors. Fair enough, but shouldn't we still commend complementarian women to pursue these degrees?

Complementarians are not Gnostics. We don't believe that only some people can/should have access to the deep truths of God that can be unlocked by formal education. Of course, learning the Bible is not tied to a graduate degree, but there is something to be said for thoughtful and structured study of God's Word. Practically, it would be immensely helpful in discussions with egalitarian scholarship to have more complementarian women able to interact with them at an equal level of scholarship. The majority of complementarian scholars who could submit an article to a journal or write a theological treatise are men.

## 3. Biblical Worldview Is Important

Maybe many complementarian men assume that women in seminary are there to be pastors and therefore can't get their mind around complementarian women being in graduate school. We make the very bad assumption that seminary graduation is coterminous with ordination. Of course there are many options in a seminary beyond the MDiv, but that degree in particular is the standard for training in vocational ministry. I have a cousin who took seminary classes with no intention of receiving a degree so she could be a more effective nurse. Cost is certainly a factor, but more options for women will only lead to more theologically grounded women in a variety of disciplines.

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, 'Silent in the Churches', in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by W. Grudem and J. Piper, (Crossway, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> T. Keller. "Women in Ministry." *The Gospel Coalition*. August 14, 2008. Accessed February 1, 2016. <http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/scottysmith/2008/08/14/titleitems/>.

<sup>5</sup> J. Frame. "May Women Teach Adult Sunday School Classes." *Frame-Poythress*. May 21, 2012. Accessed February 1, 2016. [www.frame-poythress.org/may-women-teach-adult-sunday-school-classes/](http://www.frame-poythress.org/may-women-teach-adult-sunday-school-classes/).

Having a well-trained theological mind does not necessarily mean a woman will go into vocational ministry. What about the women she could disciple, the friendships where she could bring informed biblical counsel, and the children (spiritual or physical) she will raise? What if she becomes a doctor who takes care of families, a lawyer who seeks justice or works in a government role for the good of society? Should we not cheer her on as she works towards a degree that lays the foundation for a deep biblical worldview?

#### **4. Women Are Involved in Teaching**

We certainly see women involved in the early ministry of the church. Priscilla teams with her husband to teach Apollos (Acts 18:26). Paul refers to women as workers in the Lord (Rom 16:12). Phoebe in Romans is singled out for her work with Paul (Rom. 16:1–2). Paul mentioned two women who labored with him side by side in the gospel (Phil. 4:2–3). Paul clearly commands women to teach children and younger women (2 Tim. 1:15; Titus 2:3–5).

The one way it seems that men and women diverge in the church is in the role of authority and weighing of teaching. The conclusion of 1 Timothy 2:11–12 is not that women must never teach men or submit to all men, but that men who are tested and approved are those who must ultimately preach, teach and weigh what is being taught. This makes sense of 1 Corinthians 14:26–35 where the women participate in prophesying, but not in the oral weighing of such prophecy. Paul is saying that women may not teach the gospel authoritatively to men in the public assembly of the church. Paul does not want women to be in positions of authority in the church; teaching is one way in which authority is exercised in the church. This is why the office of elder is closed to women – this is the authoritative office of the church.

I diverge from some of my complementarian brethren in that I see contexts where women taught men and I believe women should be teaching in various ways in the church for the edification of the body. This could also include teaching in schools, Sunday school courses, becoming scholars in various fields, serving in a campus ministry, leading a non-profit and more. Even if the most conservative of complementarians see problems with some of the conclusions here, we can all still strive to train more women for the positions we all agree on.

#### **5. Many Gospel-Loving Women Led the Missionary Movement**

What about the women who were deeply involved in the modern missionary movement? Elisabeth Elliot, Amy Carmichael, Corrie Ten Boom, Lilia Trotter, Helen Roseveare, Mary Slessor, and Lotie Moon come to mind immediately. Let's also not forget the wives of the men we revere. Just by example, do you think of Adoniram Judson or Adoniram and Ann?

Elisabeth Elliot once wrote:

What is the place of women in world mission? Jesus said, “You [and the word means all of you, male and female] are my witnesses. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” And there have been countless thousands who, without reference to where they came from or what they knew or who they were, have believed that Jesus meant exactly what he said and have set themselves to follow.

Today strident female voices are raised, shrilly and ad nauseam, to remind us that women are equal with men. But such a question has never even arisen in connection with the history of Christian missions. In fact, for many years, far from being excluded, women constituted the majority of foreign missionaries.<sup>6</sup>

Oh, for more and more women on the global mission field, well trained in theology, with minds honed to read and teach the Bible.

## 6. A Lesser Call?

It is either culture or human tendency that leads people to believe that the ultimate calling in vocational ministry is the ability to preach and teach to the whole church. Maybe it is because we vet those people in a more thorough way than we would say a youth worker. So teaching children—not ultimate. Discipling youth—not quite the top. College students—at least you are close. Outreach—if you study you probably don’t have the time. And women—we leave that to the pastor’s wives.

This is obviously a caricature, but I hope it makes the point. Women training women is not only a high calling; it is a crystal clear command in Scripture. The discipleship of women and children is so massive a burden that we will never reach the end of it. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if local churches had women they could go to, whom they could trust to train other women?

## 7. The Immense Value of Theologically Trained Moms

The impact of well-trained women would be enormous on the next generation. If moms are the primary nurturers of our children and often the ones who spend the majority of time with their children, then isn’t a God-centered theologically robust worldview of great value? Are we short-changing the primary teachers of our children by not encouraging them to receive more formal training?

## 8. On Books by Women

Walk into almost any Christian bookstore anywhere in the world and you will find that the majority of books are prosperity gospel lite and that the women’s section in particular needs help! You may wonder whether we should have so many books specific to men and women, but we can agree that a few more well-informed women who can write would be a great blessing to the church?

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<sup>6</sup> E. Stetzer. "Monday Is for Missiology: Women, Missions, and Missiologists." *Christianity Today*. January 10, 2011. Accessed February 1, 2016. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2011/january/monday-is-for-missiology-women-missions-and-missiologists.html>.

It is probably no surprise to you that women read more than men. Let's have some women with a formal and solid theological education that can serve as teachers to deepen the roots of faith and understanding for the women who walk into Christian bookstores.

### **9. Your Church Would Do Well to Have a Few Theologically Trained Women on Staff**

I was recently listening to D.A. Carson, who recounted that the hiring practice in the churches in the thoroughly complementarian Sydney Diocese (Anglican), is to make the 3rd or 4th hire in a church plant a formally well-trained woman. Considering the number of women that are most likely in your church, do you have a few women who can rightly divide the word of truth? Might you consider hiring a woman on your staff as your church grows? I am well aware that many women step away from "working" while they are having children, which decreases the pool of women from which to hire, but there are certainly some women who could flourish in these roles.

I'm also not speaking just of a woman who could be a good counselor. I am so glad there are women being trained in solid counseling programs, many of which seminaries create and gear specifically to women. But how much more beneficial would it be to have women with a general Biblical Studies degree AND a counseling degree. Let's pray that they would be good counselors because they are biblical scholars!

We need well-trained women serving in our churches. Seminaries and the plethora of new training options available would do well to market to complementarian women. If we believe the gifts are not restricted to men only, then surely complementarians should lead the way in training women. Lord, make it so, for the sake of your bride.

### **10. Final Confession**

I want to conclude by saying I have failed miserably at purposefully encouraging women to study at a deeper level. When I was a pastor I remember my focus being so intently on the men of the churches. I never once thought of starting an intensive training regimen for any women in the church. I left that to the community bible studies, a less intensive and more relational time people would gather together. I was wrong to do so. Maybe more complementarian pastors can learn from my mistake and push women to formalized study, whether in a school or in the many church-based training options now available.



# Evaluating a Response to the Refugee Crisis through a Biblical Theological Lens: Perspectives from the Epistle of James

H. H. Drake Williams III

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## ABSTRACT

The refugee crisis has created diverse responses within the global Christian community. While Christian leaders should make clear statements to address the immediate crisis, this problem also deserves attention from traditional Christian disciplines. This article advocates for disciplines like biblical theology to contribute to a global Christian response. It provides a sample from the Epistle of James. A biblical theology of James encourages compassion for the weak, evaluating wealth properly, and prayers from righteous people.

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**A**s I write from my office in the Netherlands, Europe is in the midst of a great demographical change. Refugees are entering this continent at a rate like never before from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Mali, Gambia, Nigeria, Somalia, and other countries. It is estimated that 7,000 refugees had been arriving per day during the fall of 2015 on the Greek islands. Europe has received over 1,000,000 refugees in 2015, well above the normal number from past years.

The crisis is not merely about people relocating countries. When humanitarian issues are considered, some estimate that the refugee crisis has affected as many as 60 million people.<sup>1</sup> Never have so many persons been displaced. In Syria alone, more than 13 million children and their parents need humanitarian aid. Nearly 4.4 million have been forced to flee to neighboring countries for safety.

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<sup>1</sup> The statistics are from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Staff Figures, "Facts and Figures about Refugees," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. Accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>.

Along with the number of refugees, the world has heard a staggering number of horrific stories. News articles contain stories of large sums of money being paid for dangerous voyages across the Mediterranean Sea. There have been families being separated and refugees being killed by snipers as they flee. The world has heard accounts of capsized boats and consequently women and children swimming in the Aegean or Mediterranean Seas for several hours afterwards. Then, there have been reports of closed borders with razor sharp wires, bussing of unwanted people across countries, and the use of tear gas against vulnerable refugees.

At the same time as refugees have arrived, there have also been worries that insurgents from the Islamic State have also infiltrated Europe. Some insurgents on the attack on Paris have been linked to Islamic State refugees entering Europe illegally. In other headlines Isis has claimed that 4,000 of their own people have entered Europe.<sup>2</sup> The attacks on women in Cologne on New Year's Eve have been linked to foreigners. Some have reported that refugees may be responsible, although it has been reported that refugees aided some in distress.<sup>3</sup>

On New Year's Day, Gavin Hewitt, a chief BBC correspondent, declared that Europe is set for a fundamental clash of ideas. This includes the regulation of borders within the Schengen zone, the intake of certain numbers of refugees, and the screening of refugees. Also, involved with these decisions will be the direction of Germany. Germany has already taken over 1,000,000 refugees in 2015. Will the nation be able to accept an unlimited number of refugees or will this lead to the downfall of the German economy? Will Germany need to restrict refugees more? Will President Erdogan of Turkey begin to limit the number of refugees coming through his nation into Europe? Will Italy and Greece be able to handle in a more organized manner the number of refugees coming into their countries? Will Europe deploy border guards to patrol the external borders of the Schengen zone?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> H. Torres, "Just wait: ISIS agent bares thousands of terrorists smuggled into Europe together with refugees and now ready to strike," *Christian Today*, November 15, 2015. Accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/just.wait.isis.agent.bares.thousands.of.terrorists.smuggled.into.europe.together.with.refugees.and.now.ready.to.strike/70505.html>.

<sup>3</sup> M. Baumgärtner, "Chaos and Violence: How New Year's Eve in Cologne Has Changed Germany," *Spiegel Online*, January 9, 2016. Accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/cologne-attacks-trigger-raw-debate-on-immigration-in-germany-a-1071175.html>. L. Dearden, "Cologne attacks: American woman tells how Syrian refugees rescued her from New Year's Eve sexual assault," *Independent*, January 16, 2016. Accessed January 18, 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/cologne-attacks-american-woman-tells-how-syrian-refugees-rescued-her-from-new-years-eve-sexual-a6816221.html>.

<sup>4</sup> G. Hewitt, "Europe set for a fundamental clash of ideas," *BBC*, January 1, 2016. Accessed January 3, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/correspondents/gavinhe Witt>.

## 1. The Search for a Christian Response

In the wake of the number of refugees, various Christians have rushed to respond. Pope Francis has urged the international community to welcome refugees but also to provide developmental assistance.<sup>5</sup> In his message delivered on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees on 17 January 2016, he urged every Christian institution not to be silent but to reach out in mercy, welcome the stranger, influence public opinion, and even extend help to the countries from which the refugees originate.<sup>6</sup> He has encouraged every parish, monastery, religious community, and sanctuary to take in a refugee family. The Vatican has also sheltered refugees as part of its response.

The Anglican Church, like the Catholic Church, has urged the welcoming of refugees. In his Christmas address of 2015, Archbishop Justin Welby expressed that Jesus welcomed refugees and strangers. In a similar way, Christians should do the same. He said “Jesus was a refugee—fleeing as a baby with his parents, returning years later to a strange new ‘home.’ He tells us to be those who welcome the alien and stranger, the poor and weak.”

Other denominational bodies have also spoken about the need to embrace the refugee. The Lutheran World Fellowship has developed programs called “Welcoming the Stranger.” The World Council of Churches along with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) have issued a joint letter encouraging European churches to deepen their efforts in supporting refugees.

Not all voices from the church have urged such acceptance. Bulgaria’s Orthodox Church has urged that Syrian refugees not be welcomed. Bulgaria’s Orthodox Church has called on its government not to let any more Muslim refugees into the country. The concern from the church that holds eighty percent of Bulgaria’s 7.15 million people is the threat of invasion. In previous years Bulgaria was accused of ethnic cleansing. This took place shortly before the Communist dictatorship fell in 1989. The Bulgarian Orthodox church also added that the country of origin must be determined. The Bulgarian people should not pay the price.<sup>7</sup> While this is the stance of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, other Orthodox communities have responded differently.<sup>8</sup>

Evangelical Christians have also spoken with a divided voice. Some urge that the acceptance of refugees is the proper Christian response. Several articles on the Gospel Coalition’s website urged

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<sup>5</sup> See I. S. Martin, “Pope Francis calls for development to fight refugee crisis,” *Crux* 1 October 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See Pope Francis, “Message of his holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016,” delivered 17 January 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Middle East Eye, “Don’t let Muslim Refugees in, says Bulgaria’s Orthodox Church,” *Middle East Eye*, September 1, 2015. Accessed January 18, 2016. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/dont-let-muslim-refugees-says-bulgarias-orthodox-church-1024482681>.

<sup>8</sup> Nine O’Clock, “Romanian Orthodox Church, first reaction to refugee crisis,” *Nine O’Clock.Ro* September 3, 2015. Accessed January 18, 2016. <http://www.nineoclock.ro/romanian-orthodox-church-first-reaction-to-refugee-crisis/>.

the acceptance of refugees.<sup>9</sup> *Christianity Today* has also run several articles that show care for refugees.<sup>10</sup> These have urged care and love for the refugee. Others have responded differently. While he is well known for his work with the underprivileged through the ministry Samaritan's Purse, Franklin Graham has urged restraint. Citing current United States immigration policies, Graham has warned that refugees could bring to United States soil the same difficulties that have taken place in Paris and other places.<sup>11</sup> Rather than acting in a politically correct way, Graham has warned about security issues. He has recommended that immigration policies be reconsidered.

The Evangelical Community has continued speaking about these matters. In December 2015 and January 2016, Wheaton College hosted the GC2 Summit. This gathering provided a statement concerning attitudes to refugees. This gathering of approximately 100 denominational leaders from the United States, produced a statement regarding refugees.

In this Statement, there are several theological affirmations which are supported by Scripture verses.<sup>12</sup>

- Refugees possess the image of God and, as such, are infinitely valuable to God and to us. (Gen 1:26–27; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9)
- We are commanded to love our neighbor, and it is our privilege to love refugees. (Lev 19:18; Matt 5:43–48; 19:19; Luke 10:25–37)
- As Christians, we must care sacrificially for the refugee, the foreigner, and the stranger. (Lev 19:9–10, 33–34; 23:22; 25:35; Deut 10:19; 14:28–29; 15:11; 24:17–22; Prov 14.31; Zech 7:8–10; Matt 2:13–15; 25:31–46; 26:11)
- We will motivate and prepare our churches and movements to care for refugees. (Matt 28:18–20; Luke 14:12–14; Titus 3:1, 8, 14)
- We will not be motivated by fear but by love for God and others. (Psa 27:1; 118:6; Matt 22:34–40; Rom 13:8–10; Heb 13:1–6; I John 4:13–21)

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<sup>9</sup> See D. Glen, “Eight Words from Jesus in a World with Refugees,” *Desiring God* November 20, 2015. Accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/eight-words-from-jesus-in-a-world-with-refugees>; D. Crabb, “Building his church in a Refugee Crisis” *Desiring God*. November 19, 2015, Accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/building-his-church-in-a-refugee-crisis>.

<sup>10</sup> M. J. Wachsmuth, “Refugees on the Roma Road” *Christianity Today* January/February 2016, Vol. 60, No. 1: 22, accessed: 18 January 2016 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/january-february/refugees-on-roma-road-syria-iraq-balkans.html>; E. Stetzer, “The AIDS Epidemic: Faithfulness not Fear” *Christianity Today* (Accessed: 18 January 2016).

<sup>11</sup> See Franklin Graham, “Muslim Immigration Will Bring Paris Attacks to US Doorsteps,” *Christian Post*. November 17, 2015. Accessed: January 18, 2016, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/franklin-graham-muslim-immigration-paris-terrorist-attacks-150084/#2UYQbtXiGJCCvEqG.99>. See also V. Stracqualursi, “Sarah Palin speaks out on Syrian Refugee Crisis,” *ABC News*. November 17, 2015. Accessed: January 18, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/sarah-palin-speaks-syrian-refugee-crisis/story?id=35260402>

<sup>12</sup> GC2 Summit. “Statement,” GC2. December 19, 2015. Accessed: January 18, 2016, [http://www.gc2summit.com/statement/.](http://www.gc2summit.com/statement/)

- Christians are called to grace-filled and humble speech about this issue. (Prov 16:21; Eph 4:1–4, 31–32; Col 4:6)

### **1.1. Time to Allow More of the Scripture to Speak**

It is good that Christians are discussing and voicing opinions on refugees. It is also a positive development that various Christian bodies are coming together to arrive at common statements such as the GC2 Summit. The refugee crisis appears to be a long term issue that Christians will need to address. It will be a help, therefore, if traditional Christian disciplines can be brought to bear on the matter. Such dialogue could help refine statements and approaches that need to be initiated to address a crisis immediately.

One discipline that could be used to a greater extent is biblical theology. Biblical theology attempts to provide a full orb ed picture based on the entirety of the Bible. It examines individual sections throughout the Bible and then aims to provide a composite picture. It reads Genesis in the light of Romans, Judges in relationship to John, 2 Kings in the light of Revelation, etc. It is also focused on the life of the church and is concerned about the Bible’s overarching narrative with its focus on Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> It is from a broad and integrated view of the entirety of the Bible that an approach can be made to a particular subject such as missions, poverty, human identity, and others.<sup>14</sup> Many of the current Christian statements in the refugee crisis are motivated by portions of the Scripture—the example of Jesus or commands from the Gospels. Other sections of the Bible can contribute helpful viewpoints, too.

One biblical book that deserves more of a voice in the current refugee crisis is the book of James. It is a book that is often forgotten by readers of the Bible. It is a small epistle towards the end of the New Testament. Martin Luther called it famously, “a right strawy epistle” thus minimizing its influence in the minds of many. The historical critical method influenced by Luther and expounded by F. C. Baur further and unfairly reinforced James as a letter of lesser standing.<sup>15</sup>

There are many reasons to consider reading James in the light of the refugee crisis. It is written by James, the half-brother of Jesus and the bishop of the church in Jerusalem. As a result, the Epistle contains much influence from Jesus as well as continuing many ethical ideas from the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> The Epistle of James is a general epistle. James 1:1 states that it is written to “the twelve tribes

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<sup>13</sup> For further on biblical theology see T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> For example, see topics like these in the IVP New Studies in Biblical Theology Series.

<sup>15</sup> For a history of interpretation of James with its influence within the ancient church, see L. T. Johnson, *The Epistle of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 124–61.

<sup>16</sup> Note the parallels between the following verses: James 1:2 and Matthew 5:10–12; James 1:4 and Matthew 5:48; James 1:5 and Matthew 7:7–12; James 1:9 and Matthew 5:3; James 1:20 and Matthew 5:22; James 2:13 and Matthew 5:7; James

in the Dispersion.”<sup>17</sup> As such, it indicates that it is written to an audience in different geographical locations with diverse experiences. This provides a good basis to pass along general principles to Christians from various walks of life today.

James is also writing to people who would have an appreciation of the refugee experience as evidenced by the way that he addresses his audience. As those in the Dispersion, his readers would have some idea of being refugee themselves, since they have been driven from their home land. They may likely be familiar with suffering since the word *diaspora* is connected to suffering in places within the Old Testament (Deut 28:25; Psa 146:2). They are apt to grasp that while dispersed, they know that a true home is in the future when God brings his people back home (Isa 11:12).<sup>18</sup> With such an address, James indicates that he is writing to those who would understand the feelings of a refugee.

Furthermore, James is known for its concern for the poor. In James 2:2–6, the writer describes the scene of a poor man entering the assembly. There is no statement as to whether he is a Christian or a non-Christian, and James provides guidance for how Christian believers should relate to the poor person who is interested in the faith. Since refugees are generally known to be poor and may be interested in the Christian faith, James has something to share regarding the refugee situation.

The remainder of this article will address the refugee situation from the book of James. It will isolate several themes that are valuable for consideration and then bring these to bear upon some of the current Christian responses.

## 2. Theological themes from James relating to refugees

### 2.1 True Religion and the Weak

James exhorts his readers that the expression of true Christianity is found in looking after the weak. James 1:27 states this explicitly when it says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” This verse sets forward what is true religion in contrast to what is false. In James 1:26, James has declared false religion as someone who has an unbridled tongue. The evils of the tongue are evident within the Epistle of James, in that an unguarded tongue has the capability of setting a large forest ablaze. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (Jas 3:5–7). Such empty talk demonstrates a futile religion. In contrast to the lack of discipline of the tongue which causes so much evil, the care of the widow and the orphan illustrates true religion.

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2:14–16 and Matthew 7:21–23; James 3:17–18 and Matthew 5:9; James 4:4 and Matthew 6:24; James 4:10 and Matthew 5:3–5; James 4:11 and Matthew 7:1–2; James 5:2 and Matthew 6:19; James 5:10 and Matthew 5:12; James 5:12 and Matthew 5:33–37.

<sup>17</sup> All Scripture texts are taken from the ESV unless otherwise stated.

<sup>18</sup> R. P. Martin, *James* (WBC 48; Waco: Word, 1988), 10.

Care for the weak is declared to be pure religion. James 1:27 sets pure and undefiled religion forward since these words begin the verse. For the word pure, the author uses the word *katharos*. This word is used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure (*katharos*) in heart, for they shall see God.” The word is also used in the Old Testament for cultic objects and people that are worthy to approach God (cf. Gen 7:3; 8:20; Lev 4:12; 7:19; 11:32; 15:13; Num 8:7; Deut 12:15). The idea carries into the New Testament in which clean people are in view with the proper giving of alms (Luke 11:41), for clean people (Tit 1:15), clean consciences (1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3) and for clean hearts (Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 1:22). James now employs this word for pure religion which is found in looking after the weak.

James 1:27 also contains another word worthy of reflection. The verb for visiting (*episkeptomai*) orphans and widows in their affliction also contains significance. This verb is only used one time in James, but it is found within other sections of the New Testament. It is utilized as being part of a defining aspect of being truly godly and worthy of salvation as is seen by its use within the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:36, 43). It is used in the sense of the visitation of God through his Messiah for his people (Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16). If it is traced within the Old Testament, it is often used as a technical term for the “visiting” of God either to rescue or save his people (cf. Gen 21:1; 50:24; Exod 3:16; 4:31; Josh 8:10; Ruth 1:6; 1 Sam 2:21; Zech 10:3). The widows and orphans that James has in mind may be inside or outside of God’s people as this verb is used in relation to care for those within or outside of God’s people (cf. Ruth 1:6).<sup>19</sup>

Of further significance is James’ use of the verb *episkeptomai* in the present tense. By doing so, he indicates that there is an ongoing sense of care for the weak that is in mind. The present tense verb in the infinitive mood in Greek carries with it continuity of action rather than a description of time. As a result, James implies that the ongoing visitation of the orphan and the widow is an evidence of the act of God. It is no wonder then that James states these activities to be true religion.

## ***2.2 Warnings to the Rich and Partiality to Them***

The Epistle of James contains several warnings about riches. In James 1:9–11, James addresses the status of rich and poor. He urges that the believers reconsider this. The rich person is not as high as he thinks and the poor person is not as low as he thinks. The traditional interpretation of this passage is that the rich person is a Christian believer. Christians with wealth are also challenged in several sections within the Epistle of James (Jas 2:1–4; 4:13–17). Furthermore, the same boasting verb in James 1:9 that applies to the poor, who are known to be Christians, is applied to James 1:10.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 212.

<sup>20</sup> For further evidence that rich Christians are in mind in James 1:9–11 see further H. H. D. Williams, “Of Rags and Riches: The Benefits of Hearing Jeremiah 9:23–24 in James 1:9–11,” *TynBul* 53.2 (2002): 273–82.

The text indicates that in the Lord's eyes, the rich Christian is not as high as he assumes. His riches will pass away. Like the grass that withers and the flower that falls, so will it be for the rich person who will also fade away in his pursuits.

As the Epistle of James continues, James speaks against partiality to the rich in James 2:1–9, something about which he is particularly concerned. In his theoretical example, someone wearing fine clothing enters the meeting place and is treated with honor; at the same time a person wearing shabby clothing is asked to sit at someone's feet.

The description of the clothing is significant. While the ESV translates the rich man's attire as being fine clothing, the Greek word used is *lampros*, a word that could also show how it attracts attention in the light (cf. Luke 23:11; Acts 10:30; Rev 15:6; 19:8). In comparison, the poor person wears shabby clothing. The word for shabby is the word *hrumpara* which can also be translated as "filthy."<sup>21</sup> The person with shiny and fine clothing is then asked to sit in a spot of honor. At the same time, the person with shabby and filthy clothing is then placed beneath someone's feet.

There is also a sense of mockery here. Rather than rejecting the poor person or telling him to go away, by placing the poor person at someone's feet, he is being placed in a humble spot.<sup>22</sup> By doing so, they have made distinctions, an improper matter. Furthermore, they have also become judges with evil desires (Jas 2:4).

As James 2 progresses, James writes about the difficulty of encouraging a poor Christian brother or sister apart from physical care for him or her. In James 2:15–16, he warns of the duplicity of saying "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without offering proper clothing and food. James declares that it is of no benefit, repeating the word *ophelos*, a word that means meaningless, twice within three verses.

Instead, James urges the sharing of wealth. He goes on to use the examples of Abraham and Rahab. He specifically calls them modes of sacrificial charity. The binding of Isaac is the culmination of Abraham's works (Jas 2:21). The sparing of Isaac as well as confirmation of Abraham's righteousness is in response to Abraham's generosity (Jas 2:22).<sup>23</sup> Rahab, too, by her act of generosity exhibited faith. Her faithful hospitality protected Israel's scouts, and she was then exhibited to be righteous (Jas 2:24–25). The illustration, then, of faith working with regard to deeds is that of generosity to the poorer brother (cf. Jas 2:15).<sup>24</sup>

As the Epistle of James progresses, James encourages his readers to see wealth and poverty from a different light. The poor in this world are often the rich in faith and also heirs of the kingdom. The

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<sup>21</sup> L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 222.

<sup>22</sup> L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 223.

<sup>23</sup> P. H. Davids, "James" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Edited by T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 345–46.

<sup>24</sup> L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 245.



rich are often the oppressors in the world. This particularly becomes evident within James 5:1–7, which is a rebuke comparable to some sections within the Gospel tradition.<sup>25</sup> It is directed against the rich non-Christian.

In James 5:1–7, James speaks with a prophetic tone. He uses words such as weep and wail, which are found in prophetic laments.<sup>26</sup> While the rich appear to have all they need, there is a time when they will not have what they need. Instead, there will be misery coming upon them. James describes their riches as rotted and their clothes are moth-eaten. Their gold and silver, precious metals that do not rust, have even been corroded. The author uses the perfect tense for each of the indicative verbs in this sequence, suggesting that he is being prophetic. The activity has already taken place from the divine perspective, and it will be realized in the future.

Besides having many possessions that will vanish, James describes the rich as the oppressors in James 5:4–7. They deserve to be judged. The wage that has been held back as well as the oppressed poor workers now act as prosecutors crying out against the oppressive rich person (James 5:4). Their cry is justifiable because the rich person has lived on earth in luxury, even fattening themselves in a day of slaughter (James 5:5). Even worse, they are responsible for the murder of the righteous person. They have condemned the righteous, and God will now condemn and oppose them (James 5:6). Their status will be reversed.<sup>27</sup>

### ***2.3 Prayer by Righteous People is Powerful and Effective***

The Epistle of James finishes with an exhortation to prayer. Many will be familiar with James 5:16b which reads, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”<sup>28</sup> This verse is found in children’s songs about prayer, read before prayer times at church services, and written in prayer bulletins. While this short verse is used mostly in isolation, its context has something to contribute.

The prayer that James is considering is that of a righteous person. This is apparent from the broader context of James 5. While some throughout church history have focused on the use of oil and have written books about its appropriate use, the primary concern is for the prayer of the righteous.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Matthew 19:23–24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:23–25; 21:1–4. L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 298.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Amos 1:2; 8:8; Joel 1:9–10; Isa 24:4; 33:9; Jer 4:28. L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 285.

<sup>27</sup> R. Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999), 194–95.

<sup>28</sup> The NIV version reads, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. The KJV reads, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” The text used within this article is from the ESV unless otherwise stated.

<sup>29</sup> K. Condon, “The Sacrament of Healing (Jas 5:14–15),” *Scripture* 11 (1959) 33–42; J. Coppens, “Jacq v, 13–15 et l’onction des maladies.” *ETL* 53 (1977) 201–207; B. Reicke, “L’onction des maladies d’après S. Jacques,” *Maison-Dieu* 113

Genuine prayer, rather than a specific manner of prayer with oil, is the theme of the context that follows James 5:16b. James 5:17–18 reads, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.” These verses do not speak of a particular manner of prayer. Further, the verses to which they refer in 1 Kings 17 also put forward no clearly specific manner or type of prayer.

Like the type of prayer, the type of person whom James encourages to pray is further explained when James 5:16b is read in context. Rather than highlighting the activity of a super star, James states that only one attribute is necessary for powerful and effective prayer. From James 5:16b, the only qualification for effective prayer is possessing the quality of righteousness. The New International, King James, New King James, and New American Standard versions in James 5:16b specifically state that the person is a “righteous man.” There is, however, insufficient indication from the original language to conclude that the person must be male. From the Greek text, the prayer mentioned is *deēsis dikaïou*, which translated literally means “a prayer of a righteous person.” While *dikaïos* is a masculine word, it does not refer exclusively to a man over against a woman. The phrase *deēsis dikaïou* is best translated as “righteous one” and thus refers to a righteous individual.<sup>30</sup>

The righteousness that James envisions can be explained further from the broader context of the letter. Righteous living has been an overriding concern within the Epistle. Throughout it James has challenged Christians to be joyful despite trials (1:2–4), resist temptation (1:13–15), act with impartiality to fellow Christians (2:1–11), control the tongue (1:19; 3:1–12), be humble before God (4:6–8; cf. 1:9–11), and look after the needy (1:27). Most of the book is designed to promote righteous behavior. The importance of righteous action also can be seen by the number of times that James encourages Christian deeds to match Christian beliefs. He repeatedly urges God’s people to make certain that declared faith and resulting actions agree (cf. 1:22–25; cf. 2:14–2:26). Thirty-four of the one hundred and eight verses in James, namely one-third of the book, are devoted to this theme.<sup>31</sup> By placing James 5:16b at the end of his letter, James likely is envisioning that the Christian who is actively aspiring to righteous behavior will have effective prayers.

The strong connection between effective prayer and those actively pursuing a righteous lifestyle is further emphasized when compared with the greater Jewish context. James and his readers would have been familiar with such a background as they both are from a Jewish background. When

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(1973) 50–56; D. Lys, *L’onction dans la Bible* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1954); F. W. Puller, *The Anointing of the Sick in Scripture and Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1904).

<sup>30</sup> As D. J. Moo says in his commentary, “The Greek text leaves us in doubt about it being exclusively masculine in orientation.” D. J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, 247.

<sup>31</sup> See I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 632.

read in relation to the broader context of Judaism, effective prayer and righteousness are explicitly connected. A number of passages in the Psalms encourage God's people to pray with righteous hearts (e.g., Ps 5:1–5; 17:1–2; 24:3–5; 51:10; 73:1; 145:18). Conversely, God does not listen to the prayer of unrighteous people (e.g., Deut 1:43–45; 1 Sam 8:18; Psa 66:16–20; Prov 28:9). The prayers of the righteous such as Abraham, Moses, Hannah, Samuel, David, Daniel, and Elijah would have been well-known for those reading from a Jewish background. These were people who prayed “powerful and effective prayers” and also were known for their righteous behavior. “James has focused on the ordinary member in good standing who confesses sins and adheres to community standards.”<sup>32</sup>

Such prayer has the possibility of bringing physical healing. The verses leading to James 5:16b are concerned with prayers for healing. James 5:15 indicates that “the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”<sup>33</sup> An appeal to broader Judaism suggests that the prayers of righteous people can make a difference in physical health. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel are encouraged to turn to God in prayer for healing (Job 5:18; Psa 6:2; 41:3–4; Jer 17:14; Hos 6:1).<sup>34</sup> The Old Testament also records miraculous healing after prayer. Following prayer, the barrenness of Hannah's womb was overcome (1 Sam 1:1–20). The son of the widow from Zarephath is healed following Elijah's prayer (1 Kings 17:19–24). King Hezekiah's deadly illness was removed following prayer (2 Kgs 20:1–11; 2 Chr 32:24). Following prayer, Elisha raises the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kgs 4:32–37).

Looking at the broader context of James 5 and Judaism also reveals an additional sense about how powerful and effective the prayer of a righteous person can be. When considered in relation to the subsequent verses in James 5, James presents prayer as able to bring extensive spiritual blessing upon God's people. This aspect often is overlooked in discussions about James 5:17–18. These verses describe Elijah's great prayer for rain. They describe him as a person just like the rest of humanity. He prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain over all of Israel. Then, he did pray earnestly and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops.

While commentators regularly look to the example of Elijah as an example of powerful prayer within James 5:17–18, they do not sufficiently consider the meaning of rain for a first century Jewish reader.<sup>35</sup> There is a strong connection that rain and drought had within Jewish thinking. Tracing James' reference back to the Old Testament, one arrives at the events in 1 Kings 17 and 18. In 1 Kings 17:1,

<sup>32</sup> P. H. Davids, *James* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmanns/Paternoster, 1982), 196.

<sup>33</sup> Certainly, Jesus' ministry was one where prayer and healing coincided, too. Cf. Matt 21:22; Mark 9:29; 11:24.

<sup>34</sup> In intertestamental times, God's people are also encouraged to turn to the Lord for healing, too (Tob 5:10; Sir 38:9).

<sup>35</sup> For example, R. P. Martin focuses his attention on James drawing the comparison with Elijah's nature and that of the rest of humanity. R. P. Martin, *James* (WBC 48; Waco: Word, 1998), 212. D. J. Moo sees a general reference to Elijah and drought that is borrowed from Jewish tradition. D. J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, 248.

Elijah prophesies to King Ahab that it will not rain due to the great evils that the king was committing, namely serving and building an altar to Baal, making an Asherah pole, and marrying Jezebel (cf. 1 Kgs 16:29–33; 18:17–18). In 1 Kings 18, God promises rain before Elijah’s meeting with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. At the end of their contest and the slaughter of the prophets of Baal, a cloud rises from the sea. Then, the sky grows black and heavy rain comes upon the land. What can be deduced from this incident is that rain comes upon God’s people as a sign of blessing. Drought conditions occur when God is not favorable to his people. This fits well within the broader context of Jewish thinking in which the presence or lack of rain are a result of his blessing upon his people or his disapproval of them (cf. Deut 11:16–17; 28:1–4, 12; 1 Kgs 8:35–36; Jer 5:24–25; 14:22; Zech. 10:1).<sup>36</sup>

If rain is understood in relation to this greater Jewish context, James would be signaling that the prayer of a righteous person does not merely change a day’s weather. Instead, the prayer of the righteous can result in extensive, life-giving, divine blessing upon God’s people. By declaring that his readers are just like Elijah who prayed for drought and rain (Jas 5:17–18),<sup>37</sup> he is bidding them to pray earnestly and expect extensive, revitalizing showers of blessing on God’s people as a result.

### 3. Conclusion

The refugee crisis is a significant matter that is impacting our world at the start of 2016. It will be affecting Europe and many other places for years to come. While it is good that statements have been made from leaders within Christian bodies to deal with the immediate crisis, a more full orbited investigation will aid the Christian’s response to refugees. Such efforts from disciplines such as Biblical Studies, Church History, and Systematic Theology should be encouraged as the worldwide body of Christ addresses this significant issue.

In the examination of the relatively small Epistle of James, there have been several matters that can be added to the statements of Christian leaders. While these do not address the political matters of the day which are many, complicated, and well beyond the scope of this article, these ideas from James do have something to add to a compassionate response to refugees.

Reaching out to refugees with care and compassion fits well within James’ thinking. Furthermore, James reveals that the ongoing care of the weak is a means of displaying God’s presence within the world. It shows true religion because it exhibits God’s presence. Favoring the rich over the poor is to act contrary to God’s ways. An appropriate compassionate outreach to suffering refugees is a way to manifest the presence of the Lord in this world.

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<sup>36</sup> For further explanation of the Jewish background see H. H. D. Williams, “Further Encouragement to Pray: Examining James 5:16b in relation to Context” in *My Brother’s Keeper: Essays in Honor of Ellis R. Brotzman* (Edited by T. J. Marinello and H. H. D. Williams, III; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 78–90.

<sup>37</sup> The word in Greek is *homoiothēs*. The word is also used in Acts 14:3 to show that Paul and Barnabas are just like the citizens of Lystra who perceive them to be gods. R. P. Martin, *James*, 212.

Teaching about the dangers of riches should be encouraged. Riches from the perspective of James have a way of obscuring God's true work in this world which is to exalt the humble and lowly ultimately while at the same time humbling the proud. From James' perspective, the rich non-believer may even be a cause of the oppression that refugees are experiencing. Education so that God's people can live more modestly may allow more refugees to be helped.

While perhaps it has been assumed by Christian leaders, ongoing prayer should be added for the refugee crisis. As it is powerful and effective to heal and brings untold blessing, a concerted effort in prayer should be added to all statements. Prayer directed to the cause of the refugee crisis, safety, and reception in hosting countries could go well beyond what many imagine.

# Pursuing Integrated Identity in Christ in Ministry to Muslims

by Fred Farrokh

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## ABSTRACT

Controversy surrounds several aspects of ministry to Muslims. This paper examines one of them—the identity development of those who have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. On one hand, Western missionaries have developed an “insider movement” model, in which Muslims retain their public identity as Muslims while adopting an alternative internal identity as followers of Jesus. This model may result, however, in identity bifurcation. This paper recommends, to the contrary, an “Integrated Identity in Christ” model. In this model, believers find their individual identity in Christ, as well as their collective identity in the Body of Christ. This Christo-centric identity is centered in, and continually converges on, the Lord Jesus Himself, and is not intentionally hidden from family, friends and the community. The author suggests that new believers in Christ from Muslim background, globally, are already pursuing this Christo-centric model. The article concludes with several tips for those discipling new believers in Muslim contexts, helping them progress from Christ-followers to Christ-worshippers.

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## 1. Introduction

**M**any Muslims have come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in our generation—God be praised. Duane Miller and Patrick Johnstone have completed an exhaustive, country-by-country count of believers in Christ from a Muslim background. They estimated there are 10,284,200 of these believers in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Many of Christ’s servants have labored sacrificially in our lifetime and in prior generations to bring this fruition to reality. As a Muslim-background Christian, I thank those who have laid down their lives serving Muslims with the gospel.

With those victories have come thorny issues. How should new believers in Christ from the Muslim community identify themselves? How should they be identified by others? Are the new believers actually still Muslims? Could an individual be considered a Muslim in the collective

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Duane A. Miller “Believers in Christ from a Muslim Background: A Global Census,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, vol. 11, Article 1, (2015): 17.

sense, while individually being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ? What about timing? Should allowances made for short-term periods of transition be extended indefinitely?

These are just some of the contemporary pressing questions in ministry to Muslims. Those involved in direct (face-to-face, or *hijab*-to-face) ministry to Muslims realize these are not merely hypothetical questions, but enigmas with potentially life-and-death repercussions. These questions hold dramatic implications for discipleship and extending Christ’s Kingdom into the Muslim world.

Like mountain ranges formed by the collision of great tectonic plates, the particular questions related to identity continue to be thrust to the top in this discussion. In this article, I plan to do the following: 1.) define the concept of identity; 2.) consider key issues related to identity in ministry to Muslims; 3.) evaluate current missiological thinking that results in “permanent identity bifurcation;” and, 4.) recommend the pursuance of an “Integrated Identity in Christ” (IIC) model as the best identity paradigm for ministry to Muslims. Indeed, this is the type of model Muslim-background believers in Christ globally are already pursuing and creating.

## 2. Defining the Elusive Term *Identity*

I consider *identity* a reflexive concept with individual and group dimensions. For the purposes of this paper, I define identity as: “one’s self-perception and how he or she is perceived by others, as well as how the groups to which the individual belongs perceive themselves, and how these groups are perceived by others.” My usage of identity can thus best be represented in a four-quadrant matrix:

	Self-Perception	Perception by others
Individual	Individual self-perception	Individual as perceived by others
Group	Group self-perception	Group as perceived by others

Every person maintains multiple identities simultaneously. These identities include: vocational identity; ethnic identity; socio-economic status identity; birth order identity; gender; and, spiritual/faith identity. Likewise, people simultaneously perceive themselves as possessing a variety of collective identities and group affiliations or associations.

This paper will focus on spiritual identity. For individuals and groups, their spiritual identity may change as their spiritual allegiance changes. Other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, are unchangeable.

### 3. Key Identity Issues in Ministry to Muslims

#### 3.1 *The Place of Identity in the Bible and the Qur'an*

The concept of identity lies just below the surface of both the Bible and the Qur'an. These two books, which anchor the two largest religions in the world, seek to shape self-perception at the core spiritual level for both individuals and groups. Neither book uses *identity* as a featured, stand-alone term, but one could argue its inferential importance at many turns. For instance, when Paul writes, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17, NASB throughout), he obviously intends to describe and shape the identity of new believers in Christ. In the Qur'an, Allah states, "This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as [your] religion" (Sura 5:3, A. Yusuf Ali translation throughout). Again, the text propels identity in a certain direction. By this line of reasoning, much of the Bible and the Qur'an can be interpreted as addressing identity issues.

#### 3.2 *The Impact of Apostasy Laws on Identity in Muslim Contexts*

The Islamic Law of Apostasy presents ministry challenges in many ministry contexts—even if those contexts are not technically under Shari'ah Law. Muhammad himself created, implemented and modeled the position on apostasy he required the *umma* (Muslim community) to perpetuate. According to Muhammad's statement in Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 52, Number 260:

"The Prophet said, 'If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.'"

A number of Qur'anic verses mete out severe penalties for apostasy. Sura 4:89 seems to close the door on any claims that Islam does not prescribe the death penalty for converts:

They but wish that ye should reject Faith, as they do, and thus be on the same footing (as they): But take not friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of God (From what is forbidden). But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them; and (in any case) take no friends or helpers from their ranks.

Some modern Muslim apologists, as well as non-Muslim apologists for Islam, have asserted that Islam is a religion of peace, and can function in societies where there is freedom of religion. Such claims depart from classical Islamic teaching. As Mawdudi, the great Islamic scholar of South Asia in the twentieth century, explains:

To everyone acquainted with Islamic law it is no secret that according to Islam the punishment for a Muslim who turns to *kufir* (infidelity, blasphemy) is execution. Doubt about this matter first arose among Muslims during the final portion of the nineteenth century as a result of speculation. Otherwise, for the full twelve centuries prior to that time the total Muslim community remained unanimous about it. The



whole of our religious literature clearly testifies that ambiguity about the matter of the apostate's execution never existed among Muslims. The expositions of the Prophet, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (*Khulafa'-i Rashidun*), the great Companions (*Sahaba*) of the Prophet, their Followers (*Tabi'un*), the leaders among the *mujtahids* and, following them, the doctors of the *Shari'ah* of every century are available on record. All these collectively will assure you that from the time of the Prophet to the present day one injunction only has been continuously and uninterruptedly operative and that no room whatever remains to suggest that perhaps the punishment of the apostate is not execution.<sup>2</sup>

Islamic laws regarding apostasy tend to cause a paralyzing fear among Muslims, thus freezing their spiritual identity. These laws also set the backdrop for ministry to Muslims, and hence influence missiological thinking.

### 3.3 Concerns over Extraction and Expulsion

Missionaries naturally would like new converts to remain within their communities, being salt and light therein. Historically, this has proven difficult within Muslim contexts. During the Colonial era, nearly all Muslims lived under the rule of Europeans, who were viewed as Christians by local populations. When Muslim converts to Christ ended up living outside their birth communities, the question begged: “Did missionaries extract the converts, or did the *umma* expulse them?”

In the post-Colonial era, Western missionaries developed a consensus by the 1970s that missionary error—extractionism—was the cause of limited fruit in Muslim contexts. This errant thinking justified the radical experiment that new believers in Christ be encouraged to permanently retain Muslim identity. In reality, expulsion of converts by the *umma* was the primary cause of the problem. Missionary Sam Schlorff astutely states:

Clearly, it is the Shariah, especially the *dhimmi* system [Islamic governance of religious minorities] and the law of apostasy, that is primarily responsible for the extraction of the Muslim convert from his culture. ... Unfortunately, the widespread attempt to blame Muslim resistance to the gospel on missionary extractionism has encouraged younger missionaries to experiment in ways that can only be described as extreme.<sup>3</sup>

This historical landscape describes the missional challenge in Muslim contexts and presages current missiological thinking.

<sup>2</sup> Abul Ala Mawdudi, “The Punishment of the Apostate According to Islamic Law,” (1953) translated 1994 from Urdu by Husain, Syed Silas, and Ernest Hahn, <http://www.answerislam.info/Hahn/Mawdudi/index.htm>, accessed December 15, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Schlorff. “The Translational Model for Mission in Resistant Muslim Society: A Critique and an Alternative.” *Missiology* 28, no. 3 (2000): 316.

## 4. Current Missiological Thinking

### 4.1 Insider Movements and Permanent Identity Bifurcation (PIB)

In the last several decades, advocates of insider movements (IM) have advanced a paradigm which claims to have largely solved this challenge. The IM paradigm discourages new believers from converting *out* of non-Christian religions, such as Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, but rather encourages them to follow Jesus while remaining *inside* those religions. This paradigm, according to proponents John Travis and Dudley Woodberry, may result in fast-moving revivals that “grow like yeast.”<sup>4</sup>

Insider theorist Rebecca Lewis penned a definition of insider movements at a consultation sponsored by the International Society of Frontier Missiology. One may observe that IM is not specific to Muslim contexts. Lewis defines “insider movements” as:

any movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

Lewis’ quote reveals that the IM paradigm has clear implications for identity. IM believers therefore *retain* their socio-religious identity—in this case, Muslim identity—though these believers have now come to believe in the Bible and Christ as Lord. Throughout this article, therefore, I will use the term *Retentionism* as short-hand for the *permanent retention* of Muslim identity by Christ-worshippers. It is the required IM position on identity according to the definition of IM proponents. Retentionism speaks to permanent states of identity, not temporary or transitional states that a person or persons in the process of conversion may undergo.

The term *Christian* is frequently a pejorative in most Muslim contexts. Hence, using a phrase that western evangelicals might understand and freely use, such as “becoming a Christian,” would likely be misunderstood and even frowned upon in Muslim contexts. Hence, Lewis uses “living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible” as an alternative. Though IM manifestations are far from uniform, Lewis’ definition of IM requires permanent retention of Muslim identity. Thus, if the movement can be considered an insider movement, the local Muslim community must continue to see the IM participants as Muslims.

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<sup>4</sup> John Travis and Dudley Woodberry, “When God’s Kingdom Grows Like Yeast: Frequently-Asked-Questions About Jesus Movements within Muslim Communities,” July-Aug (2010): <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/when-gods-kingdom-grows-like-yeast>, (Accessed December 18, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Lewis, “Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 24, no. 2, Summer (2007): 75.

Muslims have historically refrained from conferring Muslim identity on those who believe God visited the earth in the form of the Divine Savior Jesus. In fact, adoption of this belief is considered *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) which is the unpardonable sin in Islam, according to Sura 4:116. In my own doctoral field research, I found that Muslims and Muslim scholars consider a Christ-worshipper to be a non-Muslim.<sup>6</sup> To this date, I know of no Muslim scholar who is willing to extend Muslim identity to a person who worships Christ as Lord. This creates an irreconcilable tension for the viability of Retentionism. Islam was established by Muhammad and his followers to affirm absolute Divine Unity (*Tawhid*) and to forbid Trinitarianism, incarnational beliefs, and the worship of Christ. By promoting the existence of Christ-worshippers who are still Muslims, Retentionists have demolished the primary identity marker the *umma* has set up for itself. If the term *Muslim* could include a Christ-worshipper, then the term *Muslim* has lost all meaning.

The result of the missiological experimentation of the Retentionists is identity bifurcation. Believers see themselves as what Evangelicals may consider “Christian,” though these believers continue to identify themselves as Muslims publicly. Their Muslim family, friends and wider community may see them as Muslims. Since Retentionism describes permanent identity states (not transitional), I suggest that Retentionism promotes “permanent identity bifurcation” (PIB).<sup>7</sup>

The IM paradigm suggests that one’s personal core identity (faith in one’s heart) need not correspond to external identities. While this may be a reality for many Muslim inquirers in the transitional stage, for the reasons stated below, I believe this model fails to hold long-term promise for healthy discipleship of those who are intent on following Christ as Lord.

#### **4.2 Complications with Retentionism and PIB**

Far from untying the Gordian Knot in ministry to Muslims, Retentionism has created or exacerbated several problems, including PIB. Muslim followers of Jesus have ostensibly believed in Christ as Lord in their hearts, but they still seek to retain Muslim identity status. The first problem is that the *umma* confers Muslim identity upon those who esteem Muhammad as a prophet, and Muhammad forbade the worship of Jesus Christ (see Sura 3:59; 5:72; 5:116).

Second, by seeking to permanently retain Muslim identity, IM participants will be inclined to disguise their true beliefs in Christ. This creates a permanent spiritual schizophrenic state marked by identity confusion. In my experience, I have observed that Muslims who are

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<sup>6</sup> Fred Farrokh, *Perceptions of Muslim Identity: A Case-Study among Muslim-born Persons in Metro New York*, PhD Dissertation, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. Springfield, MO, (2014): <http://gradworks.umi.com/36/30/3630231.html>, (Accessed December 1, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Tim Green presents a three-layer model comprising core identity, social identity, and collective identity. However, I have not parsed collective and social identity. See Tim Green, “Identity Issues for Ex-Muslim Christians, with Particular Reference to Marriage.” *St. Francis Magazine*. August. 8:4, (2012): 435–481: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241678198\\_identity\\_issues\\_for\\_ex-Muslim\\_Christians\\_with\\_particular\\_reference\\_to\\_marriage](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241678198_identity_issues_for_ex-Muslim_Christians_with_particular_reference_to_marriage), (Accessed December 19, 2015).

journeying toward Christ collapse emotionally if they do not get some type of resolution to this identity limbo. Successful new believers press on toward a new spiritual identity in Christ. They naturally would prefer to avoid rupture of their existing family and communal relationships, but realize that reactions to their newfound faith are largely outside their control.

Third, a problem exists when the Muslim community sees these new insider believers as something they are not. Don McCurry assesses the IM paradigm (which he terms as “model five... staying inside Islam”) as follows:

I cannot agree with model five...There is too much room for deception in this model. The unconverted Muslims can perceive these new ‘believers’ as Muslims, while the new ‘believers’ perceive themselves as Christians without the label....The whole witness to the truth of the Gospel is blunted by this total submersion within forms of Islam.<sup>8</sup>

McCurry rightly points out the possibility of deception in this model. While Islam may allow for deception (*taqiyya*) in the promotion of Islam, the biblical approach rejects this. The New Testament history in Acts includes no precedent of the apostles hiding their identity to further the gospel or to avoid persecution.

The Retentionist paradigm endeavors that the *umma* would continue to see “Muslim Followers of Jesus” as Muslims. However, as stated above, if these believers have truly believed in the biblical narrative that God visited the earth in the form of Christ to save sinful humans, they are no longer Muslims. Their claim that they are still Muslims constitutes an ethical violation.

Fourth, the witnessing potential of these Muslim Followers of Jesus is weakened rather than strengthened by their pursuit of permanently retaining Muslim identity. A compromised believer lacks the witnessing conviction of a believer who has taken a strong stand for Christ. Fifth, Retentionism proposes that the ultimate “landing place” for Muslim seekers after Christ continues to be the Islamic mosque and the global *umma*. As such, these inquirers may never find their most appropriate permanent identity in the Body of Christ. This pitfall also mitigates against PIB being a holistic long-term missions model.

## 5. Pursuing Integrated Identity in Christ (IIC)

The long-term goal in ministry to Muslims should be modeling, mentoring and teaching integrated identity in Christ. In this “Integrated Identity in Christ” (IIC) model, the believer finds his or her individual identity in Christ, and his or her collective spiritual identity in the Body of Christ. The groups of which they are a part likewise find their primary spiritual identity in Christ and are

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<sup>8</sup> Don McCurry, *Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Ministries to Muslims, (2001): 330.

increasingly perceived as such by others. In the IIC model, identity is both integrated and converging upon Christ. As such, “integrated” is the opposite of “bifurcated; IIC constitutes the antithesis to PIB.

The IIC model must be viewed from several lenses. Individually, the new believer finds his or her identity in Christ, growing closer to Christ and more like Christ in a transformational process. The new believer’s self-awareness and self-identity likewise mirror this transformation “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18), since Christ Himself is “the Hope of Glory” (Col. 1:27). Duane Miller confirms that Christians of Muslim background are already pursuing a Christocentric emphasis:

The discourse, writings and liturgies of the CMB’s I studied tend to be *Christocentric*, meaning ‘those types of theology in which the person and work of Christ are the bases for all theological and ethical propositions.’<sup>9</sup> There is a strong tendency in these theologies to find all understanding about who and what God is like as seen through the person of Jesus. One of the consequences of the Christocentric tendencies I observed is that Muhammad entirely loses his status as the *ideal man*.”<sup>10</sup>

The family, friends and social circle of the new believer will inevitably become aware that this Christ-ward process is occurring in the life of the believer. This realization may be precipitated by the believer’s words or actions. Often the family and social circle will notice this change of behavior relatively quickly.

The collective process of transformation mirrors the individual process. The new groups of believers adopt a collective identity which also converges upon Christ. They no longer find their identity in the *umma*, since the *umma* is not Christ-centered. They are increasingly aware of themselves as forming a local expression of the global Body of Christ. Indeed, these groups find themselves stumbling upon the biblical ecclesiology that is absent in the IM model. Though they may not call themselves “churches,” and though they may meet on days other than Sunday, they are nonetheless *ekklesia* in the biblical sense. While I do not believe it is mandatory these new believers from a Muslim background, or their groups, use the identifier “Christian,” it is unethical for them to continue to identify themselves as “Muslims.” They simply are no longer Muslims in the eyes of the *umma*.

In places such as Iran and Algeria—contexts marked by minimal outside influence—this dynamic is actually being manifest. In Algeria, for example, the new believers are identifying as *Masiheeyeen Judod*,<sup>11</sup> even though the term Christian is not a positive one in that context. In

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<sup>9</sup> Inset quote: Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms*, New York: Macmillan, (1964): 48.

<sup>10</sup> Duane A. Miller, *Living among the Breakage: Contextual Theology Making and ex-Muslim Christians*, PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, (2014): 236–237.

<sup>11</sup> Bassam Madany, “Learning from the ‘New’ Maghrebi Christians” (no date): [http://www.answerislam.org/authors/madany/maghrebi\\_christians.html](http://www.answerislam.org/authors/madany/maghrebi_christians.html), (accessed December 15, 2013.)

the contemporary revival in Iran, new believers in Christ have readily rejected Muhammad, the mosque, and Muslim identity.

Readers familiar with Muslim contexts will be aware that family or community ostracism, or outright physical persecution, may occur at any stage of this process. Yet, new believers in Christ from a Muslim background do well to realize that the community reaction to their newfound identity in Christ is largely out of their control. If they veer away from their Christ-ward pilgrimage in the face of this persecution, they will lose the ability to influence this community for Christ.

### **5.1 The IIC Model Moves New Believers from Christ-Followers to Christ-Worshippers**

The expression “Follower of Jesus,” has become a bit trendy, even in the West, since it ostensibly wards off the dreaded associations of “religion.” Those promoting Retentionism prefer identifiers which use the term Muslim in the present tense. Examples include “Muslim Followers of Jesus”<sup>12</sup> and “Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa.”<sup>13</sup> Retentionists also seem to prefer the term “follower” of Jesus since that terminology does not necessarily contradict Islam.

I agree that being a Christ-follower is a valid biblical descriptor; for instance, Jesus simply told Matthew, “Follow me” (Mt. 9:9, see also Mt. 8:22). Nevertheless, this *Christ-follower* descriptor is less than optimal in Muslim contexts. In Islam, all prophets are believed to have brought forth a similar message of *Tawhid* and iconoclasm. Jesus, as a mortal prophet in Islam, is believed by Muslims to have brought forth the identical core message as Muhammad. As such, all traditional Muslims would *de facto* consider themselves “followers of Jesus,” even though they do not use this descriptor. That is, they follow the essential Qur’anic message preached by all mortal prophets, including Jesus.

When a term like “Muslim Follower of Jesus” is used in Muslim communities, Muslims will be inclined to think the person or group using this identifier is following the Islamic Jesus. This Islamic Jesus is only a prophet; he is not God; nor did he die on the cross. Meanwhile, the new believers may agree internally they are following the biblical Jesus. Again, the result is dissimulation and permanent identity bifurcation—PIB.

This simulated conversion between a hypothetical “Mustafa” and his father illustrates why the “Follower of Jesus” descriptor falls short in Muslim contexts:

Mustafa’s father: “Son, I am concerned you may be adopting some unusual beliefs. What is your religion?”

Mustafa: “I worship God. I am a Muslim follower of Jesus.”

Mustafa’s father: “We, too, are followers of Jesus and all the prophets. Tell me, son, have you become a Christ-worshipper?”

<sup>12</sup> J. H. Prenger, *Muslim Insider Christ Followers*. PhD Dissertation. Biola University. Los Angeles, CA, (2014).

<sup>13</sup> John Travis, “Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa: A Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 17, no. 1, Spring, (2000): 53–59.

At this point, Mustafa's father has made the issue crystal clear. Being a Christ-follower is not so bad in Islam—and could even be interpreted as being laudable. But to be a Christ-worshipper is forbidden. In terms of identity, is Mustafa willing to say he has a new identity in Christ, or is he merely content to hide behind his previous identity?

### ***5.2 The IIC Model and the Inevitable Stress Points***

Buildings and bridges are rated based on how well they can withstand the stresses of wind, earthquakes and tremors. For Muslims journeying to Christ, significant stress points emerge almost immediately. The largest and greatest stress point will always be whether believers place greater value on worshipping Christ than on family and community approval. This is the honor-shame issue wherein the honor of Christ may precipitate personal shame for the new believer. The sooner the believer and the believing group have settled this matter *internally and externally*, the easier their decision-making progress will be going forward.

For example, on the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter was tracking Jesus, "following at a distance" (Luke 22:54). He still was holding out hope that he would be appointed by Jesus to a high position in a temporal kingdom in this world. Suddenly a major stress point came upon Peter at the camp fire as his allegiance to Christ was called into question. This seems to have caught Peter somewhat by surprise; he denied even knowing Jesus. When Peter came to realize what he had done, he wept bitterly. This type of challenge mirrors the stress point encountered by Muslim-background believers when they are challenged by friends, family, community and religious leaders regarding their choice to worship Jesus as the living God. In the IIC Model, the new believers are fortified by their union with Christ in successfully overcoming these stressful challenges.

### ***5.3 Implementing the IIC Model through Identificational Discipleship***

The typical Western chronology of ministry progression is: evangelism, discipleship, church planting. First, Christ's witnesses preach the gospel. Once souls are saved, they are discipled. Once enough people are disciple, a church is organized.

While this progression may work well in some contexts, it may not translate as well into Muslim contexts. Most Muslims exhibit a collectivist decision-making mindset. Due to this dynamic, decision-making in this context is more deliberate. Instantaneous decisions are rarely made. Furthermore, the Muslim inquirer will be vetting the gospel messenger or messengers (for credibility and possible future moral support) throughout this process.

Though it may seem counter-intuitive, I recommend that those serving Muslims think "discipleship-first" in relationships with Muslims. I call this discipleship-interaction "Identificational Discipleship," which I define as: "An enduring relationship in which a Christian values, and seeks to enhance, the spiritual development of a Muslim or Muslims as if it were his or her own development."

The closest human analogy to this discipleship paradigm can be found in parenting. Many parents are as concerned, if not more concerned, with the well-being of their children as compared to their own well-being. As in parenting, the enduring nature of the discipleship relationship between the Christian and Muslim indicates the process cannot be rushed, since the new believer's identity is continually and gradually converging on Christ Himself.

Jesus provides the main biblical example of Identificational Discipleship. Jesus spent over three years pouring out His life and teaching into the lives of a dozen men. He granted the time necessary for them to find their individual and collective identity in Himself. As Peter's denial of Jesus indicates, this was far from a seamless process. Yet the end result was exemplary. The Book of Acts chronicles a movement in which believers had their individual and collective identity rooted in Jesus Himself.

For those ministering to Muslims today, several points of emphasis are in order. Patience is required as new believers begin to saturate themselves with the Bible, rather than Qur'anic teaching. Being conformed to the image of Christ is rarely a speedy process. Furthermore, if Muslims who are sojourning to Christ halt permanently in a state of permanent identity bifurcation, they will not have the internal fortitude or external platform to be effective witnesses to the risen Christ.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article I have described some of the challenges in ministry to Muslims. Identity has emerged as perhaps the most critical issue at this point in history. The root of this challenge lies in the explosive nature of Islam toward those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord. Some missiologists have recommended permanent retention of Muslim identity as the best way forward. I suggest this has resulted in, and can only ultimately result in, permanent identity bifurcation (PIB). The Insider Movement paradigm, with its identity position of Retentionism, does not promote the long-term spiritual health of new believers in the Lord Jesus from a Muslim background, since the key ingredient for retaining Muslim identity is affirming Muhammad, who rejected the biblical Jesus. Specifically, Muhammad spurned the narrative that God visited the earth in the form of Jesus, who died on the cross for sinful humans. Instead, Muhammad forbade the worship of Christ and transformed Jesus into his own personal herald (Sura 61:6).

Instead of Retentionism, I recommend an integrated identity in Christ (IIC) model in which group and collective identity shifts from Muhammad and the mosque, respectively, and to Christ and the Body of Christ, in a persistent, convergent fashion. Believers in Christ from a Muslim background are themselves already making this identity paradigm a reality in many of their local contexts. And the timing of the implementation of IIC may be excellent as the current manifestation of jihadist Islam is causing many Muslims to consider leaving Islam outright.



# Does the Old Testament “Authorize” A Creation Care Mission of the Institutional Church? Examining Christopher Wright’s Claims

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## ABSTRACT

Christopher Wright proposes that Christians, including the institutional church, have a God-given mission for creation care, finding his main scriptural support for this claim through his “paradigmatic” approach to the ethical application of Scripture, in particular in regard to OT ethics. Wright also calls for a broadened understanding of biblical authority which understands a mission of creation care as a responsibility “authorized” by the historical realities to which Scripture refers even in the absence of more explicit NT commands for the New Covenant community to pursue creation care. This article critiques both Wright’s expanded view of biblical authority and his paradigmatic application of the OT. This article concludes by providing an alternative interpretation of the scriptural data concerning creation care.

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**C**hristopher Wright is one of the leading evangelical voices advocating creation care. Through his many publications, through his work with the Lausanne Movement, and through his position as John Stott’s successor as head of the Langham Partnership International, Wright’s views exert a wide influence. Concerning creation care, Wright believes “justice towards the earth and entire cosmos forms an integral part of the mission of the church.... [The church] must include the ecological sphere within its scope, and see practical environmental action in general and aggressive responses to the climate crisis in particular as a legitimate part of the Christian mission.”<sup>1</sup> For Wright, creation care is an expression of compassion because “to care for God’s creation is essentially an unselfish form of love, exercised for the sake of creatures who cannot thank or repay us. It is a form of truly biblical and godly altruism.”<sup>2</sup> While Wright is not the first

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, “The Earth Is the Lord’s: Biblical Foundations for Global Ecological Ethics and Mission,” in *Keeping God’s Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective*, ed. Noah J. Toly and Daniel I. Block (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 235.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 418.

to argue for the importance of creation care,<sup>3</sup> what sets Wright apart from many other advocates is his in-depth engagement with the biblical text, the Old Testament (OT) in particular, in seeking to provide textual warrant for his claims. A key aspect of Wright's OT-based argument is his paradigmatic hermeneutic for doing biblical ethics, a model which includes a broadened understanding of biblical authority. Wright argues that the weight of biblical authority does not merely rest behind the explicitly-commanded mission tasks of Scripture but also behind unstated mission tasks, true responsibilities "authorized" by the realities to which Scripture points.

This article will consist of three parts: first, an overview of Wright's paradigmatic approach to OT ethics and his broadened understanding of biblical authority, with a special focus on how these two components undergird his belief in a biblically-required creation care mission. Second, this article will critique Wright's paradigmatic approach and his broadened understanding of biblical authority, demonstrating that Wright goes too far in claiming extensive Scriptural warrant for a mandated creation care mission of the institutional church today.<sup>4</sup> Fundamental to this paper's critique is the argument that the conscience-binding, ethical authority of Scripture is better understood as wedded more closely and narrowly to the intentional, textually-encoded meaning of the human authors, rather than broadened in the manner Wright advocates. Wright's expanded understanding of biblical authority is foundational to his expanded vision of the institutional church's God-given mission (including a robust responsibility for creation care), while a more limited view of how Scripture functions authoritatively cautions us against enlarging our understanding of the mission of the church beyond clear textual warrant. Finally, this article will propose an alternative understanding of what Scripture teaches about creation care, including the corresponding responsibilities of Christians toward the natural world.

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<sup>3</sup> A few of the many advocates of creation care include: James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000); C. Rene Padilla, "Holistic Mission," in *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call: Lausanne Occasional Papers From the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization*, ed. William Claydon (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 11–23; Andrew F. Walls and Cathy Ross, ed., *Mission in the Twenty-first Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Though Wright does not make a distinction between an "institutional" church mission of creation care and the environmental activities of individuals or groups of Christians in society operating apart from the structures and direct leadership of the local church (a distinction in keeping with Abraham Kuyper's distinction between the "institutional church" and the "organic church"), he nonetheless clearly includes both the "institutional" church and the individual Christian in his understanding of the obligation to pursue a mission of creation care. This paper will employ the term "institutional church" since it helps clarify the issue of whether there is a difference in the creation care responsibility of the institutional church in contrast to the creation care responsibility of individuals or groups of Christians when functioning apart from the direct oversight and operations of the institutional church.

## 1. Wright's Paradigmatic Approach to OT Ethical Authority

Even a cursory reading of Wright's body of work confirms his own testimony concerning "the great love-affair of my life with the ethical study and relevance of the Old Testament."<sup>5</sup> How does Wright develop ethical applications for today from the OT? He employs a "paradigmatic" approach,<sup>6</sup> using the term "paradigm" in both the senses proposed by Thomas Kuhn in his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. According to Wright, in the first sense, Kuhn uses "paradigm" to refer to a "wider conceptual paradigm," an "overall matrix of beliefs, values and assumptions,"<sup>7</sup> what could also be labeled a "worldview." In the second sense, Kuhn uses "paradigm" in a more narrow way as "a concrete model, a practical, experimental exemplar of the beliefs and values" of the wider paradigm.<sup>8</sup> For example, when a chemist working within the broad paradigm of the discipline of chemistry produces a model (or narrow paradigm) to solve a particular problem within chemistry, other chemists later apply the successful model (or case study) to additional problems within the field of chemistry.<sup>9</sup> These chemistry case studies or problem-solving models function "paradigmatically" for other chemists as they address additional problems within the overall discipline of chemistry.

How does Wright apply Kuhn's two senses of "paradigm" to his interpretation and ethical application of the OT? First, Wright sees the OT as providing an overarching worldview or broad paradigm.<sup>10</sup> Second, within this larger worldview, OT Israel is a particular application of that worldview to a certain time and place — a "case study" as it were. OT Israel as a case study or narrow paradigm provides us with "actual experimental results" and with a "historical exemplar of what [the OT worldview] meant in practice for one human community."<sup>11</sup> This illustrates Wright's conviction concerning the indivisibility of God's particular will for OT Israel in history and God's universal

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "My Pilgrimage in Theology," *Themelios* 19 (May 1994), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Others, like Walter Kaiser, are hesitant to adopt a paradigmatic approach to Israel as a model for the nations because, according to Wright, they are reacting to the extremes of theonomy. See Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: A Survey of Approaches," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2 (Nov 1992), 206. In comparison to Wright, Kaiser's approach to formulating ethical applications from OT law codes (employing what Kaiser labels a "ladder of abstractions") represents what can be seen as a more qualified and restrained application of OT law to contemporary ethics.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Authority of Scripture in an Age of Relativism: Old Testament Perspectives," in *The Gospel in the Modern World: A Tribute to John Stott*, ed. Martyn Eden and David F. Wells (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 43.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. This approach seems to parallel the pre-critical understanding of Scripture which "saw in the biblical narratives a coherent world in its own right that had a reality of its own and into which the biblical interpreters have to fit their own lives." John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 36.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

will for mankind throughout history. Though Wright resists making a simplistic transfer from the particular to the universal, he does assume that “the laws and institutions God gave to Israel accurately reflected, within the particular historical and geographical context, his desire and design for human life in the world.”<sup>12</sup> Wright sees this connection between historical Israel and God’s universal purposes for humankind as an “important hermeneutical principle [which] helps to unlock the relevance of the Old Testament for our own ethical construction.”<sup>13</sup>

Is Wright’s paradigmatic approach to OT ethics a case of reading back into the OT what was not originally intended by the authors? Did the OT authors expect readers outside of the original historical context of OT Israel to use OT Israel as a paradigm for application to their own lives and contexts? Is Wright’s paradigmatic approach a creative imposition on Scripture or does it reveal how the OT was intended to function all along? In answer, Wright is convinced that Israel *was* originally “intended by God to be an ethical model or paradigm and this was part of what it meant for them to be ‘a light to the nations.’”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, according to Wright, the concept of Israel as paradigm is “not just a hermeneutical tool devised... retrospectively, but, theologically speaking, was part of God’s design in creating and shaping Israel as he did in the first place.”<sup>15</sup> While Wright clearly claims that this paradigmatic application of Israel to the reader’s context was *God’s* original intent, it is not as clear whether or not he believes that this paradigmatic usage was also the conscious intent of the *human* authors of Scripture. As will be addressed further below, a crucial question in assessing Wright’s paradigmatic approach is the debated hermeneutical issue of the role of the consciously- and textually-encoded intent of the human authors for determining the authoritative meaning of Scripture.

Wright outlines four basic steps for moving from the paradigm of Israel to contemporary applications. First, the reader must acquire a general and broad understanding of OT law and its various categories and functions.<sup>16</sup> Wright’s main point is that the reader must begin by seeking to “step inside [the OT world] and understand the law from Israel’s own social perspective” and in so doing determine “the different ways that law functioned in Israelite society, the different kinds of law that operated, and the different patterns of judicial administration.”<sup>17</sup> Step two is to turn from the OT

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, “God or Mammon: Biblical Perspectives on Economies in Conflict,” *Mission Studies* 12.2 (1995): 148.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, “My Pilgrimage in Theology,” 4.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, “The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament,” (Nov 1992), 228.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

law broadly considered to the analysis of *particular* laws and institutions.<sup>18</sup> This analysis includes understanding the relationship of individual laws to the overall system of law and the function of those individual laws within the society, an analysis requiring in-depth engagement with “the fields of Old Testament economics, politics, sociology, [and] legal history.”<sup>19</sup> After attaining an understanding of Israelite society and law, including the function of individual laws, step three seeks to clarify the objective or objectives of those individual laws.<sup>20</sup> Finally, step four transfers the understood objectives and functions of particular laws from within the context of OT Israelite society to the new context of contemporary society.<sup>21</sup> According to Wright, this process of translation from ancient to modern is an attempt to achieve the underlying objectives of OT laws within society today or, at the very least, to “bring our own social objectives to point in the same direction” as OT Israel’s.<sup>22</sup> Through this four-step, paradigmatic ethical application, Wright seeks to establish a framework or outer boundary for our behavior even while permitting “a degree of variety and disagreement among Christians over the details of ethical decisions and social policies.”<sup>23</sup>

We should note that Wright’s paradigmatic approach is not his only rationale for creation care from the OT. For instance, Wright reasons, “if the greatest commandment is that we should love God, that surely implies that we should treat what belongs to God with honor, care, and respect. This would be true in any human relationship. If we love someone, we care for what belongs to them.”<sup>24</sup> In addition to such reasoning, Wright also believes Genesis 1–2 (Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 in particular) gives specific commands for humans to engage in creation care, commands whose validity is not contingent upon his paradigmatic approach. In Wright’s interpretation, Genesis 1–2 teaches creation care as “the first great responsibility that God laid on the human race,”<sup>25</sup> a never-rescinded duty which means that “ecological concern and action” *must* be seen as “a valid part of biblical Christian mission” today.<sup>26</sup>

Wright also integrates this “first great responsibility” into his paradigmatic approach. According to Wright, Genesis 1–2 presents the original broad paradigm of the proper relationship between

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 231.

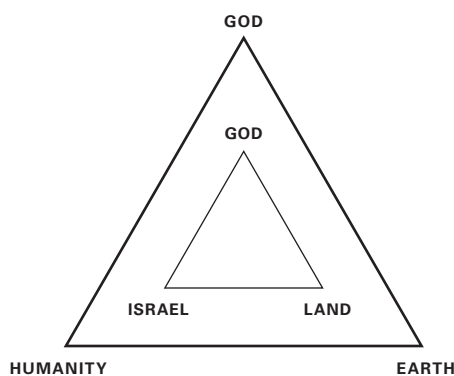
<sup>24</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 116.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 425.

humanity and the natural world as God intended it. Wright believes the church today must apply these same creation principles as an accurate reflection of the consistency and continuity of God's purposes throughout history. In addition, this continuity of purposes is not merely drawn between the Old *Covenant* people and the New *Covenant* people but is also continuity in God's purposes for all humanity, including humanity presently *outside* the New Covenant. Therefore, Wright believes that OT Israel is intended to function as an ethical model for Christians to apply in *secular* society today: "What God did with Israel in their land functions for us as a model or paradigm from which we draw principles and objectives for our socio-ethical endeavor in secular society."<sup>27</sup> Though Wright acknowledges the asymmetrical relationship between Israel as "a redeemed community" and present day secular society as a mixture of believers and unbelievers, he holds that Israel as a model was rooted in unchanging, universal "creation ordinances."<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Wright believes that Christians today should not hesitate to apply OT ethics to secular society using his paradigmatic approach.

FIGURE 1



In his major work on OT ethics, Wright explains his overarching goal as "outlin[ing] the broad contours of the worldview that lies behind the wealth of laws and exhortation in the Old Testament, as well as the moral values implicit or explicit in the narratives, worship and prophecy. Old Testament ethics are built upon Israel's worldview."<sup>29</sup> He goes on to identify God, Israel, and the land as "the three pillars of Israel's worldview."<sup>30</sup> Wright presents these three key elements as existing in a "triangle of relationships,"<sup>31</sup> with the three corners labeled "God," "Israel,"

and "the Land." Then, to demonstrate the relationship between the particular "case study" of OT Israel and the universal biblical worldview, Wright places the triangle within a larger triangle (See Figure 1). The apex of the larger triangle is also labeled "God." But the other two corners of the larger triangle are labeled "Humanity" (corresponding to "Israel") and "the Earth" (corresponding to "the

<sup>27</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 175–176.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Land”).<sup>32</sup> According to Wright, in the biblical worldview, just as God was centrally concerned with OT Israel’s relationship to the covenant land, so God continues to care deeply about all humanity’s relationship to the environment of the whole earth.

Wright’s formulation of the broader worldview of OT Israel corresponds with step one in his four-step paradigmatic process. In steps two and three (looking more closely at *individual* laws within the Israelite legal system), Wright also finds paradigmatic support for a creation care mission as he seeks to “make positive use of Israel’s comprehensive and detailed laws and institutions concerning the distribution and use of land in our own efforts to think biblically about economic and environmental ethics in our day.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, for Wright, the specific ways Israel related to the covenant land apply to the way Christians should relate to the earth, including the kind of economic solutions Christians ought to support and advocate in the political sphere. As specific examples of how the paradigm of OT Israel might apply to economics and politics today, Wright argues for equitable land re-distribution, wealth re-distribution, and the re-distribution of other natural resources within contemporary society.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, according to Wright, even as OT Israel was intended to be a nation which paradigmatically embodied justice for the weak and defenseless, so creation care is a warranted expression of the OT paradigm of justice, since the earth itself is weak and defenseless before human abusers thereby making our defense of the earth against environmental degradation a legitimate expression of OT justice.<sup>35</sup>

While Wright does believe that Genesis 1:28 provides a direct divine command for humans to engage in creation care, through his paradigmatic approach to OT ethics, he also wants to rethink the whole idea of textual authority and re-examine the question of how the OT functions authoritatively

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<sup>32</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 394–395.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, “God or Mammon,” 149.

<sup>34</sup> Concerning land redistribution, Wright argues: “[The OT system of land tenure] is itself a reflection of God’s wider original creation purpose for mankind on the earth. That all people should have access to some of the resources of the earth that is God’s gift is a basic human right which takes priority over the unchecked accumulation of private ownership. Israel, as God’s redeemed, ‘model’ community, were given an institution designed to protect this principle in their own stewardship of their land. So we may justifiably take it as a moral paradigm and apply its force as a ‘lever’ in Christian-based arguments for land reform.” Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, 177. Concerning wealth redistribution, Wright believes on the basis of the OT paradigm, “If in our day the rich — individuals or nations — cannot be *persuaded* [original emphasis] to make the sacrifices necessary to enable a more equitable deal for the poor, we face the moral and political question of whether they should be *compelled* to do so, whether by radical revolutionary means or by the more gentle process of redistributive taxation,” *ibid.*, 179. Concerning resource distribution in general, Wright is convinced that “The moral principles of the jubilee are therefore universalizable on the basis of the moral consistency of God. What God required of Israel reflects what in principle he desires for humanity; namely, broadly equitable distribution of the resources of the earth, especially land, and a curb on the tendency to accumulation with its inevitable oppression and alienation.” Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 207.

<sup>35</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, “Mission and God’s Earth,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader, 4th Ed.*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 32.

in developing biblical ethics.<sup>36</sup> He believes that Christians “need a broader understanding of revelation”<sup>37</sup> as well as a more flexible and “dynamic understanding of the authority and role of the Bible in a post-modern world,”<sup>38</sup> an understanding that goes “beyond merely direct, positive textual commands,”<sup>39</sup> such as Genesis 1:28. Wright is convinced that the church exhibits “a misleading tendency to equate the terms ‘revealed and authoritative’ too exclusively with the category of command.”<sup>40</sup>

Instead of seeing biblical authority for action as strictly attached to the commands intended by the human authors, Wright argues, “The authority of the Bible is that it brings us into contact with reality—primarily the reality of God himself,” and secondarily with other realities.<sup>41</sup> In turn, these various realities “generate authority that governs our responsive behavior.”<sup>42</sup> Wright further elaborates:

Reading and knowing Scripture causes us to *engage with reality* [original emphasis]. That in turn functions to authorize and to set boundaries around our freedom to act in the world.... these realities authorize our action in mission. They make our mission appropriate, legitimate and indeed necessary and inevitable. The authority for our mission flows from the Bible because the Bible reveals the reality on which our mission is based. I have three realities in mind, which are rendered to us first by the Old Testament Scriptures and then confirmed in the New. In these biblical texts we encounter the reality of *this God*, the reality of *this story*, and the reality of *this people*.<sup>43</sup>

Though a subtle distinction, Wright locates textual authority not primarily in the text itself but in the realities (God, the story, God’s people) to which the text points. Through this broadening of how the Bible’s authority functions and how God reveals his will, Wright then claims to establish grounds of biblical authority for mission tasks (such as creation care) that even if not *explicitly* commanded in Scripture are nonetheless “authorized” by the realities referred to in the text.

Another way Wright describes these textually-referenced realities is as “indicatives,” which he says are “simply a statement of reality” and the ground for *explicit* biblical imperatives, like the Great Commission.<sup>44</sup> Because of this, Wright believes that one “cannot read biblical indicatives without

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<sup>36</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 442.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>38</sup> Chris Wright, “Christ and the Mosaic of Pluralisms,” in *Global Missiology For The 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 76.

<sup>39</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 52.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 450.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 53.

<sup>42</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 469.

<sup>43</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 53–54.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.



their implied imperatives. Nor can [one] isolate biblical imperatives from the totality of the biblical indicative.”<sup>45</sup> Wright seems to say that biblical indicatives (or referential realities) contain “implied imperatives” that mandate certain actions, even in the absence of *explicit* imperatives. In this way, the underlying indicative reality of OT Israel sufficiently “authorizes” a Christian mandate for ecological activism, even in the absence of any direct NT commands.

## 2. Critique of Wright’s Paradigmatic OT Ethical Authority for Creation Care

Wright’s paradigmatic approach contains multiple aspects that are commendable. His method is a good-faith attempt to construct a biblical theology encompassing both testaments. Wright seeks to read Scripture as a unified story expressing an overarching worldview, including his particular specialty of in-depth analysis of the OT. He reads the Bible as an authoritative text which reveals God’s will for human ethical behavior today. Wright correctly turns to authoritative Scripture as providing the proper framework for addressing important contemporary issues facing Christians, including environmental abuse. Whether or not one agrees with Wright’s perspective on creation care, Wright has made a significant and influential contribution to the conversation among those seeking to engage environmental issues from a biblical worldview.

Despite the strengths of Wright’s paradigmatic approach, his argument for a creation care mandate for the institutional church today suffers from notable weaknesses. While there is a certain logic to arguing that if we love God, we should love what he loves, including the natural world, nowhere in Scripture do the human authors make this particular argument for the necessity of creation care. Likewise, though it is true that the natural world cannot defend itself against human misuse, Wright expands the definition of “social justice” too far when he posits the environment as a legitimate object of social justice. The concept of “social justice” in the Bible is better limited to describing the relationships between humans within society and does not encompass human relationships with the environment.

While the textual basis of these two just-mentioned arguments is questionable, Wright’s argument for a Genesis 1–2 creation care command is more defensible. Though the precise meaning of Adam and Eve’s commission in Genesis 1:28 to “subdue” and “have dominion over” the earth and the animals is heavily debated, at least one aspect of this mandate seems to be the maintenance of a proper relationship between mankind and the natural world.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the mandate for Adam and Eve to rule as God’s royal representatives clearly involves more than mere creation care, particularly requiring them to live in God’s presence in the unique setting of the garden, relating

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 220.

to God as his dependent children and as his priestly worshippers.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, it is reasonable to understand the mandate of Genesis 1:28 as including the role of managing the created world.<sup>48</sup>

More debatable is the question of whether or how this mandate applies to the institutional church today. In Wright's paradigmatic approach, the Genesis 1–2 creation care mandate represents an unchanging assignment given to all humanity, fully renewed after the Fall in the Noahic Covenant. For Wright, OT Israel with her responsibilities toward the covenant land is then but one particular expression within history of the creation care mandate incumbent upon all humans, including the institutional church today. One possible objection to this paradigmatic argument is that it flattens the relationship between the covenants, insufficiently recognizing discontinuity between the covenants and the covenantal shifts that take place during the progressive unfolding of God's covenant plan.<sup>49</sup> The validity of Wright's paradigmatic application of the mandates of Adam and Israel to the church today is therefore dependent upon his overall conception of continuity between the covenants. When greater *discontinuity* between the covenants is recognized or when the New Covenant is understood to supersede the previous covenants by fulfilling them,<sup>50</sup> a paradigmatic transfer of the responsibilities from earlier covenants into the New Covenant is more questionable. In contrast to Wright, who appears to assume the legitimacy of the wholesale paradigmatic transfer of covenant responsibilities from one covenant articulation to the next, this paper argues that, because of the major NT covenantal shift, any still-valid responsibilities from previous covenants must be *explicitly* reaffirmed in the New Covenant rather than merely be assumed as transferrable. Unlike Wright, the silence of the NT concerning an explicit mandate for Christians in this age to rule over and care for

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<sup>47</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 194–216.

<sup>48</sup> There are some who continue to resist allowing for any explicit creation care mandate in Genesis 1–2. Cyril Rodd, for instance, argues: "It needs to be asserted as forcefully as possible that the question of safeguarding the environment did not enter into [the Old Testament writers'] thinking.... What I am claiming is that there is no explicit demand to care for the environment, because it did not occur to anyone in ancient Israel to make such a plea. Such a demand may be implicit in the creation narratives and the 'cosmic covenant,' but hardly ever (if at all) in the Old Testament are human beings urged to take active measures to conserve nature." Cyril S. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T, 2001), 249. David Horrell agrees that "Even the apparently most valuable ecotexts do not straightforwardly imply any particular pattern of ethical responsibility towards creation." David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010), 118.

<sup>49</sup> Wright does recognize discontinuity between the covenants. He agrees that there is not "a flat identity between the two Testaments" nor does he "overlook the diversity within the Testaments and the crucial developments between them" such as the different "historical eras, covenantal articulations, and changing cultural contexts at each stage of [the biblical storyline]." Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 315. The critique of this paper is not that Wright does not recognize any discontinuity but that his recognition of discontinuity is insufficient. In the final analysis, for Wright "the unity of God's people in the Bible is a far more important theological truth than the different periods of their historical existence." Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Whole Church: a Brief Biblical Survey," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34.1 (Jan 2010), 19.

<sup>50</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 604.

either the whole earth or a covenant land cannot be dismissed simply by noting the presence of the mandate in earlier covenant administrations. Therefore, Wright is mistaken to assume that Adam's and Israel's God-given responsibilities toward the natural world must necessarily be included, with little change, in the present responsibilities of the New Covenant community.

Wright's inattention to covenant boundaries also plagues his attempts to find OT texts addressing environmental abuse. For example, Wright claims that Hosea 4:1–3<sup>51</sup> “provides the most direct example” of the “strong moral link between how humans behave on earth and the state of the earth itself—for good or ill.”<sup>52</sup> Wright presents these verses as an example of “the underlying scientific connections between human action and biological effects”—that is, the same kind of negative biological effects we observe today as the result of human environmental abuses such as pollution.<sup>53</sup> The weakness of this argument is that Hosea 4:1–3 is not presenting general principles for all the earth. Instead, the passage is speaking of the unique covenant land which received physical curses as a consequence of Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness rather than as a result of their polluting. The languishing of the land in Hosea 4:1–3 is not the result of the impersonal laws of cause-and-effect built into the natural world where environmental abuse inevitably leads to environmental spoilage. Instead, the languishing of the land in Hosea is the result of the Lord's direct, causal judgment upon Israel for their covenantal unfaithfulness. Wright is unconvincing in arguing that Hosea 4:1–3 is addressing the issue of environmental abuse.

The objections proposed so far to Wright's argument for a creation care mandate are all based upon the inadequacy of Wright's textual evidence. Yet, in light of his re-casting of how the Bible functions authoritatively in determining ethical application, are these objections dismissible as rooted in faulty presuppositions concerning the function of the text? As noted earlier, for Wright, the key question seems less, “What authoritative meaning did the human authors intentionally communicate through their written text?” and more “What is the authoritative meaning of the historical *realities* to which the text points?” But does biblical authority function as that which is wedded more narrowly to the author-intended textual meaning or is it wedded directly to the authority of God's reality (and other realities)—potentially exceeding the bounds of explicit author-intended textual meaning? Millard Erickson agrees that “God himself is the ultimate authority in religious matters. He has the

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<sup>51</sup> Hosea 4:1–3 [ESV] “Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: ‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. *Because of this*, the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away.’”

<sup>52</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 55.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

right, both by virtue of who he is and what he does, to establish the standard for belief and practice.”<sup>54</sup> So far, he agrees with Wright. But Erickson goes on to argue that God “does not exercise authority in a direct fashion, however. Rather, he has delegated that authority by creating a book, the Bible.”<sup>55</sup> Though Wright would no doubt affirm Erickson’s statement, Wright’s belief that the reality *behind* the text “has its own intrinsic authority”<sup>56</sup> tends toward some allowance for the direct functioning of the authority of the referential realities (God, the story, the people) in a way which is not strictly limited by the more narrow authority attached to the author-intended meaning of the text.<sup>57</sup> This is essentially the move Wright makes when he claims that the Bible authoritatively demands creation care as a vital part of the institutional church’s mission—even though the explicit evidence in the OT for such a mandate is at best minimal<sup>58</sup> and is completely lacking in the NT. It is better to follow Kevin Vanhoozer who argues that we ought clearly to maintain “the connection between authors and

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<sup>54</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 271.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 457.

<sup>57</sup> Another way to understand this issue is through the question: Where is the locus of authoritative and inspired meaning — in the human author’s intended meaning as embedded in the text or in the historical event or subject matter to which the text refers? While it can be said, in one sense, that God revealed himself in historical events, many who personally experienced that event-revelation (i.e. Israelites in Moses’ day or Jews in Jesus’ day) profoundly misinterpreted what they experienced. Scripture, on the other hand, is the only inspired interpretation of those events and the only on going access we have to special revelation in history and is itself a textual form of special revelation. But for those who accept some of the presuppositions and conclusions of historical criticism, the question becomes: How can a historically embellished and questionable text function as authoritative special revelation? Or for those who accept some of the epistemological assumptions of post-modernism, the question becomes: How can any text provide clear and authoritative propositional knowledge? Some (like Schleiermacher in an earlier age) respond with an understanding of authority not in the textual meaning but in the reader’s religious experience. Authority moves from text to experience, from author to reader — as is common in many reader-response hermeneutical approaches today. Others in history “developed elaborate apologetic approaches that sought to locate the truth of faith (revelation) in the history (‘events’) that occurred behind the texts of Scripture. The Bible formally preserves its authority, but its relation to revelation changes. Instead of the texts themselves being directly revelatory, the texts witness to the truth of revelation occurring in history.” Charles J. Scalise, *Hermeneutics as Theological Prolegomena: A Canonical Approach* (Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1994), 11. While Schleiermacher moved authoritative revelation “in front of the text” (a reader’s experience), others moved authoritative revelation “behind the text” (the events of history). In contrast, for those, like Stein, who still approach Scripture as historically-trustworthy and epistemologically perspicuous, a distinction is maintained between textual meaning on the one hand and either historical events or the reader’s subjective response on the other hand. “When we are investigating the ‘text,’ we are seeking to ascertain what pattern or type of meaning the author willed to convey by his text. When we investigate the ‘event,’ we are investigating the historical subject matter referred to in the text,” and “Significance involves a person’s attitude toward the meaning of a text.... Meaning belongs to the author; significance belongs to the reader.” Robert H. Stein, *Playing By The Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 48, 44. This understanding of authoritative textual meaning as found in the author’s explicit intent seems to cohere best with the idea of divine textual inspiration as conveyed in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20–21.

<sup>58</sup> The mandate of Genesis 1–2 for humanity and its (at least partial) renewal in Genesis 9 is probably the strongest OT argument for an explicit creation care command that applies, in some sense, to Christians today.

authority”<sup>59</sup> as “the author originates meaning,” and therefore “it is the author who has authority, author’s rights.”<sup>60</sup> Rather than expanding the ethical authority of Scripture beyond the author-intended meaning of the text, it is wiser to maintain with Kaiser and Silva that “only what is directly taught in Scripture is binding on the conscience.”<sup>61</sup> If Scripture does not give an explicit command for creation care to the institutional church today, we are not at liberty to impose one.

### 3. An Alternative Proposal

After questioning the validity of Wright’s arguments for a creation care mission of the institutional church, this article will now propose an alternative view of a Christian’s responsibility toward the natural world in this age, consisting of six principles. First, as mentioned earlier, the Creation Mandate of Genesis 1–2 is fundamentally about humanity’s relationship with God as priestly vice-regents and only derivatively about humanity’s relationship with animals and the rest of the natural world.<sup>62</sup> Any Christian responsibility for creation care must then be seen as secondary to the mandate to multiply the “royal priesthood... [which] proclaim[s] the excellencies of [God]” (1 Pet 2:9).

Second, the renewed mandate of the Noahic Covenant in Genesis 9 is an altered mandate, a Fallen Creation Mandate. The commands to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” *are* renewed, but there is no longer a command to “subdue” or “have dominion” over animals and the earth (9:1). This reveals the changed relationship of humans to the natural world after the Fall. Instead of a harmonious dominion over the animals (2:19–20), animals now fear mankind (9:2), and mankind is allowed to kill and eat the animals (9:3). As well, animals kill humans, as indicated by the command to kill any animal that kills a human (9:5). Additionally, man no longer lives in the garden of God’s perfect presence and provision, but instead must toil in the cursed ground to bring forth food (3:17–19). As soon as God makes a covenant with Noah (a second Adam), Noah immediately plants a garden (a vineyard) and falls into sin in a way reminiscent of the first Adam (nakedness revealed) (9:20–22). Rather than exerting dominion over the earth, the fruit of the earth (grapes), ironically, exerts dominion over Noah (drunkenness). Finally, man’s new attempts to establish dominion lead to God’s judgment at Babel (11:1–9), much in the same way that fallen man’s attempts at dominion

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<sup>59</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 44.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 204.

<sup>62</sup> See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004) for one who argues strongly for Genesis 1–2 as presenting mankind as fundamentally functioning as priest-kings in God’s presence. Beale argues that Christians today have the same fundamental priestly tasks as Adam: learning and teaching God’s Word, prayer, holy living, and witnessing, *ibid.*, 398–400.

before the flood (4:16–24) also led to God’s judgment (6:1–7). As we consider Christian creation care in light of this fallen age, the reality of this Fallen Creation Mandate should temper our expectations for the dominion that we will be able to establish over the natural world.

Third, as Wright notes, the Fallen Creation Mandate of Genesis 9 is a mandate for all humanity, believing and unbelieving, part of the Noahic Covenant made with Noah and all his descendants after him (9:9). The universal Noahic Covenant is then not a covenant of salvation and special grace with a particular people (like the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New Covenants), but is instead a covenant of preservation and common grace with all people.<sup>63</sup> The Fallen Creation Mandate is therefore a responsibility for all humanity, not merely Christians. This should cause us to be more hesitant than Wright in assigning to the institutional church a distinct mission of creation care. The institutional church’s unique mandate is the New Covenant ministry of salvation and special grace. While individual Christians (along with all humanity) share Noahic Covenant responsibilities (responsibilities which arguably include creation care), we should be hesitant to assign the mission of creation care to the institutional church.

Fourth, contrary to Wright, the laws regulating Israel’s Old Covenant relationship with the Promised Land do not relate as directly as he claims to the church’s New Covenant relationship with all the earth. New Covenant members do not now have a unique and separated holy land. While the new heavens and new earth will one day provide Christians with that holy land, at this point in salvation history, Old Covenant land laws do not provide the unequivocal imperative that Wright claims they do for Christians to care for the present earth. Rather than an authoritative mandate for creation care, the OT laws provide wisdom and implied principles that should inform our relationship with the natural world in this age rather than offering binding prescriptions for the institutional church. As well, since human society today is necessarily a mixture of both those inside and outside the New Covenant, we should be more reluctant than Wright to apply OT laws, such as land redistribution, in a more direct fashion to secular society today. Those covenant laws were established originally with the Israelites alone, not with all humanity.

Fifth, the dominion mandate of Genesis 1 is only partially reflected in the NT. Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), clearly expressed dominion over the natural world (and the spiritual realm) during his earthly ministry. As Jesus departed the earthly realm, he also definitively established the truth that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18). But to what extent is Christ’s dominion over the natural world extended to his people in this age? When Christ sent out the twelve and the seventy in his name (Luke 9–10), he gave them his authority to cast out demons and to heal the sick. In the book of Acts, after Pentecost, Peter, Paul, and the other apostles

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<sup>63</sup> See David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010) for further development of this distinction between the biblical covenants.

continued to express authority to cast out demons and to heal the sick. But in the later NT era and in the patristic period, the authority and miraculous signs and wonders of the apostolic ministry (displaying in part a heightened experience of authority over the natural world by at least some believers) were increasingly revealed to be characteristics of a unique era in salvation history and of a foundational apostolic role. Scripture reveals the ongoing authority and dominion of believers in this post-apostolic age to be more limited to the spiritual realm and the realm of the institutional church (see for example the “keys to the kingdom” in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18), clearly not extending to dominion over all human society or the whole natural world. Yet, the NT also reveals that the authority and dominion of believers *will*, after Christ’s return, extend to all creation. Paul teaches that Christians “will judge the world... [and] angels” (1 Cor 6:2–3). The glorified Christ of Revelation promises that in the future kingdom of God, he will give believers “authority over the nations... [to] rule them” (Rev 2:26–27). Believers will “sit with [Christ] on [his] throne,” even as he “sat down with [his] Father on his throne” (Rev 3:21). But the NT shows that this universal dominion of believers is a future, and not a present, reality. The NT picture of believers’ limited dominion in this age, along with the lack of a NT command for the institutional church (or individual Christians) to care for creation, should caution us against proclaiming, as Wright does, an unequivocal, biblically-warranted, institutional church mandate for creation care.

Sixth, the repeated NT command to “do good to all” is the best option for an appropriate category within which we can rightly recognize a Christian responsibility for creation care. Paul commands us: “as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). I lived for over seven years of my life in a horribly polluted Asian megacity. God originally fashioned the world as a place for human habitation, but as I experienced first-hand, human misuse and folly can make the natural world an inhospitable place to live. Though Christians put their ultimate hope for creation in the new heavens and the new earth (Rom 8:19–22), we are right to love our neighbor and to seek to do good to all by advocating for wise policies of creation care in this age. But our responsibility to care for creation as Christians is “as we have opportunity,” a command to do good whose weight and specificity does not match the magnitude or directness of Wright’s claims for an obligated creation care mission of the local church. In contrast, the New Covenant community’s primary responsibility toward the world is to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2), a command extensively repeated in different ways throughout the NT and a unique mission clearly assigned to the institutional church.

# New Trajectories and Old Patterns: Hermeneutics and Same-Sex Advocacy

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## ABSTRACT:

Both Luke Johnson and James Brownson, two respected New Testament scholars, have argued in recent years in favor of same-sex marriage. Johnson argues that Christians should not base their ethic solely on the New Testament witness and thinks there are grounds to go beyond the biblical teaching for a variety of reasons. Brownson, on the other hand, maintains that a careful study of the scriptures shows that they don't actually speak against faithful and monogamous same-sex marriages. The arguments of both Johnson and Brownson are carefully reviewed and found to be unconvincing. Johnson doesn't rightly construe the role of salvation history and the definitive and final revelation given in Jesus Christ. Brownson's exegesis of key texts in Paul, especially Romans 1, misconstrues the argument of the text. Also, he wrongly presupposes in the article that Paul doesn't know about same-sex orientation.

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## 1. Introduction

**I**n a time long ago and in a place faraway I debated those who defended women's ordination. My fundamental argument in the debate then (and I still make the same argument by the way) was the argument from creation. I would argue that women should not serve as pastors or elders or overseers since God, according to 1 Timothy 2:12–13, established at creation a different role for women.<sup>1</sup> I would regularly point out during these discussions that the same argument is used relative to homosexuality. In other words, Paul argues that same-sex erotic behavior is wrong because it violates the created order. When I would bring up this argument, my opponents would sometimes get upset, claiming that I had wrongly linked the two issues and that I was playing on people's emotions to make my point. I would always say in reply... Of course, the prohibition

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<sup>1</sup> See the third edition of *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas Kostenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).



against same sex relationships is clearer than the prohibition regarding women serving as pastors.<sup>2</sup> Of course. Of course. But don't you see that the principal argument is the same—in both cases we have arguments from creation?

If one argument from creation is jettisoned (as is the case with women serving as pastors), it won't be long before the argument from creation relative to same-sex relationships is abandoned as well. I was told that it would never happen since the case against homosexuality is so clear. But, of course, it is happening more and more, and some who thought the issue was so clear 20 to 30 years ago are rethinking the whole matter. The new trajectories we are seeing today are in part the fruit of old hermeneutical patterns. We have sown the wind of rejecting the argument from creation when it comes to women's roles, and now we are reaping the whirlwind of rejecting the argument from creation when it comes to same-sex relations.

No, I am not saying the arguments are equally clear, but I am saying that it is not surprising that old hermeneutical patterns have led to new trajectories. William Webb argued some years ago that a trajectory hermeneutic takes us beyond the Bible on the women's issue.<sup>3</sup> He insisted that there are no grounds for such a trajectory on homosexuality, but when I reviewed his book I predicted that others would take up the same kind of argument and find a trajectory to justify same-sex relationships.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, some were moving in this direction even while Webb was writing.

Some might think that this issue is just a debate in the West, and it doesn't relate to the rest of the world, and it certainly doesn't relate to missions. Such a perspective would be radically mistaken. For one thing, virtually everything that is popular and endorsed in the West, for better or for worse, ends up spreading to the rest of the world. If we think that the issue of same-sex relations will be limited to the West, we are sadly mistaken. Second, the temptation to engage in same-sex relationships isn't a western problem but a human problem. Some societies may clamp down on the expression of such desires, but they exist everywhere and hence God's people need to be ready to give biblical and wise answers to the questions that people are asking today. And people will ask and are asking what God's will is on same-sex relationships, and thus careful study of and responses to those who advocated same-sex marriage must be given.

For the rest of this paper I want to briefly consider the contributions of Luke Timothy Johnson and James Brownson. Luke Johnson is a famous Roman Catholic NT scholar, and his work as a NT scholar is generally quite conservative, and yet he has come out in favor of same-sex marriage. James

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<sup>2</sup> By relationships I mean erotic relationships for the purpose of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*: A Review Article," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6 (2002): 46–64.

Brownson is a professor of NT at Western Seminary in Holland, Michigan, a Reformed Church of America institution. Brownson has recently written a nuanced and sophisticated defense of same-sex marriage. Both Johnson and Brownson reject lust, promiscuity, and licentiousness in same-sex relationships. They defend, however, monogamous same-sex relationships characterized by fidelity, love, and commitment. My purpose today is to consider the arguments of both scholars and to see if some of their arguments pass muster.

## 2. The Case Presented by Luke Johnson

### 2.1 *Arguing from Human Experience*

Let's consider Luke Johnson's argument first. In one sense, Johnson is very clear. He freely admits that scripture condemns all same-sex relationships.<sup>5</sup> At the same, however, he protests we don't follow scripture on everything in any case. He says we must "be liberal in the name of the gospel."<sup>6</sup> He goes on to say, "we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality—namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience to God's created order."<sup>7</sup> Well, one can't be much clearer than that. There is no subterfuge here. Our experience and our moral sense trumps the scriptural word; this is nothing other than Protestant liberalism showing up in a Catholic guise. Johnson clearly goes beyond the Bible and cheerfully so.

Johnson notes that in the 19th century people appealed to the Bible to defend slavery and they were "deeply wrong," even though scripture doesn't condemn slavery.<sup>8</sup> Johnson compares defenders of gay and lesbian marriage to the abolitionists of a former day. He says, "We are fully aware of the weight of scriptural evidence pointing away from our position, yet place our trust in the power of the living God to reveal as powerfully through personal experience and testimony as through

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<sup>5</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "Homosexuality and the Church: Scripture and Experience," Accessed at <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-1> on September 25, 2015. For a fuller explanation of Johnson's view, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). See especially his discussion on Cornelius and the Apostolic Council (pp. 89–108) and homosexuality (pp. 144–48).

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, "Homosexuality and the Church: Scripture and Experience," Accessed at <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-1>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

written texts. To justify this trust, we invoke the basic Pauline principle that the Spirit gives life but the letter kills (2 Corinthians 3:6).” Johnson admits that the experience of one of his daughters, who is a lesbian deeply influenced him, and we can understand the human concern that animates him. Still, his appeal to 2 Cor. 3:6 fails since Paul isn’t claiming here that moral norms can be contravened and reversed by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the background to Paul’s letter-Spirit contrast are the new covenant texts like Jer. 31:31–34 and Ezek. 36:26–27. And in those texts God writes the law upon the heart and gives his Spirit so that human beings are enabled to keep God’s law.

### ***2.2 Arguing from the Bible***

Still, the matter isn’t so simple because Johnson also appeals to Paul’s refusal to be bound by the OT law to justify his reading. He brings in the Bible to defend the notion that we can go beyond the Bible. Johnson cites the stories in Acts 10 and 15 where Gentiles are accepted into the people of God apart from observance of the Mosaic law. The Jewish Christians who received the Gentiles listened to the Holy Spirit, and realized that God was doing a new thing, a thing that wasn’t obvious to God’s people before the coming of Jesus Christ and the inauguration of the last days.

We also see Johnson’s hermeneutic when he says, “I suggest, therefore, that the New Testament provides impressive support for our reliance on the experience of God in human lives—not in its commands, but in its narratives and in the very process by which it came into existence. In what way are we to take seriously the authority of Scripture? What I find most important of all is not the authority found in specific commands, which are fallible, conflicting, and often culturally conditioned, but rather the way Scripture creates the mind of Christ in its readers, authorizing them to reinterpret written texts in light of God’s Holy Spirit active in human lives. When read within the perspective of a Scripture that speaks everywhere of a God disclosing Godself through human experience, our stories become the medium of God’s very revelation.”<sup>9</sup> So, according to Johnson we take seriously scripture’s authority in going beyond scriptural commands. The commands, Johnson says, may be wrong, but apparently we can discern via the Holy Spirit and human experience what is normative for us today. Johnson says that “a blind adherence to Scripture when God is trying to show us the truth in human bodies is also a form of sin.”<sup>10</sup>

The appeal to experience is classic, imitating Protestant liberals of old. But Johnson is also like the liberals of old in that he can’t resist using the Bible to defend his view. Still, the criterion for what is authoritative, as Johnson admits, is human experience. Johnson attempts to defend such an interpretive move with scripture, but the arguments miscarry. First, he tries to defang scripture by claiming that the biblical writers were wrong on slavery. He fails to see, however, that the biblical

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

writers never defend slavery as a social system. Slavery is never endorsed or commended but is regulated, delimited, and qualified. Slavery, unlike marriage, isn't rooted or based on the created order, showing that it isn't God's good intention for human beings. After all, Paul says that people should gain freedom if possible (1 Cor. 7:21). We must realize that the biblical writers address society as it is on the matter of slavery, but male and female relationships are dramatically different since they are rooted in the created order.

Johnson's appeal to the overturning of the Mosaic law in the case of Cornelius in Acts 10–11 and at the Apostolic Council in Acts 15 is unconvincing. Surprisingly, he doesn't recognize the covenantal and salvation-historical character of NT revelation. With the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the promises of the new covenant and the new creation have been realized. The old has passed away and new has come. The people of God is no longer confined to a Jewish theocracy, but now all people everywhere belong to Jesus Christ by faith. The law of the old covenant is no longer in force now that Christ has come and fulfilled old covenant promises. Believers are no longer under the law. Hence, circumcision, food laws, and other stipulations that mark out Jews from Gentiles have passed away with the dawn of the new age in Jesus Christ. The moral norms of the OT law, however, continue to be in force since they are part of the law of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

As Hebrews 1:2 says God has spoken to us in the last days in his Son, or as Jude 3 says we are to contend for the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints. Here is the point that Johnson misses: now that the Christ has come and the last days have arrived there is no new revelation until Christ returns and the new creation arrives in its fullness. There is no hermeneutical justification to use what happened at the turn of the ages in the NT as a paradigm for ethical renovation today. In doing so Johnson wrenches the scriptures from their covenantal and redemptive historical context.

I have taught students for years the importance of redemptive history in considering Acts 10–11 and Acts 15. Since covenant fulfillment is realized in Jesus Christ, I can't legitimately say that I had a dream last night and God showed me that adultery or homosexuality or murder is okay, just as he showed Peter that it was legitimate to eat unclean foods. To do so fails to see the unique fulfillment of covenant promises which took place at the coming of Jesus Christ. There is no canonical warrant for further revision of God's revelation. In other words, the canon of scripture is closed. What Johnson suggests hermeneutically means that he puts himself on the same level as the apostolic witnesses, as if we have the right and the ability to keep revising the faith once for all handed down to the saints. We can see, perhaps why a Roman Catholic would do so, though Johnson does so apart from the magisterium. For Protestants, however, who hold to *sola scriptura* and a closed

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<sup>11</sup> For a fuller explanation of this matter, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); idem, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010).

canon, Johnson's moves are highly irregular and they end up contravening biblical authority. Human experience becomes the measure and the standard instead of the apostolic word.

### 3. The Case of James Brownson

Now let's turn to James Brownson. Space is lacking to engage every dimension of his argument. The argument is learned, sophisticated, and at many points illuminating, and yet, the thesis propounded fails to convince. Since Brownson has written a full length book on the matter, I will concentrate on the arguments that are central to his affirmation of same-sex unions. Like Johnson, Brownson appeals to the leading of the Holy Spirit in Acts 15, to our experience today, to the conflict Galileo had with church authorities, to slavery in the nineteenth-century, and to the issue of women in leadership.<sup>12</sup> The revelation that one of his sons was gay provoked him to follow the Reformed notion of investigating afresh God's word on the principle that the church is consistently refreshed and reformed by the word of God.<sup>13</sup>

#### 3.1 Complementarity

Brownson investigates and considers the issue of complementarity.<sup>14</sup> His goal is to discover the moral logic informing same-sex relations. He rejects the notion that the complementarity of the sexes is fundamentally biological. In other words, he says it isn't persuasive to argue against homosexuality from the fittedness of sexual organs. Do we really point to anatomy, he protests, to discover the moral logic in the scriptural word? Brownson argues instead that the one-flesh bond of Adam and Eve isn't based on differences but similarity. Adam recognized that Eve was "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Adam doesn't focus on the differences between him and Eve but the similarities. One flesh denotes a kinship group and a kinship bond, not "physical gender complementarity."<sup>15</sup> Hence, the notion that same-sex relations are contrary to nature is flawed since the scriptural "moral logic" isn't grounded on anatomical complementarity.

Brownson is partially right; the text doesn't specifically refer to anatomical complementarity. Still, it is significant that Adam marries someone who is both similar to him *and different* from him. The Lord says that he will make "a helper as" Adam's "complement." As Preston Sprinkle argues the

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<sup>12</sup> James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–38.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

word translated “complement”—*תְּנִידָה* in Hebrew—emphasizes that Eve is a female.<sup>16</sup> If Eve’s gender wasn’t significant all that would need to be said, as Sprinkle, points out is that Eve was made “like” Adam. But the text says more than that; it emphasizes Eve’s sexual distinctiveness.<sup>17</sup> Readers have been attuned to the complementary role of women throughout history. The Lord could have easily made another male for Adam. Still, does the female gender of Eve require marriage to a person from the opposite sex? Brownson says no, but his reading is sundered from the entire Jewish tradition. The OT, Second Temple Jewish literature, and the NT unanimously and without qualification reject all same-sex relations. Indeed, when Jesus reflects on marriage and one-flesh unions in Matthew 19 (vv. 3–12), he speaks in terms of the union of one man with one woman, as he reflects on the creation account in Genesis 2. Brownson tries to crack open the window to include same-sex relations, but there is no space for such an opening in the scriptural tradition or in the teaching of Jesus. Brownson ends up going beyond Genesis and beyond Paul and beyond Jesus, and he does so without any scriptural warrant.

### 3.2 Patriarchy

Brownson also defends his thesis by reflecting on patriarchy.<sup>18</sup> He sees a tension in the OT between patriarchy and egalitarianism. The presence of Miriam, Deborah, and others demonstrate that patriarchy isn’t absolute, and thus he sees glimpses in the OT of an egalitarian vision. A similar pattern emerges in the NT so that the new creation is the fundamental reality per Gal. 3:28. Hence, the limitations on women are for “pragmatic” and cultural reasons. Brownson in his conclusion to this chapter sounds remarkably like William Webb. “The overall movement of the moral logic of Scripture with respect to patriarchy is thus away from roles defined by household responsibilities in the ancient world... and toward a vision of mutuality and equality in which the procreative enterprise of male and female no longer defines human identity at its core.”<sup>19</sup> Brownson concludes, then, that homosexual unions can’t be condemned because they violate hierarchy since scripture itself relativizes hierarchy.

Even if one concurs with Brownson’s egalitarian vision for women, we need to remember that there is not a single instance where same-sex relations are commended. Still, I also dissent from Brownson’s claim that role differences between men and women have been cancelled by the new creation.

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<sup>16</sup> Preston M. Sprinkle, “Romans 1 and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of James Brownson’s Bible, Gender, and Sexuality,” *BBR* 24 (2014): 522–26; cf. idem, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 58–61.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 57–84.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 81.

This is not the place or space to delve into these matters, but I would argue that Brownson skates too quickly over the texts that ground the differences between men and women in the created order.

### 3.3 One-Flesh Unions

Brownson reflects further on whether one flesh unions may include same-sex couples.<sup>20</sup> He argues that he is asking a question which biblical authors didn't contemplate.<sup>21</sup> But then he goes on to say, "we must not allow the limitations of the experience of the biblical writers to be used to deny the truths that evidently lie before us."<sup>22</sup> Here he brings up science and slavery. The scriptures never consider whether slavery should be abolished, and thus "What is normal in Scripture is not necessarily also normative."<sup>23</sup> Brownson asks whether the moral logic of the Bible "requires" heterosexual unions.<sup>24</sup> Since one-flesh unions don't, according to Brownson, suggest anatomical gender complementarity and since procreation isn't of the essence of marriage (see his chapter 6), and since calling the husband the head in Ephesians 5 is pragmatic instead of theological, there is the possibility that same-sex unions are morally virtuous. Indeed, since kinship is the heart of one-flesh unions, then it seems that same-sex relationships can fulfill this criterion.<sup>25</sup> The texts in the NT that proscribe same-sex unions "were always marked by differences in social rank and status, and they were always described as episodic rather than permanent."<sup>26</sup> There wasn't any mutuality in NT times, but one partner always dominated the other. Hence, there is room for committed same-sex unions today, where there isn't sexual promiscuity.<sup>27</sup>

In reading a book like this, we may easily lose the framework and architecture of the biblical story. We may forget the unified vision of biblical writers regarding same-sex relations. Brownson tries to knock down pillar after pillar in the biblical witness, as if there is actually a place for his view of same-sex relations. But virtually every dimension of his argument can be challenged. He says that biblical writers didn't reflect on sexual orientation or on committed and faithful same-sex relationships. Preston Sprinkle has shown in a careful study of primary sources that these assertions are historically flawed. In fact, there is significant historical evidence indicating that ancient

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<sup>20</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 85–109.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 108.

people were aware of sexual orientation.<sup>28</sup> Sprinkle demonstrates as well that there is evidence of consensual same-sex relationships in the ancient world.<sup>29</sup> There are even examples from the second century A.D. of females marrying one another. It seems likely that Paul was aware of such currents of thought. In any case, Brownson's claim that Paul never conceived of sexual orientation or of committed same-sex relationships rests on a shaky foundation. The most natural way of reading the biblical text is to conclude that there is no warrant for same-sex erotic relationships. Everywhere we read that marriage is between men and women, and Jesus emphasizes that such was God's created intention from the beginning (Matt. 19:3–12). Indeed, as Sprinkle keenly observes if Jesus desired only to say that marriage was a one-flesh union he could have cited Gen. 2:24, but he also appealed to Gen. 1:27 which states that God created man as "male and female," demonstrating that "male-female pairing is part of what marriage is according to Jesus."<sup>30</sup>

In addition, Paul never justifies marriage between a man and woman based on procreation, and thus Brownson's attempt to see this as one aspect of Paul's argument is flawed.<sup>31</sup> We have already seen that Brownson's argument regarding kinship is reductionistic and one-sided; males and females are similar *and different*. Nor is it at all evident or warranted to say that the same-sex relations are proscribed due to differences in social rank and status. Romans 1:27 doesn't breathe a word about differences in status: it speaks of men having sexual relations with men, and nothing is said about one man feminizing the other. As Sprinkle points out, other Greco-Roman and Jewish writers denigrate same-sex acts because it feminizes one partner, but Paul says nothing whatsoever about such a state of affairs.<sup>32</sup> There is no indication in the text at all that the sexual union is anything other than voluntary from both men.

### 3.4 Celibacy

Brownson also addresses celibacy in supporting his argument.<sup>33</sup> He maintains that most of those who are gay can't change their sexual orientation, but his fundamental argument is that the call for life-long celibacy puts an inordinate burden to repress natural sexual desires. In fact, Paul counsels against remaining single if sexual desire burns strongly in someone (1 Cor. 7:9). How can we expect

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<sup>28</sup> Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Sprinkle, "Romans 1 and Homosexuality," 526–27; idem, Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 61–64.

<sup>30</sup> Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 35–36. The quotation is on p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 246. Sprinkle shows that Brownson actually contradicts himself here since he had earlier argued that Paul didn't think procreation played a role in Paul's view of marriage ("Romans 1 and Homosexuality," 519).

<sup>32</sup> Sprinkle, "Romans 1 and Homosexuality," 519–22.

<sup>33</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 127–46.



gay people, indeed all gay people, to control their sexual desires for their entire lives? I sympathize with the struggle and the pain and the difficulty, and our churches need to grow in showing love and compassion to those struggling. Still, Brownson assumes what needs to be proven. What we don't find in the canonical scriptures is justification for fulfilling sexual desires with the same sex. The life of discipleship is one where everything is given up for Jesus's sake, and human sympathy can't overturn the will of God revealed in the scriptures. The difficulties faced in discipleship are not the same; Peter was called to die by crucifixion and John had a different calling (John 21:18–23). We have no right to permit and justify what God has forbidden. We are called upon to help those struggling and to encourage them in every way possible in the path of discipleship.

### 3.5 Excessive Lust<sup>34</sup>

Brownson also turns to the matter of lust and desire to advance his case.<sup>35</sup> Lust in Romans 1 is indicted, he avers, because it is tied to idolatry. Indeed, according to Brownson Paul doesn't indict same-sex orientation here. Instead, the focus is on "self-centered lust."<sup>36</sup> He favors the notion that the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula might be in view here since he was a dramatic example of unrestrained lust. What Paul criticizes here, says Brownson, is not sexual desire but excessive desire, sexual desire out of control. Hence, since Paul may be criticizing the extreme passion and lust of Caligula, we can see that Paul speaks of extreme sexual excess. He doesn't rule out faithful and monogamous same-sex relationships because "Paul, did not look at same-sex eroticism with the understanding of sexual orientation that is commonplace today."<sup>37</sup> Hence, loving committed same-sex relationships are dramatically different from what Paul indicts here. Brownson claims that Paul doesn't teach here that same-sex relations are wrong *objectively*; here he speaks of subjective reality, of the lust that disfigures sexual relationships. On the other hand, loving and committed same-sex relations aren't marked by such lust. The ancient world, in contrast to our time, had "almost no interest at all in the question of sexual orientation."<sup>38</sup> Paul indicts same-sex behavior but doesn't address the question of sexual orientation.

Brownson's interpretation of lust is one of the fundamental building blocks of his argument, but it fails quite remarkably. First, seeing any reference to Caligula falls prey to an arbitrary and

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<sup>34</sup> See also the arguments of Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 98–100.

<sup>35</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 149–78. Remarkably, he argues that those condemned for judging in Romans 2 are self-righteous Christians (p. 152). Actually, it is quite clear that Paul speaks about unbelievers who haven't repented and trusted in Christ, and thus Brownson missteps quite dramatically here.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–56.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

insupportable kind of mirror reading. We don't have the slightest evidence that Paul has Caligula in view here.<sup>39</sup> Second, the real bedrock of his view is the claim that Paul didn't understand sexual orientation as we do today. Everything else Brownson says flows from this presupposition. In other words, we know more and we know better than the scriptural writer. The authority of the person in the 21st century takes precedence of the authority of the biblical writer, and that authority is premised on our superior knowledge. Still, as noted earlier the claim that Paul wasn't familiar with sexual orientation is disputable on historical grounds as Sprinkle has shown. In fact, he probably was aware of such. Third, there is no basis in the text for saying that the issue is excessive lust instead of the objective action of same-sex relations. For Paul the lustful desire and the action are inseparable. Brownson posits such a separation, but when we actually look at Rom. 1:27 the lusts and the actions that follow such desires are joined together. Certainly, this is no surprise: sinful desires, as James teaches us, give birth to sinful actions (Jas. 1:14–15). I would suggest that Brownson is trying to have his cake and eat it too. On the one hand, he says that Paul didn't know about sexual orientation, and yet at the same time Paul only condemns excessive lust and not same-sex acts per se. But how likely is that scenario if Paul didn't know about sexual orientation? It would never have occurred to Paul to segregate the desires from the actions if he never thought about sexual orientation. Brownson's argument fails on its own terms.

### 3.6 Impurity

Brownson moves in the same orbit in his discussion of impurity.<sup>40</sup> He surveys purity issues in the canon, noting the greater emphasis on purity of heart in the NT. Impurity isn't an objective disorder, according to Brownson, but a subjective matter, and this is supported by Rom. 14:14. Hence, impurity has to do with motives rather than actions. Thus, impurity can be defined as uncontrolled lust. Since impurity is a matter of the heart, it seems that same-sex unions aren't clearly indicted by Paul. Brownson says, "if we are to face such an issue honestly and objectively, we must consider the actual experience and testimony of gay and lesbian Christians."<sup>41</sup> Lesbian and gay Christians may have sanctified and holy and committed relationships that aren't marked by impurity.

Once again, Brownson wrongly segregates the act from the motive. Actually, when Paul uses the word "impurity" (*akatharsia*), there is no indication that the focus is on motives rather than actions. The term is often used to designate sexual sin in Paul (2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:7), to sin that reveals itself in actions. That the sin is objective and not just confined to motives is

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<sup>39</sup> On the matter of mirror reading, see the wise observations of John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test-Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73–93.

<sup>40</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 179–203.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 198–99.

clear in Eph. 4:19 where Paul says that people have given themselves over to *aselgeia* (lack of restraint), for the “working of all uncleanness” (*eis ergasian akatharsias*). The word “working” indicates that outward actions and not just motives are in view. In other instances, unclean actions are certainly in view (Rom. 6:19). Even in 1 Thess. 2:3 uncleanness is linked with deceit, showing that motives and actions are intended. Exegesis doesn’t support Brownson’s claim to restrict impurity to motives.

### 3.7 Honor and Shame

Brownson then turns to honor and shame and reads Rom. 1:26–27 through that lens.<sup>42</sup> He argues that Rom. 1:26 doesn’t indict female same-sex eroticism but sinful heterosexual behavior since the notion that same-sex relations are in view doesn’t appear in the first 300 years of church history. Brownson’s interpretation of Rom. 1:26 has gained some popularity lately, but it is unconvincing. The close parallels between vv. 26–27 indicate that same-sex relations are in view in both instances. For instance, Paul speaks in v. 26, when referring to women, of their exchanging “the natural use for that which is contrary to nature” (*tēn physikēn chrēsin eis tēn para physin*). This is quite close to what he says about men involved in same-sex practices in v. 27: they “have left the natural use of women” (*aphentes tēn physikēn chrēsin tēs thēleias*). In both instances, we have exact same phrase “the natural use.” Furthermore, the phrase “contrary to nature” is always used of same-sex erotic behavior in the literature.<sup>43</sup>

According to Brownson, the shame described in v. 27 doesn’t refer to same-sex actions. Men were shamed in the ancient world if they were penetrated as if they were a woman. Social expectations were contravened if a man was treated as a woman. But, says Brownson, we don’t feel the same sense of cultural shame today; what is honorable and shameful is culturally located instead of representing God’s transcendent will. Shame comes from excessive lust, not same-sex relations themselves. Loving and committed same-sex relations aren’t shameful; what is shameful is excessive passion. Once again, Brownson strays from the text. Paul gives no hint that the shame has anything to do with being treated like a woman. There is no word about the oppression or shaming of the man who plays the role of the female. Instead, both partners are indicted for their sinful desires in v. 27. And both partners are equally indicted and viewed as willing accomplices in the act.

### 3.8 Nature

Finally, Brownson considers nature, which plays a major role in discussion.<sup>44</sup> Brownson defines nature as doing what comes naturally so that it refers to one’s individual and psychological nature. Hence,

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 204–222.

<sup>43</sup> See Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 211–12, n. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 223–55.

in Romans 1 Paul criticizes those who leave their own heterosexual nature and act contrary to their natural disposition. Brownson claims that there is no evidence in Jewish Christian sources, though there is some evidence in Greek sources, that there was any understanding that some were naturally disposed towards sexual relations with the same sex. He says, “We must reckon with the fact that what we are confronting here is a dimension of human experience that is unaddressed and unanticipated by the biblical writers—Jews or Christians—in the ancient world; we now know that there is a disparity between the deeply personal nature of gay and lesbian persons and the norms and assumptions of the wider human community—along with the apparent structures of the natural world.”<sup>45</sup>

Brownson goes on to say that nature is used in the sense of social convention, and this is apparent since Paul says we are taught by nature that women have long hair and men short hair (1 Cor. 11:14–15). Nature for Brownson includes one’s personal dispositions, social convention, and also the notion that sexual relations are for the sake of procreation. But, says Brownson, we don’t share that conception of the world today. “The modern world no longer understands ‘natural’ gender roles in the way they were understood in the ancient world.”<sup>46</sup> And, “Psychologists now recognize a persistent, nonpathological pattern of same-sex orientation as a natural phenomenon.”<sup>47</sup> He says, “This does not mean that contemporary Christians reject the will of God as it is revealed in creation. But it does mean that our understanding of exactly how the will of God is revealed in the natural order is subject to change, deepening, and growth over time.”<sup>48</sup> Some things that are natural like circumcision (Rom. 2:27) and wild olive branches (Rom. 11:14) aren’t determinative. We see in Gal. 3:28 that redemption goes beyond what is natural. Now we follow the Messiah who transforms nature. We look fundamentally to the new creation, which is breaking out in Paul’s churches with women in prominent leadership roles. What is natural looks different in light of the gospel of Christ. We have to remember that the NT “does not envision the kind of committed, mutual, lifelong, loving, moderated gay and lesbian unions that are emerging today.”<sup>49</sup>

Brownson insists that Paul wasn’t aware of committed same-sex relationships, but Sprinkle, as noted above, calls this assumption into question. Brownson also appeals to the experience of same-sex couples today in seeing a place for committed same-sex relationships. He claims that the new creation relativizes the old creation, but such a claim isn’t persuasive when the NT documents appeal to that very created order to set forth the will of God for believers. After all, NT writers and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 232. See also p. 266.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 251.

readers were living in the new creation. Apparently, they didn't think that the new creation cancelled the norms on homosexuality. Brownson rightly observes that the word "nature" doesn't always refer to the divine intention in Paul (cf. Rom. 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24 [3 times]; Gal. 2:15; 4:8; Eph. 2:3). Words, however, have their meaning in context, and we have clear evidence that Paul argues from creation and the divine intention in Rom. 1:26–27. First, Paul chooses the unusual words "female" (*thēlys*) and "male" (*arsēn*) rather than "woman" (*gynē*) and "man" (*anēr*). In doing so he drew on the creation account of Genesis, which uses the same words (Gen. 1:27 LXX; cf. Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). These words point to the sexual differentiation of males and females. Hence, sexual relations with the same sex violate the distinctions God intended in creating man and woman.

Nor is it convincing to say that "nature" refers here to what comes naturally psychologically or personally. In the Jewish tradition, the word "nature," when same-sex relations are in view, designates what God intended for males and females. For instance, Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 2.24 §199) declares that the marriage of a man and woman is "according to nature" (*kata physin*), and proceeds to say that the OT law demands the death penalty for intercourse between males. Both Philo (*Spec. Laws* 3.7 §38; cf. *Abr.* 26 §§133–36) and Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 2.37 §273) specifically criticize homosexual relations as "contrary to nature" (*para physin*). The author of the Testament of Naphtali (3.3–4) sees homosexuality as a departure "from the order of nature," and his appeal to creation in verse 3 reveals that he understands this in term of God's created intention. We read in Psuedo-Phocylides, "Do not transgress with unlawful sex the limits set by nature. For even animals are not pleased by intercourse of male with male. And let women not imitate the sexual role of men" (*Psuedo-Phocylides* 190–92; cf. 3, 210–14). Nature in Paul and in the Jewish tradition designates God's intention in creation regarding homosexuality. The phrase "contrary to nature," as Sprinkle argues, is always used to designate same-sex erotic behavior.<sup>50</sup>

By way of contrast, Brownson says that "the Bible neither assumes or teaches a normative understanding of gender complementarity."<sup>51</sup> He goes on to say about the hierarchical relationship of the genders that "the larger trajectory of the Bible as a whole moves away from that assumption."<sup>52</sup> But there is no trajectory or pattern as Brownson claims. There is a unified and consistent witness against any same-sex relations.

<sup>50</sup> Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 93–98.

<sup>51</sup> Brownson, *Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 265.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.9 Other Texts

What about other texts in scripture that condemn same-sex relations?<sup>53</sup> Brownson says that the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 is clearly an example of abusive same-sex desires. The prohibitions in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 need be mapped onto the discussion of purity noted earlier. Plus, these prohibitions are tightly linked with idolatry. The omission of females supports the notion that cultic prostitution and idolatry are in view. There is also perhaps the issue of male honor in that a man would feel degraded as if he were a woman, but such feelings aren't present in committed same-sex relationships. Plus, we need to remember that we can't base an ethic on the Levitical law, according to Brownson, since we live in the age of fulfillment inaugurated in Jesus Christ. The prohibitions in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 relate to pederasty where a young boy is taken advantage of sexually by an older man. Brownson concludes, "I am convinced that the church needs to come to move away from an interpretation of Scripture that assumes that the Bible teaches a normative form of biological or anatomical gender complementarity."<sup>54</sup>

Certainly the Sodom story in and of itself can't prove the case against same-sex relations, but when plotted into the framework of the creation ethic articulated in Genesis 1–2, one which is also strengthened and endorsed by both Jesus and Paul, then the desire for same-sex intercourse highlights the depth of depravity in Sodom. Despite Brownson's claims, there is no evidence that the prohibitions in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 can be limited to idolatry or to men feeling degraded. The admonitions are general proscriptions. Both men are clearly equally responsible since they are both to be put to death, so we have no evidence of abuse or rape here or of cultic prostitution.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, it quite telling that both 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 depend upon the wording of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, showing that Paul believed that the Levitical prohibitions still applied in his day.<sup>56</sup> Yes, oppressive same-sex relations are indicted, but evidence is lacking that Paul is only speaking of such. Brownson tries to chip away at the unified biblical witness on same-sex actions and relationships, but he doesn't make a chip in the marble.

## 4. Conclusion

I noted in the introduction that same-sex marriage and same-sex relations are an issue for every person and every culture. No culture is exempt from the temptation to act contrary to the will of God. And what is promoted and endorsed in the West will have a world-wide impact. Those who

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 268–79.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>55</sup> See again Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 45–52.

<sup>56</sup> This is a common observation. See Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 108–15.

are pastoring outside of the western world or are engaging in missions must be ready to answer the questions people are asking or they will be asking.

We have seen that both Johnson and Brownson privilege human experience and narratives over the scriptural word. They both attempt to ground their view of same-sex relations on scripture as well, but it is quite clear that the experience and notions popular in western culture today govern their reading. Brownson claims that biblical writers didn't have any notion of sexual orientation, but Sprinkle has demonstrated that in saying so he ignores a significant amount of historical evidence. Brownson tries to dismantle the prohibitions regarding same-sex marriage piece by piece, but his exegesis is artificial and contrived. The argument from creation is a rock that can't be dislodged by revisionist interpreters. God's commands are for our good and for our holiness. Of course, there are many pastoral dimensions that we need to address, but that is not the purpose of this article, for that is a subject for another time and another place.

## REPORT FROM THE FIELD

### Reflections on Our One-Year Anniversary

Aaron and Meg Brown

*Aaron and Meg live in Kampala, Uganda with their three young daughters and work at Africa Renewal University.*

**O**n 03 December, 2014, our family of five flew from Minneapolis, MN (in the United States) to our new home in Kampala, Uganda (in East Africa). Now, after 13 months, we want to share a few reflections on what we've experienced as a family called to serve in cross-cultural theological education. We work at Africa Renewal University, an accredited Christian University whose mission is "To equip Christian leaders for the transformation of society." We teach theology and English, and we have three daughters, all under 8 years old.

Hours after stepping off the plane, we were confronted with a stark reality: short-term and long-term ministry are not the same. We don't have any definite plans for a departure date, and only vague notions of a furlough after 2 or 3 years or so.

So now, as committed, long-term missionaries who are trying to dig deep into life here, and find the best solutions, we see the problems begin to intensify rapidly. There are so many more issues in front of us than we ever could have imagined, though we had already been here three times in the last few years. But now we can't just go home in 11 days and let the other people solve the problems. And much to our surprise, the problems are not merely cultural.

What do you do with all the stuff you see day after day as you drive through town to the grocery store? With the child who bangs on your car window and asks you to buy bananas? With the man who is limping down the street and has no crutches or shoes? With the American proselytizer who is trying to coax a local into some crazy ministry pyramid scheme that will "make them rich quick." It can be overwhelming and daunting at times. It can be frustrating and painful, or even numbing.

How do we process this all? There are the personal implications: Are we wise? Foolish? Deceived? Calloused? Compassionate? Aware? Ignorant? Are we good stewards? Wasteful? Idealistic?

Then there are the philosophical dimensions: from where do these problems stem? Government? Economics? Social issues? Cultural realities? Educational challenges? Environmental turmoil? Ecclesiological structures? Spiritual darkness? Or maybe from other missionaries?

Coming from our culture in North America that values convenience, efficiency, and a high return on investment, the temptation is to jump in quickly and create positive results instantly (whatever that is, and whoever decides what that looks like).

But the truth is, there are already many groups out there trying to solve the shoe problem, or working with street kids, or giving out free clothes and digging wells. And don't get me wrong,



there are many good things about these projects. Many people have been blessed and helped by these good endeavors. Needy people are everywhere; of course people benefit from a well to get clean water, and a child without shoes will definitely be better off with some. We must commend the heart of a person that says, “The needs are so great; let’s do something to help!”

Nevertheless, sometimes this urge to help falls short because the strategy and cultural understandings are flawed, at least from a long-term vantage point. We sometimes wonder, when such-and-such missionary or NGO suddenly leaves the country (a frequent occurrence), how many more organizations will feel the urge to come and fix the three new problems that were unintentionally, (or haphazardly,) left behind? And if what remains requires three new organizations to address the problems, what happens in the next five years when this second wave of NGOs or missionaries closes up shop and leaves the country?

So, we come back to this challenging question again and again: “What can we do to help?” Maybe you are beginning to sense, with us, that it’s actually a difficult question to answer.

Broadly speaking, we know that people need to be made right with God, and then live a life that knows and shares the love of God. The book of Acts actually describes preaching the gospel and church planting as “help.” (Acts 16:9–10).

Having started with the gospel, what is next? Or, lest we think that there is something better, above, or beyond the gospel, we ask the question, “What does it mean to live faithfully in the gospel at this place, in this time, among these people?” If love of neighbor is essentially the way of life for all Christians everywhere, how is it done best here?

Learning how to love people well inevitably requires cultural sensitivity. For example, we’ve found that sometimes it can be a challenge to get a clear answer when the cultural assumption is that it is impolite to say “No.” Even a smile can mean many different things. Is it a smile of happiness or discontentment? Understanding or confusion? Embarrassment or pride? Agreement or disagreement? What was this person communicating to me when he smiled?

Right there is the rub—we are learning that it takes some time to figure out what is in the mind, heart, symbols and norms of this culture into which we have immersed ourselves. How do they work, play, and rest? How do they talk, gesture, shrug, and glance? How are they born? How do they grow up? How do they marry? And how do they die? Then what happens?

Over and again, we have had to flip a switch off from what we’ve always thought was normal, natural, good and right. Then, we have to take some time—a long time—just to listen. It’s difficult to listen deeply and carefully without judging and evaluating their world based on the background and culture that we are most familiar with. What we see and hear is not equal to what it meant in our previous culture. And there’s no consistent conversion scale. It could be directly opposed to what we once knew; it could be generally the same; or it could have no conceivable analogy.

This doesn't mean that evaluation and seeking to bring about changes will never come. It's only that we are challenged to spend sufficient time listening—even to the point where it begins to feel uncomfortable. After all, if attempts to bring about change come pre-maturely, before we've actually listened carefully, deeply, and patiently, those attempts at change will fail to reach the real heart of the people, and they may end up worse off for our hastiness.

Patient cultural listening does not mean that we approve of everything (or anything!). It just means that when we attempt to bring about change, it will be after we have made our best attempt to come to terms with what is really there. What is really there is different than what we see with our eyes at first, and cannot be seen through our original culture's lenses. It will only begin to emerge after we have discovered some new "terms" that will most likely differ from those in our previous culture.

One of our hearts' deepest desires is to see people transformed through the Gospel of Jesus. We have come to the steady conviction that real change cannot happen without real listening. We live each day between the tension of urgent needs and misdiagnosed problems. The urgent needs are many and extreme—sometimes they are a life or death matter. And yet the misdiagnosed problems may be just as urgent. The implications of "solving a problem" with a harmful set of assumptions and strategies may take decades to reverse. They can be just as fatal.

We often go back to this old proverb: "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." We came here to teach because we saw the value of giving Ugandans tools to use within their own context. We frequently remember a statement made by one of the founders who came before us: "If you can train a pastor, then you can change a church; and if you change a church, you can change a community; and if you can change a community, you change a nation." And after being here one year, we think it's true.

One of the greatest joys for us is to teach a group of students who were pastored by one of the first students of the University. It's a beautiful picture of what the founder described. This pastor's training allowed him to go back to his community and teach others what he had been taught. It was his passion and love for the gospel that transformed the lives of twenty-six students so that they now have dreams and hopes and gospel-centered training for transforming the world. They want to be pastors and business owners, teachers, mothers and fathers, entrepreneurs and advocates for those with disabilities. And imagine if twenty-six more people came from each one of these students—maybe it would start a sustainable model that could reverse the harmful trend of organizations that create more problems than solutions.

Conclusions can be hard to come by at this stage of the journey, but we've learned that there are a few firm convictions that we can now stand behind. First of all, we have come to see that a big part of our role is to take the longer view of things for the best long-term impact. While short-term strategies have their place, we have mainly experienced heartache resulting from such solutions, and want to avoid ending up in the NGO graveyard of reinvented wheels. Secondly, in spite of these negative

realities, we are striving to maintain a good attitude and grow more in grace and less in bitterness. This challenging set of circumstances does not give us an exemption from the commandments to maintain our spiritual fervor and believe that, in it all, God is working these things together for our good and the good of the Ugandans who are called according to his purposes.

Thirdly, we want to build sustainable, long-term solutions that avoid perpetuating dependency at every level. If we can establish patterns of interdependence, then the people we help can find ways to truly help others.

In the end, what we perceive as inadequate attempts at help present us with a choice: will we have a response characterized by impatience and annoyance? Or will we see the problems as an opportunity to dig deeper into the lives of people, and present a more robust understanding of the transforming power of the gospel?

# APPROACHES TO MINISTRY

## The Universal Questions Muslims Ask

David W. Shenk

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### EDITOR'S PREFACE

Understanding between Christians and Muslims is of great importance in the global community. As a result of recent events in Syria, Somalia, Nigeria, France, Belgium, and the United States, there is fear and confusion. Christians who are interested in grasping why recent events have taken place, and how to understand Muslims, will need to look beyond the sound bites of the evening news or the internet, and consider this important subject more deeply.

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**T**he relationship between Islam and Christianity deserves careful exploration from many angles. Christians should explore the text of the Qur'an and compare it with the Bible. Insight can also be gained by comparing specific beliefs of God, Messiah, salvation, Bible, and cross. These will undoubtedly provide clarity and show the significant differences between these two faith traditions.

Another means deserves to be explored as well. How does the average Christian relate to the average Muslim? How could the Christian begin to converse in a respectful manner with a Muslim about matters of faith?

It is from this perspective that the following article is written. Most Muslims have never spoken with a Christian about the gospel. Most Christians do not know what they will encounter even if they begin. This article provides five starting points for conversation. It is not intended to be a substantive theological exploration.<sup>1</sup> Some will inevitably want more depth. What follows comes from a man quite experienced in addressing Muslims on their terms. It is in this spirit that this article should be read.

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed examination of the theological matters can be found in David Shenk's *Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church, the Mission of two Communities* (Kitchener: Herald, 2013).

The pastor in a largely Muslim village in Bangladesh told me that he had never conversed with the imam who led the Muslim community.

The pastor explained, “I am afraid of the Muslims. Furthermore, I do not know how to answer their questions.”

So I observed, “Recently you translated and published in Bengali a book of Muslim-Christian dialogue.<sup>2</sup> What if we passed the word on to the imam that we want to meet him and give him a book on Muslim-Christian dialogue? Might that open the door for conversation between you and the imam?”

That is what the pastor did. He sent an emissary to the imam, who responded by inviting us to come that afternoon to his *madrassa* (a Muslim training center). When we arrived, the *madrassa* was packed with teenage students who were memorizing the Qur’an. We were escorted into a large room. The students were dismissed from their classes.

Quite likely this was the first time in the history of that village that a pastor and an imam met together within the sanctuary of a Muslim *madrassa*. The getting-acquainted niceties were completely disarming as we greeted with the Arabic peace greeting: *salaam aleikum*. Somber excitement characterized the spirit of our gathering.

The imam and his teachers were delighted to receive gift copies of *A Muslim and A Christian in Dialogue*. This book is a dialogue between a Muslim, Badru Kateregga, and myself. We wrote the book in East Africa when Kateregga and I were teachers at the Kenyatta campus of the University of Nairobi.

The *madrassa* where we met was comprised of two buildings. One was the classroom and the other a spacious one-floor office for administration and teachers. Students stood around the outside and listened, but they could not participate. The windows were open and without glass so those closest to the window openings could hear best. Every window was filled with faces with eagerly listening ears. I suppose fifty faces crowded all space within those open windows.

It was when the gifts of books were presented that it happened, as it most often does. Our hosts had probing questions about the Christian faith. During the rest of the afternoon our precious time with these students and faculty focused on the five questions that Muslims ask Christians. These were not pre-planned questions. The questions did not flow in one, two order. But in the space of an hour we spoke, albeit briefly, into the five universal questions.

The faculty was not hostile and the questions were not accusatory questions. Rather they were questions rooted in curiosity and perplexity. They were the honest questions that Muslims ask Christians around the world wherever Muslims and Christians meet one another at the belief or

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<sup>2</sup> Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2011).

theological level of interchange. One of the inhibitors of congenial relations is that Christians are often perplexed as to how to respond to these five questions. What are the questions?<sup>3</sup>

- First, have you changed or corrupted the Bible?
- Second, what do you mean by saying that Jesus is the Son of God?
- Third, what do you mean by Trinity?
- Fourth, how could Jesus the Messiah be crucified?
- Fifth, what do you think of Muhammad?

It is most unlikely that a Muslim will consider the Christian faith unless Christians take these questions seriously and respond in ways that a Muslim finds to be persuasive. That was evident in a recent conversation with the local imam in my home town. He said that for some time he had considered becoming a Christian, but then decided not to go in the Christian direction, because he did not get satisfactory answers to his questions. A participant in that meeting offered to meet regularly with the imam with the express commitment to responding to the questions.

That is what happened in the *madrassa* in Bangladesh. We had questions. So did the Muslims. A scripture that guided the response of the Christian team that afternoon was 1 Peter 3:15. “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

There are other questions as well, but these five statements have occupied Christian/Muslim discourse from the very beginning of the Muslim movement. They never go away. These are the persistent questions Muslims bring to the tea table.

I will describe aspects of our conversations that afternoon in Bangladesh. Our responses might be helpful in other settings as well. I attempt to write in a manner that Muslims can understand. Within an hour each of the five questions had been posed by our hosts. Our hosts were not reaching for philosophical conjecture. Each question invited us to respond with clarity. We also responded being cognizant of the reasons for the questions. Our responses did not exhaust the possibilities. Nevertheless with remarkable focus we touched the key questions Muslims ask Christians.

### **The First Question: Has the Bible been changed or corrupted?**

This first question was about the trustworthiness of the Bible. That question persists because Muslims are perplexed about differences between the Bible and the Qur’an. For example, when our family was serving in Somalia, a student asked for a Bible. The next day he returned to our home and placed the Bible on my desk as he exclaimed, “This is not scripture. It is, to the contrary, a history

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<sup>3</sup> For a more thorough description and response to the five questions see chapter 7 in my book, *Christian . Muslim . Friend. Twelve Paths to Real Relationship* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2014).

book. The Qur'an is not history. It is instruction. But I read Genesis last night, and it is clear the Bible is mostly history."

The Bible as history is the primary reason Muslims around the world assume that the Bible, therefore, cannot be scripture. The Christian view of Scripture does not fit into the Muslim view.

There are other reasons as well for dismissing the Bible as changed and corrupted. The many translations of the Bible are quite troubling for a Muslim who believes the Qur'an is an exact copy of an original Arabic Qur'an in heaven. The Bible is not that kind of book. Another troubling reality is the contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'an. Noteworthy is the apparent denial of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an and the centrality of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospel.

We responded to the imam's question about the Bible by beginning with the Qur'an that does communicate great respect for the Bible. In fact the Qur'an specifically mentions the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospel as being revealed scriptures. Both the Qur'an and the Bible assert that God will protect the scriptures God has revealed. We pointed out that the Bible is the account of God coming down to save us and reveal himself to us. That is why the Bible is history; it is the account of God acting in history as he calls forth people to believe in him and serve faithfully in his kingdom.

Accounts of our sinfulness are also part of the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers to write truthfully the accounts of human faithfulness to God as well as our sinfulness and rebellion.

The news that God loves us is so wonderful that everyone should have the opportunity to hear or read this good news in their own mother tongue. That is the reason that everywhere the church goes disciples of Jesus give high priority to translating the Bible into the languages of people around the world. These Bible translators rely on the scholars who study the original languages. The first part of the Bible was written in Hebrew and the second part was written in Greek. There are thousands of ancient manuscripts of the Bible. So we can say most confidently the Bible is the true and trustworthy Word of God.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Second Question: What do you mean by Son of God?**

This question is rooted in a confusing assumption. The Bible was not available in Arabic at the time of Muhammad. So what Muhammad and the Muslims knew about Christians came mostly through the oral Christianized cultures on the fringes of Arabia. It appears that the oral Christian tradition was informed by the notion that Trinity means God the Father, God the Mother, and God the Son. This is polytheism, a notion that Muhammad strenuously opposed. In fact there was a shrine in the Meccan community dedicated to the three daughters of Allah. Opposing the daughters of Allah was a defining characteristic of the Muslim movement. The Qur'an condemns such idolatry.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16

Christians likewise condemn all forms of polytheism. In the Bangladeshi mosque, we indicated horror at all such polytheistic notions. However, we observed that Son of God is not a name given to Jesus the Messiah<sup>5</sup> by human kind. Rather the name Son of God is bestowed on Jesus by God himself. When the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary the coming birth of the Messiah, the angel declared, “He will be called the Son of God.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, twice in the ministry of Jesus the Messiah, God spoke from heaven saying, “This is my Beloved Son.” So we should take note. What does God mean when he addresses the Messiah as “My beloved Son?”

“Let us hear what the Gospel says about this.”

We looked at the Gospel of John where we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>7</sup>

Muslims sometimes refer to Jesus the Messiah as *Kalimatullah*, meaning the Word of God. When Muslims refer to the Messiah as the Word, what they most likely mean is that Jesus the Messiah was created by the Word just as Adam was created through God’s almighty Word. However, in the Gospel we read, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only who came from the Father full of grace and truth.”<sup>8</sup>

This means that Jesus the Messiah is the living Word of God who lives with us. God and his Word are one. God’s Word is his self revelation. So when we meet the Messiah we are meeting the one who is the full revelation of God. That is what the Gospel means when Jesus says, “When you have seen me you have seen the Father.”

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<sup>5</sup> The Qur’an has several names for Jesus, as well as comments in regard to his mission. According to the Qur’an the following are true about Jesus the Messiah.

- Messiah (3:45)
- Good News (3:45)
- Born of a virgin (19:16–35)
- The Word of God (4:171)
- The Spirit of God (4:41)
- Miracle Worker (3:49)
- The sinless one (19:19).
- Established the former Scriptures (5:49)
- Brought the Gospel (5:49)
- Predicted the coming of Muhammad (61:6)
- Not the Son of God (9:30)
- Limited mission (13:38)
- A sign for all nations (21:91)
- Rescued from death on the cross (4:157)
- Taken to heaven without dying (3:55–58)
- Returning at the end of history to get the world ready for the final judgment (43:61)

<sup>6</sup> Luke 1:36

<sup>7</sup> John 1:1

<sup>8</sup> John 1:14



Notice how Jesus refers to God as “Father.” The Messiah had a perfect relationship with God, the Father. When we believe in Jesus the Messiah, we experience fellowship, reconciliation and forgiveness. Believers are invited into the family of God. So all who believe become sons and daughters of God.

This means that there are at least two meanings to the name, “Son of God.” First Jesus the Messiah is the Word through whom God creates and sustains the universe. Second, Jesus the Messiah had a perfect relationship with God the Father, a relationship that all who believe will also experience in part. In Jesus the Messiah we can know God as loving heavenly Father. That is the reason Christians in prayer address God as our Father in heaven.

We have observed that there are some surprising names for Jesus in the Qur’an. For example, the Qur’an refers to Jesus as the Messiah. We might, therefore, assume that there is complete agreement between the Gospel witness concerning Jesus and the Qur’an. However, when we ask Muslims about the meaning of the name, Messiah, they will probably reply, “Messiah means that Jesus had a limited mission for a limited period of time only to the house of Israel.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus is the mystery figure of the Qur’an and Islamic piety. Although wonderful names are bestowed upon Jesus, nevertheless, Jesus in Islam is not Savior and Lord. Christian witness seeks to open doors into the mystery of Jesus the Messiah so that Muslims may also believe in the Messiah as revealed in the Bible.

### **The Third Question: What do you mean by Trinity?**

When living in Nairobi a mosque was just across the street from our home. One Friday after the noon-day sermon, Lugman came rushing across the street and pounded on our front door as he called on me to open. When I opened he blurted out, “It must stop! We will not tolerate your preaching about three gods right here on our street.”

I responded, “I do not know what you are talking about. I am not preaching about three gods. What do you mean?”

“The Trinity,” he exploded!

In that brief and very emotional exchange Lugman was revealing a potentially deep fissure in Christian / Muslim relations. On the face of it, the rejection of God as Triune seems to be only a semantic misunderstanding. The Muslim assumption is that such references to God are really polytheistic bunk. Those misperceptions must be addressed. No Muslim would consider accepting a Christianity wherein god married a wife. All Muslims are repulsed at the thought of a trilogy of gods known as Yahweh the creator, the Virgin Mary as a mother goddess and a son who is their offspring. Such notions appalled the Muslims meeting us in *the madrassa* in Bangladesh. We had to confront the question with clarity. The pastor was forthright. He exclaimed, “We believe in one God only!”

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<sup>9</sup> Qur’an: (The Thunder): 13:38.

However, even after the clutter of misunderstandings is addressed, the Triunity of God in Christian experience needs to be expressed. Although we cannot adequately explain the mystery of God as Trinity, we know God as Trinity for we experience God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe in God as Trinity for we experience God as our Triune Savior. In Islam God never comes down to save us. God sends his will down, but God never lives and serves among us. God as Redeemer and Savior is not a Muslim understanding of God. Speaking of God as Trinity is our inadequate way of bearing witness to the reality that God is love.

Briefly and simply we shared with our hosts in the Bangladeshi madrassa, “Within God there is loving communion. God does not keep his love to himself. In fact, God so loves that he has come down to live among us and redeem us. It is in Jesus the Messiah that God has most clearly come down to save us. In his crucifixion and resurrection the Messiah offers all who believe the grace of love and forgiveness. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus the Messiah empowers all believers to participate in the loving, reconciling fellowship that is central to the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, to say that God is Trinity is to say God is love. God commissions all believers to extend the love of God around the world, even to our enemies.

Lugman was amazed; thereafter he addressed me as “Brother David.” In contrast, on another occasion a Muslim cleric responded to the accounts of God’s love by exclaiming, “It is impossible for God to love that much!”

We pled, “Let God be God. Do not put God in a box. Let God surprise you with the revelation of his great love for you, and for all humankind.”

In Islam God is so compassionate that he sends books of revelation down to us instructing us in regard to right belief and practice. In the Gospel we meet God who comes down personally to seek the lost and redeem and forgive. How much does God love? That was a central concern in our discussion in the Bangladeshi mosque.

Physical analogies of God as Trinity are not adequate. For example, some will explain that Trinity is like water: liquid, steam, and ice. Such an analogy communicates nothing of the essence of our Triune God, who is love. I prefer staying with Biblical language. It is significant that the Qur’an does refer to the Messiah as the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit. Christians bear witness that God is creator; he is the eternal Word; he is the Holy Spirit with us now. It is impossible to separate God from the Word or God from his Spirit. The Creator, the Word, the Spirit must be one! The essence of God as Trinity is the good Shepherd who cares for and seeks the lost sheep. We proclaim the good news, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” That message is what we shared in the mosque in Bangladesh when that congregation of Muslims invited us to explain the meaning of the Trinity.

### **The Fourth Question: How could the Messiah be Crucified?**

The discussion about the crucifixion of Jesus in the Bangladeshi madrassa is grounded in the core question: how much mercy is characteristic of God? The question about the crucifixion of the Messiah brought back a memory of my first visit to Bangladesh some thirty years earlier. I was invited into a circle of Bangladeshi farmers. Night had fallen. A pressure lamp provided a modicum of light.

After getting acquainted, I asked, “Do you have any questions to ask me, as a Christian?”

“Yes,” they said. “Do you believe that the Messiah was crucified?”

I responded, “Yes, I believe the Messiah was crucified.”

Their unanimous response was, “How can that be? The Messiah is anointed with the power of God. It is impossible that he would suffer crucifixion. The Messiah is never affected by us. The power of God would guarantee that the Messiah must escape suffering.”

This objection to the cross within Islam is rooted in the Qur’an itself. The Qur’an asserts that God sent an illusion so that people thought Jesus was crucified, but in reality he was rescued from such a fate.<sup>10</sup> However, there is an alternative verse wherein Jesus is blessed the day he dies and the day he is resurrected.<sup>11</sup>

Wistfully some Christians look at these verses and suggest the possibility of opening the door of the Qur’an to accept the crucifixion of Jesus.

On one occasion I ventured that possibility with several Muslim theologians, “As I see it, the Qur’an does not shut the door on the possibility of crucifixion for the Messiah.”

Their immediate and unanimous response was that although a crucified Messiah might be possible exegetically, theologically, “Never.”

These sophisticated Muslim theologians presented the same objections that the village farmers had ventured sitting around the pressure lantern many years earlier. The theologians said, “Crucifixion is impossible, for the Messiah is anointed with the glory of God, and the glory of God can never suffer.”

The objection to the crucifixion is a theology that was born within the soul of the Muslim community at the time Muhammad and his followers fled from Mecca to go to the safety of Medina. Subsequently the Muslim forces were successful in their wars against the polytheists. Muslim theology was profoundly formed by the reality of victory over the enemies of the Muslims. The flight from Mecca to Medina is so significant in Muslim identity that this event has become the beginning of the Muslim era. Not the birth of Muhammad; not the beginning of revelations; rather the era begins with the flight from suffering to victory over enemies in the fields of battle.

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<sup>10</sup> Quran: (the Women) 4:157

<sup>11</sup> Qur’an: (the Family of Imran) 3:55–58

There is little or no space in Islam for a suffering savior. That is what we talked about at the *ma-drassa* in Bangladesh that day. We shared that the cross is not defeat, for God raised the Messiah from the dead; that is the confirmation that the Messiah and his kingdom will endure forever.

It is helpful to link discussions about the cross to Abraham. He is significant for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Every year when Muslims take the annual pilgrimage to Mecca they offer tens of thousands of animals as a sacrifice remembering that God rescued a son of Abraham from death by providing, “a tremendous substitutionary sacrifice.”<sup>12</sup> Christians believe there are several significant dimensions of the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah. The substitutionary sacrifice that saved a son of Abraham from death is a sign pointing to one of those dimensions; that is the substitutionary atonement. This is to say that Jesus is the Lamb of God who has taken our place. The outstretched hands and arms of Jesus crucified are the arms of God inviting us to come to him to receive forgiveness and reconciliation.

A friend who was formerly Muslim often described the careful preparation for the feast of sacrifice in their home in central Somalia. A year before the sacrifice, his father would select two lambs, each a year old. They were the best from the flock. When the feast finally arrived, the family would select the best of the two lambs that had been set aside. The best lamb was sacrificed. Then his father would take the blood and dab the blood on the door post and lintel. In special ways the family would seek forgiveness of their sins. After the sacrifice and feast were concluded, the family would choose two perfect lambs for the sacrifice the next year.

In commending Christ to Muslims, the Muslim feast of sacrifice is a persuasive sign of the meaning and necessity of the cross of Jesus the Messiah. Muslims believe there is a balance scale. The wrong we do goes on one side of the scale, the good on the other. But none can know whether the good deeds are adequate to justify him or her. The final judgment will ultimately reveal the status of each person. In contrast, within the feast of sacrifice we meet a sign pointing to Jesus who is the Lamb of God.<sup>13</sup> He has taken our place. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God who is the fulfillment of all the animals given in sacrifice at the annual pilgrimage. In fact, he is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and especially of those who believe! This is the reason that Christians bear witness that their sins are forgiven. The balance scales is gone, for Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our substitutionary sacrifice. This is the reason Christians bear witness, “Our sins are forgiven!”

### **Fifth, what do you think of Muhammad?**

We had indeed participated in a most fruitful afternoon of searching questions. The gist of our conversation is woven into the responses I have described, with some editorializing. The conversation

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<sup>12</sup> Qur'an: (Those Ranged in Ranks) 37:107

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 11:9–15; John 1:29

was respectful and probing. The students' faces filled the windows as they listened pensively. Never before had they heard Christians responding to the great questions. We were ready to leave. Tea had been served. The imam and pastor were committing to meet again from time to time. Then just as we were about to shake hands, the imam turned to me and said, "What do you think of Muhammad?"

The pastor turned to me and observed, "The imam has requested your response to that question." I thanked the imam for the question, for it is a good and important question.

Then I observed, "Muhammad did much good. In his lifetime polytheism was eradicated in Arabia, as the whole region turned away from polytheism to worship only the one true God who is the almighty creator of the heavens and the earth. Injustices, such as female infanticide, were abandoned. I appreciate Muhammad's struggle for a more just society.

"Let me add that, as we study the writings of the prophets that are contained in the Bible, I learn that, beginning with Adam, God promised a Savior, who would bring salvation to all nations. God promised that the Messiah, who is the promised Savior, will bring this transformation to pass. The prophets proclaimed that the Messiah is the center of all truth and that in him there is forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

"So the basic question for me is whether Muhammad and the Muslims are proclaiming that the Messiah is the Savior of the world. Or does Muhammad take us in a different direction? As for me I have found full salvation in Jesus the Messiah. He is the one to whom I am committed. I began to follow the Messiah already when I was a child, and I shall follow him all the remaining days of my life. In fact, even after death comes my way, I shall serve the Messiah who is my Savior.

"Thanks for your very important question!"

### **Concluding Comment**

The imam and the *madrassa* students shook hands all around, and implored the pastor to visit the imam and his students again. The obvious unstated reason for meeting again was to continue the conversations that began that afternoon! We entrust to the Holy Spirit the mission of revealing the Gospel; our calling that day was simply to bear witness by responding to each of the five great questions.

These questions take us into the heart of the Gospel and the nature of the Christian faith. The questions Muslims bring to the table push Christians to be careful theologians. The five universal questions we have explored open the door to understand more fully the Muslim perplexity or objection in regard to the nature of the gospel.

The Muslim movement has turned away from the center of the Christian faith; exploring their questions may open the door for fruitful discourse on themes such as the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. We give thanks when the Muslim questions open the door for a retrieval of what has been lost as the Muslim movement turned away the Messiah of the biblical scriptures.

We are grateful wherever the door opens for Muslim and Christian conversation in regard to the five questions that come our way again and again.

An important aspect of retrieval is to hear and respond to the Muslim quest to bring every area of life under the authority of God. What shape does the will of God take? Most Muslims would say the shape of God's will is the Qur'an and the way of their prophet. The Christian will confess that Jesus the Messiah is the full revelation of the essence of the kingdom of God. The five questions we have explored push both Muslims and Christians to explore the essence of the kingdom of God wherein God's will comes on earth as it is in heaven.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**M. Daniel Carroll R. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 174 pp. \$16.99.**

Though the issue of illegal immigration is no stranger to America's history, the perfect storm of 9/11, the war against terror, political parties struggling for identity, and an economy that is moving from recession to depression has brought the issue to the fore of not only American politics but also to the attention of the church. Though our country may struggle to identify the "ethical" answer to the political quagmire of "illegal immigration," the church claims that her ethical standard, the Bible, is fixed for all times, peoples, and places. How does the church respond then to the issue of illegal immigration? Carroll seeks to answer that question in a winsome and compassionate manner in *Christians at the Border*.

Carroll is no stranger to the issue since every member of his family has immigrated or knows someone who has immigrated to the US. Recognizing that certain titles in the discussion can be politically and emotionally charged, he replaces "illegal alien" with "undocumented immigrant." Carroll is convinced that many, including Christians, either consciously or unconsciously approach the issue of illegal immigration from "passionate ideological arguments, economic wrangling, or racial sentiment" (19). Carroll is not exhaustive, but he endeavors to re-orient one's thoughts on the issue through a more biblical and theological lens.

Carroll sets the stage in chapter 1 by giving a brief history of Hispanic immigration focusing on two of the most hotly debated issues: national identity and economic impact. He successfully demonstrates that the issue is by no means simple. For example, many boldly speak out against illegal immigration while reaping the benefits of the cheap labor that such a reality brings. But matters become more complicated when one realizes that many "undocumented immigrants" are real confessing Christians. For this reason Carroll turns to the bible in chapters 2-4 in hopes of finding a "divine" answer to the matter.

Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the light that the Old Testament sheds on the matter of illegal immigration. Carroll shows how the image of God bears upon the matter and also shows that many of the characters in the OT were "foreigners." Above all Carroll seeks to illustrate that foreigners are "human beings" and need to be treated as such. In chapter 3 Carroll deals with the "treatment of immigrant within the general ethos of hospitality that was common in the ancient world" and "the legislation concerning foreigners in Israel's laws" (89).

In chapter 4 Carroll focuses on the light that the New Testament may shed on the issue. He works through Jesus' teaching as modeled specifically with his interactions with "outsiders," the general

NT theme of “Christians as sojourners,” and then briefly addresses the thorny issue of Romans 13 where Christians are commanded to “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1). Instead of starting with the lens of Rom. 13 and then reading the rest of the bible, especially the passages about the “foreigners” in the OT in light of the Rom. 13, Carroll begins with the OT teaching about foreigners together with Jesus’ teachings about hospitality and how to treat outsiders the starting point and reads Rom. 13 through that lens. Or, to put in another way, Carroll employs the analogy of scripture (i.e., the clearer passages govern the meaning of the more obscure passages) with a theology of compassion and hospitality for the foreigner as the clear scriptural default while the obedience to governing authorities is the more obscure passage.

Carroll is to be commended for moving the discussion forward. The bottom line is that there is not a simple answer to this issue. What is needed is an honest and carefully nuanced position that takes as many scenarios into account as possible. It just won’t do for Christians to say that the Bible instructs us not to disobey the civil authorities without any qualification that addresses the ineptitude of the American government to uphold its own laws. Blanket statements often times fail to deal adequately with the issue at stake and the matter of the church’s role in ministering to Christians who are illegal immigrants is no exception.

At the same time, though Carroll has made a valiant effort to push the conversation forward, his own treatment of the text leaves much to be desired. It seems to this reviewer that Carroll has quite possibly fallen into the same error as the proponents on the other side of the debate, that is, letting one scriptural issue or theme become the theological black-hole that swallows every other objection. Given Carroll’s position, the political debate of immigration at the civil level almost seems to become a gospel issue. Now this is a very hard pill to swallow but I’m not sure that the doctor prescribed it. To make connections between the Israelites treatment of the foreigner in the theocratic Yahweh-centered cultic-community and the church’s treatment of the illegal alien (whatever his/her ethnicity be) in the New Covenant era disconnected from any kind of church-state theocracy involves a necessary treatment of the relationship between the Old and New covenants. Carroll gives virtually no space to such concerns. Carroll points out that the United States’ laws on immigration are confused and contradictory concluding from this that they are unjust. Yet he doesn’t show, in any concrete way, how this is the case. Carroll must show that the United States does not, somehow, have the prerogative to make the immigration laws that it makes. This is a tall order.

The bottom line is that the church must have a biblical-theological answer to this pressing modern issue and Carroll has made an earnest contribution to that discussion; for this he is to be commended. May this book be a “stepping-stone” to further discussion for the good of Christ and His Kingdom.

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**Michael W. Goheen. *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and Issues*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014. 440 pp. \$30.00.**

In his seminal work *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch created a snapshot of mission studies in his day by uniting biblical theology, mission history, and current issues in missiology to snapshot the mission studies of his day.<sup>1</sup> A quarter-century later, a different world and a mushrooming amount of missions literature call for a similar effort in this generation. Michael Goheen answers this need with his book *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (henceforth, *ICM*), a new introduction to mission studies, organized according to Bosch's tripartite structure of Bible and theology, history, and current issues.

Goheen, scholar-in-residence at Missional Training Center in Phoenix, is a master synthesizer; boiling down a vast amount of literature to introduce the key conversations, contributors, and concepts. In many cases, *ICM* offers the most succinct presentation I've read on these issues (e.g. on changing global realities, 20–24; on developments in mission theology, 76–77; on evangelism, 238–47). Goheen is more current, more accessible, and more evangelical than Bosch; therefore, I believe that *ICM* would be a worthy replacement in most curricula.

Unfortunately, despite an attractive cover the publisher's effort in this volume is slipshod. Formatting issues in the table of contents set an unseemly tone, extended by the absence of serial commas anywhere except on the back cover. The binding is of poor quality, releasing whole sections after a single reading. IVP could have done better.

*ICM* is even-handed. In fact, it's not always clear when the author is expressing his own opinion and when he's summarizing someone else's view. Goheen presents both sides of an issue, often moving on without showing his colors (e.g., inclusivism, 346–349). Other times, he splits the baby (1 Kings 3:16–28). This can oversimplify things, as in the case of calling for evangelicals who emphasize the Word and ecumenicals who emphasize deeds to return to the gospel and mission in the way of Jesus (236). Yes, but both think they're already there. So what to do?

The chapter surveying the global church is the weakest, with Goheen seeming less at home than elsewhere while moving region by region with significant omissions (e.g. a longer discussion of Africa with no mention of prosperity gospel) and imbalance (e.g. twice as much material on the Pacific Islands as all of Asia). On the other hand, I loved the current issues section at the end, especially the chapter on urban mission, which I pray is used to further mobilize the church to engage today's burgeoning global cities.

The best section is the first, where Goheen lays a biblical-theological foundation by tracing the biblical story with a missional lens. His approach will be familiar to those who have read

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<sup>1</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, Ed. James A. Scherer, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

conversation partners Christopher J. H. Wright and N. T. Wright, or Goheen's own *A Light to the Nations*.<sup>2</sup> Mission is not about prooftexts or geography, but is at the very center of the church everywhere. Goheen then applies his biblical theology to a missional systematic theology, critiquing the concepts of mission separate from the church, or theology separate from mission.

The definition of "mission" is a perennial challenge, and *ICM* hasn't solved it. Sometimes Goheen's definition is specific, the "task given to God's people to communicate the good news" (26, cf. 236–37). More often, his concept is expansive, with the church participating "in God's mission to renew the whole creation and the whole lives of all its peoples and cultures" (117, cf. 26, 248). So, everything is mission, which Goheen nuances (82–83) by using Lesslie Newbigin's distinction between missional intention (e.g. evangelism) and missional dimension (everything else). How this distinction guides the church's priorities and resources is not clear; perhaps maintaining the more specific definition of mission and evaluating activities as "more direct" or "less direct" would help.<sup>3</sup>

With a standard historical approach—basically, the rise and fall of Christendom—*ICM* misses an opportunity. Who, wonders the reader, is our mission *with*? And who is our mission *to*? Goheen's sociological answer to the first question (any professing Christian identity or heritage) demands a gospel-agnostic answer to the second question, which is at odds with the biblical theology Goheen has already offered. Goheen's gospel emphasizes the person and work of Christ and the reign of God (94), but Christendom often prefers politics, popes, and prosperity. The progress of Christendom and the progress of the gospel are two different stories; Goheen chooses the former but the latter would have been more interesting and more consistent with his biblical theology.

A key argument in *ICM* is that "the faithful posture that the church must take within any cultural context is that of a missionary encounter" (298), a process whereby the gospel story is put in contrast to the foundational beliefs of the idolatrous cultural story by a church faithfully living the gospel story. Goheen develops this concept with provocative chapters on missionary encounters with Western Culture, and with other religions. These are helpful, as far as they go. But where, one wonders, is the missionary encounter with global "Christianity?"

We have plenty of confrontations with evangelicals here, but where is the confrontation of the non-evangelicals, the non-Protestants, and the non-orthodox? Contextualization is essential (and the chapter on the subject is quite good), but hasn't it gone too far when Roman Catholics and all manner of Ecumenical Protestants and Pentecostals are partners in mission (e.g. 20, 136, 158–59)? When is Liberation theology seen as positive contextualization (157, 311)? When African independent

<sup>2</sup> Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> For this view, see, e.g., Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 235.

churches incorporate animism, pursue healings, ordain untrained leaders, spiritual rituals, sacrifices, and pursue direct revelation as opposed to Scripture are considered “contextualized expressions of Christianity” and defended against criticism (192–3)? Goheen is actually spot on in his caution against relativism: “the situation where no cultural expression can be judged good or bad by Scripture or by the church from another culture” (268). But it’s not clear that he’s heeded his own warning.

A response to this criticism might be to mention the nature of the book, with its intention to survey and introduce mission to a wide audience. Even so, *ICM*’s spirit of generosity to the heterodox would be difficult to explain to my brothers and sisters laboring to bring the gospel to “Christians” in some of the hard places of the world: Egyptians among Coptics, Italians among Roman Catholics, Nigerians among AICs, and so on. I know many such faithful servants of Christ, and I suspect if they heard of *ICM*’s implicit dismissal of their efforts as misplaced Western enlightenment expressions against legitimate contextualized expressions they might seek a “missionary encounter” with Dr. Goheen.

Did I mention I really like this book? I do, and I recommend it to you. It might make you shout “hallelujah” one minute and shout something I can’t print here the next, meaning Goheen has succeeded marvelously in engaging the reader in the study of mission. The book ends abruptly with no conclusion. It’s a little jarring on first reading, but upon reflection it makes sense. Goheen isn’t taking his readers on a tour through Bible, theology, history, and contemporary culture so that they will accept all of his conclusions, but so that they will write their own. With its combination of ambiguity, detail, survey, insight, readability, and provocativeness, *ICM* would be it a very fruitful catalyst for discussion in a classroom, or perhaps among a session of elders, a small group, or a missionary team.

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**Conrad Mbewe, *Insights from the Lives of Olive Doke and Paul Kasonga for Pioneer Mission and Church Planting Today*. Carlisle, UK: Langham monographs, 2014. 208 pp. \$34.99.**

The author of this book, pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia (the formerly Northern Rhodesia), has planted twenty other churches in Zambia and surrounding countries. A committed church-planter and seasoned journalist, he writes to address problems that arise in the leadership transition stage of a church-planting ministry. All too commonly, distrust leads to broken relationships. In response, the author proposes mutual respect and admiration. In short, the book is about

“how to phase out pioneer missions work and bring in local leadership” (22). But in a more general application, it is about “how we ought to work with one another in missions” (23).

Most leadership transition problems stem from suspicion and distrust. From the perspective of a national pastor, “One of the most difficult phases to handle in pioneer missions work is the handover process to indigenous leaders. Often relationships between the two parties are marred by paternalism on the one hand and an inferiority complex on the other. This has resulted in suspicion from both sides, which has made a conducive working relationship and partnership extremely difficult” (14). The source? “Sadly, these are often related to money issues. The missionaries often hold on to the moneybag and use it as a bit in the mouth of a horse to drive it wherever they wish. In the same way, the local leaders sense this and resent what is happening to the extent that even where there is a genuine benevolent charity, it is held suspect. Relationships break down and strangle an otherwise growing work” (15–16). That said, the author surprisingly contends, “the very first stage of missions work invariably has to be paternalistic” (47). In support of this statement he, the author identifies three phases for leadership change; the initial paternalistic phase, the shared leadership phase, and the final withdrawal phase (57, based on A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, [Tzgel, 1988] 88). This three-phase structure becomes the basis of the author’s handover strategy in the penultimate chapter, “Transforming Paternalism into Partnership: Application” (147–67).

The author states his thesis, definitions, and method for the study clearly. Publications treating matters of missions and church planting typically focus on the perspective of the missionary sent out from the USA or another sending country. But the author writes as a national pastor who sees things differently, so much so that he discovers a solution to a potentially devastating problem for the leadership handover stage of church planting. The solution requires careful study rooted in the rigors of research. Dr. Mbewe’s thesis is “Where mutual respect and mutual admiration are fostered between the missionary and the potential local leaders, the handover process of missions work is likely to go more smoothly” (21). To be precise, the author then defines his terms: “Although respect and admiration have a lot in common and can be used as synonyms, the researcher is deliberately using both in order to achieve emphasis. By respect he means due regard to a person’s feelings and rights, and by admiration he means the recognition of a person’s achievement as being unusual and excellent” (21). Unfortunately, the book introduces these definitions on page 21 after much discussion rooted in these contextually nuanced definitions of the two terms. The method is case study analysis that “shows us real human beings doing that which produces the results that we want to produce” (21). The author illustrates the study with the amazing story of Olive Doke, a missionary sent out through South African Baptist Missionary Society (SABMS), and Paul Kasonga, a national Zambian with leprosy.

Doke and Kasonga illustrate a missions partnership without paternalism. “Olive Doke and Paul Kasonga had a real brotherly affection, deep respect, and unfeigned admiration for each other. This

was despite the many differences between them: Doke was white, but Kasonga was black. Olive was a female, but Kasonga was male. Doke was a missionary, but Kasonga was a local person. Doke grew up in the comforts of the developed world, while Kasonga grew up in a rural village. Doke enjoyed very good health, but Kasonga was a sickly leper” (13). After working together for over twenty years, Kasonga died due to his leprosy. It was then that Doke wrote the only known biography of Paul Kasonga. Although Olive Doke served over fifty years, almost her entire adult life, in Zambia, no biography has been published except the study under review. Doke and Kasonga offer us a significant example of how a good transition can occur. But other good examples of partnership also abound. “Thankfully, there have been very good examples of the opposite situation, where mutual respect and admiration has characterized the relationship between foreign missionaries and local leaders. This wholesome relationship has led to benefits that have spurred the church being planted onto higher heights” (31). One questions why this can’t be every church-planting story, indeed, every ministry transition story. What provokes distrust and suspicion in the transition phase of church planting?

Financial support causes many problems in the handover stage of church planting. “Only a deliberate effort on the part of the pioneer missionaries to show the indigenous people that leadership must not be tied with social or economic means will save the church being planted from such expectations. Sadly, the problem can also be exacerbated by the indigenous leaders’ expectations.... A local person should aim to be supported by the indigenous people and not by external sources that supported the missionaries whose job they have taken over” (37–38). Rather than indigeneity and autonomy, an improper view of money fosters not only dependence but also resentment when the time for missionary support tapers off. But even worse, “instead of missionaries emphasizing spirituality, they wait for indigenous leaders to also qualify financially before they can be true equals. Indigenous leaders have detested this. Hence, even the final choice and ordination of leaders still remains in the hands of the missionaries long after the first indigenous leaders have been chosen” (54). There are no easy answers for many of these questions. Even those who like to err on the safe side are not sure which side that is. A further reason for the lag pattern is the indigenous leadership’s fear. “Often, once missionaries have established an indigenous leadership, the new leader will be very reluctant to see them withdraw because they feel a sense of safety with the missionaries around” (65).

Church plants should view leadership handover as a process rather than event. “However this ‘handover’ is not an event but a process—a long process—which must be handled sensitively. It begins with the foreign missionaries identifying among the local disciples those who are gifted and growing in grace, and then discipling them into leadership roles. Then it goes into a phase of shared leadership, whereby the converts work as equals with the missionaries in making decisions about God’s work. Then, finally, once the missionaries are satisfied that these new leaders can work

without them, they withdraw and move on to another sphere of work (or they work under the new leaders, but in a more specialized role—e.g. theological training)” (15).

Paternalism and distrust that undercut church planting relationships in Zambia may be true of any ministry relationship, at home or abroad. Fear that a young, less-experienced leader may fail leads to prolonged control. Here, Mbewe quotes Roland Allen from a century ago who said, “It would be better, far better, that our converts should make many mistakes, and fall into many errors, and commit many offences, than that their sense of responsibility should be undermined” (40, citing Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours*, 145). Mbewe adds, “In other words, foreign missionaries should give room for local leaders to make mistakes so that they can learn from them, just as the churches of the foreign missionaries also made mistakes and have grown *because* of those same mistakes” (40). Trust for managing finances should include trust for selecting, training and ordaining leaders. In general, senior church leaders can offer encouragement and nurture to young and emerging leaders without having to control them. Of course, there will be mistakes. But these can be minimized with the right kind of ongoing support.

Several issues may invite strengthening: A first concern is for the popular incarnational model. This suggests that Christians are to empty self (based on the Greek word, *kenosis* in Philippians 2:7) as Jesus did in order to become Spirit-lead believers. But Andreas Köstenberger corrected this ministry model in his published dissertation (*The Missions of Jesus & the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel with Implications for the Fourth Gospel’s Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]). Jesus’ divine act of self-emptying is not the prerogative of believers, although the same passage admonishes us to look out for the interests of others (Philippians 2:1–3). This misunderstanding does not weaken the author’s argument that pioneer missionaries must learn to trust the spiritual maturity of indigenous church leaders. A second concern is the conspicuous absence in the book’s documentation of works like Glen Schwartz, *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement* (Authorhouse, 2007) that challenge missionaries to reassess ongoing financial support, particularly when it undermines the dignity or responsibility of nationals. Finally, this outstanding study would have benefitted from Jack Barentsen, *Emerging Leadership in the Pauline Mission: A Social Identity Perspective on Local Leadership Development in Corinth and Ephesus* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

Although this outstanding book offers many takeaways, two in particular are worth noting. First, Paul Kasonga’s disabilities that came with leprosy shaped him into an outstanding pastor. He lost fingers and toes, eventually a lower leg and was chronically ill. At the time he was ordained, he could neither walk nor write without assistance. But others helped this gifted preacher because they valued his giftedness, commitment, and spiritual insight. His suffering, which was often severe, gave him rapport with the suffering poor, sick, and outcast. His people drew from his limitations, “If a

man in his condition could do so much, how much more should those of us who are able-bodied do?” (177). The author’s own conclusion is that all believers “ought to read the life of Paul Kasonga and put aside their excuses for not serving God because of their alleged inabilities” (173–174). Perhaps hidden to the casual observer, Paul’s disabilities gave him ministry integrity among his peers and valuable spiritual insight for preaching and counseling, both for which he demonstrated extraordinary giftedness. The church today needs pastors, missionaries, Sunday school teachers and other leaders with disabilities. Perhaps ironically, it suffers spiritually without them.

The author illustrates the book’s argument for correcting the handover phase in ministry with a wonderful story. Pastor Conrad Mbewe tells a beautiful tale of two unlikely friends, a white South African Woman and a black Zambian leper who work together to reach a nation, one new convert at a time. This is a story about a different kind of suffering and the way that co-laborers serve together to overcome insurmountable relational odds-by God’s grace. It is about two human beings who love the Lord more than they fear differences. What can we learn from them?

The reviewer recommends that every believer read this book, but especially church planters and others involved in training local church leaders.

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**David Parker. ‘Discerning the Obedience of Faith’: *A Short History of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission*. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2nd ed., 2014. 160 pp. \$10.00.**

What we know today as the World Evangelical Alliance began in England in 1846. It has grown and developed into a vibrant network of evangelical Christians from many nations.

Just over forty years ago, the World Evangelical Fellowship, as it was then called, sensed that more attention on theology and theological education from the evangelical perspective was necessary. First, the Theological Assistance Program (TAP) was begun in order to encourage and support theological education, research projects, and publications, especially in majority-world countries. Soon afterwards, its successor, the Theological Commission (TC) was formed, with its first full meeting held at London Bible College, September 8–12, 1975. As Dr. Bruce Nicholls, one of the founders and primary shapers of the TAP and then the TC, wrote, the Commission “... provides an open space where theologians and educators can meet. It is a catalyst for new ideas and projects” (35).

This short, yet detailed historical monograph, written by TC leader David Parker, was originally published in 2005, and has been updated and expanded for the fortieth anniversary of the Commission. From the beginning, the TC has been involved in theology and theological education in

numerous ways. It has held “consultations”—gatherings attended by an ever-increasing number of evangelicals, both Western and non-Western. Its journal, the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, began in 1977. Encouragement of global theological institutions continued the work of the TAP, notably with lecture tours and the library development fund. The International Council of Accrediting Agencies (ICAA) was also sponsored initially by the TC. In the early days, leadership of the TC was provided by Bruce Nicholls, John Stott, and Sunand Sumithra, and many others whose names are too numerous to list here.

Throughout the late 1980’s, challenges threatened the continued progress of the work and unity of the TC. This book describes the leadership changes, the move of offices to Bangalore and Korea, financial worries, and tensions between the TC and the ICAA. Dr. Bong Ro, Dr. Peter Kuzmic, and others feature in the work which the TC did during this period to stabilize and continue its varied activities. Study units, consultations, and publications continued on topics of ethical issues, evangelism, and political developments such as the changes in the communist world. In the 1990’s, a new challenge appeared: the TC’s role was reimagined as dealing not directly with theologians and schools in various nations, but in training, strengthening, and coaching the approximately seventy National Evangelical Fellowships (NET) and regional theological associations which had been formed through the years to do this work. However, many of these national organizations later disappointingly turned away from the WEF and the TC for support and guidance elsewhere.

In the year 2000, the TC, under the leadership of Dr. James Stamoolis and others, worked together with Billy Graham on the Conference for Itinerant Evangelists in Amsterdam. In this new century, a renewed vision for the TC was formulated, and continual conferences around the world revitalized the world-wide networking and theological work of the Commission. It has continued to serve to the present, not without challenges, as “a prophetic evangelical voice that is globally representative, faithful to Scripture, theologically informed and which speaks with clarity and relevance to both the church and the world” (127).

This slim book is chock-full of details, names, and events—highly informative, but very dense to read. The open discussion of highs and lows in this organization’s history is refreshingly honest. The two Appendices give the vision statement adopted in Vancouver in 2000, and a comprehensive list of chairmen, general meetings, and publications of the TC. All in all, this is a useful and important volume for anyone interested in the history and work of the Theological Commission and the history of evangelicalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

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**Thomas Schirrmacher, *The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All: Towards a Theology of Martyrdom*. Wetzlar: Idea Dokumentation 15/99E, 2001. 156 pp. \$19.99.**

Are you theologically prepared to be a martyr? “Martyrdom and persecution has constantly accompanied Christianity throughout its history,” (25) proposes Schirrmacher, and he claims persecution is promised to believers for all times (85). Thomas Schirrmacher has three earned doctorates (Missiology, Cultural Anthropology and Ethics) and is Professor for Ethics, for Missiology and of International Development at seminaries in the U.S., Germany, South Africa and India. He serves as President of Martin Bucer Seminary in Bonn, as the director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo) of the World Evangelical Alliance and as President of Giving Hands gGmbH, an international charitable institution with projects in areas of the world where human rights are being denied and Christians are being persecuted. He has written or edited 94 books on ethics, missiology and cultural anthropology, which were translated into 17 languages. He has pastored in protestant churches in Germany and won awards in Ethics and Human Rights and Religious Freedom. His long-term scholarly work, broad international exposure and first-hand involvement on continents dealing with the issue of persecution certainly qualify him to speak to this issue.

*Persecution* was written as part of the preparation for the Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church organized by the German Evangelical Alliance to help Evangelical believers give the subject of persecution new attention. It is designed as a new Biblical-theological and ecclesiastical review of persecution. As such, Schirrmacher seeks “to demonstrate that martyrdom is not an embarrassing side effect of Christianity, but an intrinsic element of Old Testament, New Testament, Jewish and Early Church faith,” and that working to help persecuted Christians is a central task of the Christian Church (14).

Schirrmacher develops the topic of persecution and martyrdom by exploring 70 theses divided into 9 categories. The first chapter raises the relevance of the topic of persecution from both present experience and the formative influence of martyrdom on the theology of the early church. Next he gives a broad topical overview of martyrdom in the Bible. Following that, there is a discussion of the relationship of Jesus to martyrdom and then an explanation of the church’s experience of persecution. Starting with a discussion of behavior under persecution, Schirrmacher comments on martyrdom and missions, on martyrdom and persecution as “Contra a Religion of Prosperity,” and on persecution and the state. Schirrmacher ends with a chapter on the Christian’s needed, compassionate, practical response toward persecution. As appendices Schirrmacher includes two of his essays on Human Rights.

Schirrmacher uses the methodology of 70 theses, brief statements supported by usually one to three paragraphs of explanation and discussion. These are necessarily brief, but are further

buttressed by relatively extensive footnotes which provide the reader with further information and documentation for more in-depth study and understanding. There is also an extensive, 31 page select bibliography on persecution of Christians listing books, journals, articles and other scholarly publications, augmented by a list of web addresses. The bibliography equips the reader for further study and research on the subject of the persecution of Christians. (It should be noted that a large percentage of these resources are in German).

The difficulty of full accuracy concerning the present statistics on martyrdom is acknowledged in an extensive note. The fact of Christian persecution of Christians (40–42) and the fact that not all persecution is religiously motivated (criminality or sheer political activism, for example are other motivators) are also openly admitted. These honest confessions lend credibility and keep *Persecution* from seeming reactionary.

A valuable contribution to the discussion of martyrdom is made by the theses contrasting the biblical teaching on the reality of persecution with the notion of prosperity (theses 45–52). Schirmacher brings an eternal perspective on persecution which encourages the suffering and even dying believer. Another interesting section is in thesis “58. Resisting the State,” (92–95), where the ethicist in Schirmacher comes out as he explains the ethical reasoning behind obeying God rather than the state.

An index of scripture references would significantly enhance the value of this book by making the wide range of topic-relevant biblical text more easily accessible to the reader and researcher. This is an unfortunate omission in light of the book’s goal of moving towards a theology.

To a good degree *Persecution* accomplishes its goal of helping evangelical believers give the subject of persecution new attention. It faithfully gives scriptural grounding from the Old and New Testaments for its theses and lifts the subject out of a church-historical past into the present day through examples of recent persecution and martyrdom (See, for example, “Appendix 2: Faith is a Human Right”). However, the goal of demonstrating that working to help persecuted Christians is a central task of the Christian Church remains largely unreached, supported mostly by implication and a single subsection (“62. When One Member Suffers”). Schirmacher’s final, practical section is not much more than a list of (informed) ideas and opinions (information, education, liturgy cell-church structures), but lacks the biblical grounding that characterize other sections of *Persecution*.

Schirmacher’s 70 thesis approach profoundly affects the result of the book, making it more a list of ideas or thoughts than a systematic treatment of persecution. This fact is also evident in the “Towards a Theology of...” subtitle. The reader who is looking for complete theology of persecution, in-depth biblical study, or a balanced examination of relevant topics should look elsewhere.

The thesis approach also causes some inconsistency. For example, in Thesis 18, “Jesus is the prototype of the Martyr,” (45–46) Schirmacher declares that Jesus is the archetype of martyrdom. This is inconsistent with both the definition of a martyr given in Thesis 7 (one who dies for the confession

of his faith, 28) and with the clear, and biblical statement in Thesis 21 that “Paul did not regard his own suffering as redemptive” (47). Jesus’ suffering and death was an atoning sacrifice for others which was unique, rather than a pattern for others (58).

However, Schirrmacher’s list has the benefit of being a product of his long consideration of the topic of martyrdom and persecution as both a scholar and as one involved in ministering to Christians experiencing persecution. It is, therefore, not a simple list just anyone could concoct, but rather a compilation of biblical perspectives, historical, and practical concerns that are of great relevance. The book raises issues and provides key relevant texts for a broad range of vital issues on the subject of persecution and martyrdom, along with supplying highly valuable access to sources for further study through the footnotes and select bibliography.

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**Perry Shaw. *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*. Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2014. 300 pp. \$31.99.**

Curricular design is a challenge for theological education because: 1) Curriculum is vitally important; 2) Most theological educators are trained in Bible, theology, and ministry but not education; 3) In comparison to the oceans of literature on specific subjects in the theological curriculum, little is published on putting the whole curriculum together. To this last point, one can find chapters in edited volumes and online articles of varying quality, but apart from the subject of this review I know of only one monograph, Leroy Ford’s still useful but dated *Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education* (1991).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, we live in a time of global shakeup for theological education; a time where new institutions are popping up around the world and old institutions are trying to revamp their curriculum in response to rising costs, shrinking donations, new technologies, and changing needs of students and churches. So everywhere we have academic deans, administrators, and/or faculty subcommittees charged to “fix it” or “build it,” in many cases without ever having created theological curriculum or knowing where to start.

Which brings us to Perry Shaw’s *Transforming Theological Education* (henceforth, *TTE*): he’s going to tell you where to start. Indeed, he’ll do more than that, guiding you through the entire process of considering what the curriculum must accomplish and designing the program and courses that will meet that need. Thank you, Dr. Shaw.

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<sup>1</sup> Leroy Ford, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education: A Learning Outcomes Focus*, (Nashville, Broadman: 1991).

Shaw is currently Professor of Christian Education and Associate Academic Dean at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut, Lebanon, also serving as a speaker and consultant for theological education institutions around the world. *TTE* is born out of the recent history of ABTS, a 55-year-old institution that as of the early 2000's was in crisis. Revamping the curriculum over a number of years helped bring the seminary back to health, and *TTE*'s introduction tells this story and describes their new curriculum.

“Backwards design,” popularized in the secular realm by Wiggins and McTighe's *Understanding by Design*,<sup>2</sup> is the simple idea that whole curricula, and individual courses, need to be designed by first identifying the desired outcomes and then working “backwards” to determine what content and experiences will step toward these outcomes. The heart of *TTE* is an application of backwards design to the theological curriculum. This is true on the macro-level of the whole institution, but also on the micro-level of individual courses or sections of courses. Shaw has read widely in educational theory and psychology, and is gifted at identifying insights from those disciplines helpful for theological education and giving examples of how they've been applied in the context of ABTS.

The majority of the book coaches curricular designers, directing them through various considerations that need to be addressed in the course of building a curriculum like setting goals, integration, hidden curriculum, assessing the curriculum, and many more. The body of *TTE* is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the overall curriculum and institutional culture, the second dealing with the development, design, and teaching of individual courses.

*TTE*, as described in the subtitle, is very practical. After almost every chapter, the theory discussed in the chapter is given legs by showing documents, forms, or policies from ABTS exemplifying one way of how the theory can be applied. The questions and exercises at the end of every chapter extend the lesson either for personal study, or for discussion with a planning team. Dozens of diagrams help illustrate the concepts being discussed. In many places, the reader is given a clear checklist to follow, like curricular design questions to ask (48–49), or steps in syllabus design (151–52).

Perhaps one reason more books like this don't exist is that the subject matter has potential to bore. I commend Shaw for avoiding this pitfall; he writes clearly, doesn't linger too long in any one place, and unites theory with numerous examples.

I would have loved to have seen further biblical and theological reflection brought to bear on the educational theory of *TTE*. For example, how does a biblical anthropology inform or critique secular insights on how students learn? How would a biblical theology of how God communicates or calls for his gospel to be communicated shape or limit our seminary classroom methods? Such questions are beyond the scope of *TTE*'s project, but it's worth noting the opportunity for theological

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<sup>2</sup> Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 2nd ed., (Alexandria, ASCD: 2005).

educators to keep thinking biblically and theologically not only about their content but also about their methods. When it comes to the latter, there is much more work to be done.

Last year I found myself charged with leading a curricular development project at a new theological institution. My team and I consulted a wide range of resources, and found *TTE* singularly useful in defining the nature of the task we had before us and helping us start. The first three chapters, which focus on asking the right questions and implementing the curriculum, especially helped us have the right conversations about where we were going and chart a course to get there.

While I happen to work in the same region as ABTS, this book would serve theological institutions and theological educators anywhere. As we conclude our planning, the result is a curriculum that looks a lot different from that of ABTS, for reasons contextual, philosophical, and theological. But that's ok. I don't have to agree with Shaw's way of *doing* theological education to benefit from his way of *designing* theological education. *TTE* isn't trying to force ABTS's curriculum on you, but is giving you the opportunity to learn from their experience and design the curriculum that will best serve your context and your students.

*TTE* is not only for curriculum designers. Professors planning individual courses, or students developing their philosophy of education, will also find much help here. So it's an ideal book for individual reading, for faculty development, or as a textbook in education courses. *TTE* is a unique and valuable contribution to the literature on Theological Education, so if you are involved in this field on any level, I commend it to you as a resource worthy of your careful reading and reflection.

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**M. David Sills. *Changing World, Unchanging Mission: Responding to Global Challenges*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015. 233 pp. \$17.00.**

*Changing World Unchanging Mission: Responding to Global Challenges* gives the reader much to think about in engaging the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this book, David Sills seeks to answer two questions: "What can we learn from the ways past changes affected missions? What place should the future have in informing the ways we currently do missions?" (Kindle Location 50–51, all references henceforth are to the Kindle locations). David Sills has both the experience and expertise to help answer these questions. He has served as a missionary in Ecuador working with indigenous tribes in the Andes Mountains. He was president of a seminary in Quito, Ecuador. For over ten years he has taught at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His final credential would be starting and leading as the President of Reaching and Teaching International Ministries, a missions agency focused on theological education for pastors and indigenous church planting.

By design, the book is geared more for mission agencies, missionaries, and missions students. In ten chapters, Sills covers an array of current mission trends. In each chapter, a brief history of the current trend is evaluated after which several options for engagement are offered. His critiques of the past are balanced with a fair evaluation and an optimistic future outlook. The book is not designed to be an in-depth study of all current mission practices with substantial exegesis.

Sills weaves through the chapters his primary missiological emphasis—“The tragedy of the world is not that it is unreached but that it is undisciplined” (128). Discipling believers is the answer for the various problems facing the world today. While some may consider this simplistic, it is biblical (Matt 28:18–20) and practical. *Changing World Unchanging Mission* is the practical application in different scenarios.

When looking at business as mission (BAM), Sills offers this helpful thought, “Must Western missionaries be the front-line missionaries? Perhaps our most creative access would be to go to countries that we can enter more easily, and disciple, train, and equip believers there to go to countries that may be closed to US citizens but more accessible to them” (2058–2060). Sills revisits this theme when he interacts with the church in the Global South (Chapter 10). The Global South has more believers than the traditional church in the West. Though the West has more money and better technology, these are not enough to reach the world. Some may suggest digitizing and sending technological devices to disciple believers. However, Sills says, “The majority prefers a person to teach them— someone to explain face-to-face and someone to walk down the road of life with them. Technology is a wonderful blessing and will be increasingly adopted by peoples around the world, but most still prefer the message in human form to disciple, correct, clarify and model” (1306–1308).

Even though this book is targeted towards a Western audience, it does not champion the Western missionary as the world’s only hope of hearing the gospel. Sills writes, “Nationals must be trained to fulfill the task, not only because we could never amass enough missionaries to do the task but also in order for everyone to do what God is calling *them* to do” (2726–2728). When is someone disciplined? Sills gives his answer, “True success in evangelism, discipleship and theological education is achieved when new believers can understand, remember and retell what they have learned” (1339–1340).

Sills devotes an entire chapter to the role of the church in sending missionaries (Chapter 7). He emphasizes the role and priority of the church to send missionaries. However, he does suggest that churches partner with agencies because of the challenges of sending missionaries. Agencies understand language learning, missiology, culture shock, raising children overseas, and team dynamics with more experience than local churches. When churches partner with agencies they must align theologically and missiologically. Newer agencies, such as Reaching and Teaching exist because traditional agencies have narrowed their missiological focus.

The chapter with the greatest weakness is Helping without Hurting (Chapter 6). With the chapter title, the reader would expect an excerpt and more interaction with current social justice books, *When Helping Hurts*, *Toxic Charity*, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*, etc. Instead of interacting with

the different models addressed in these books, Sills gives more open-ended questions to the various situations presented within the chapter. While this is a definite weakness it also aligns with Sills' attempt to be more general and get the reader thinking about current trends. He offers 6 R's to guide missionaries, namely, rescue, relief, rebuild, restore, reconcile, and redeem. Once again, emphasis is on empowering the indigenous.

If you are looking for a comprehensive treatment of current trends in missions then this book is not for you. However, if you want out-of-the-box thinking about current missions trends then read this book. While Sills says his target audience comprises current missions practitioners or students, I would suggest that the book be read by missions-minded pastors, missions committees, and any missions-minded Christian.

The book would benefit with questions at the end of each chapter for discussion. I imagine a missions committee or small group discussing the chapters in the book each week. Each chapter would be a great discussion starter for churches to evaluate past mission experiences and plan for future missions encounters. I recommend that you put *Changing World Unchanging Mission* on your reading list.

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**Rodney Stark and Xiuhua Wang. *A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2015. 145 pp. \$20.00.**

Rodney Stark (1934- ) is the distinguished professor of the social sciences and co-director of the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University, and honorary professor of sociology at Peking University in Beijing. He is perhaps best known for his book *The Rise of Christianity* (1996) and his suggested theory that early Christianity grew primarily through gradual individual conversion by means of social networks of family and friends. Rodney Stark's latest work, written alongside co-author Xiuhua Wang, *A Star in the East* combines the sociological and historical backgrounds of Dr. Stark with the doctoral research of Xiuhua Wang on the unexpected rise of Christianity in China.

This book provides a sweeping history of missions in China combined with recent, reliable statistics on the effects of the rise of Christianity as well as subsequent implications. In 1966, due to the changed political climate of the Cultural Revolution in China, the church went into hiding, but not into hibernation (43). How had Christianity fared prior to 1966 and what can be the explanation for its rapid growth afterward? These questions are considered at length in this short work.

The authors begin by explaining the purpose of their work. "Using reliable data, we challenge previous theories about religion in China and shed new light on those groups converting to

Christianity... [this book] explores how and why this religion is growing at such a rapid rate and also speculates on its future growth” (xi). These statements provide the scope of the work to be accomplished in this modest volume of only 145 pages.

The first chapter begins by considering the problems faced in such a study of China’s recent “religious awakening” (2). Unfortunately, many discussions of the religious developments in China “have not been based on reliable statistics, properly interpreted” (2). Because of this, many have made wild predictions and have “encouraged a good deal of nonsense” (2). Two major surveys (2001 and 2007) are then explained as the foundation for this work. The difficulties, however, are not solved by merely considering these recent studies. Even these recent surveys show an interesting phenomenon that causes difficulties to those wishing to interpret the outcomes correctly. As the authors explain, in the 2007 survey, 72 percent of those who claimed no religion had, within the last year, “venerated ancestral spirits by their graves” (4). Furthermore, many Chinese do not see Confucianism as a religion, but rather a philosophy (5). It seems that most Chinese define “religion as belonging to an organized religious group” (5). Subsequently, for the Chinese, claiming no religion does not necessarily mean they are irreligious.

Christianity has clearly been growing at an astonishing rate in China. But, there is a great deal of disagreement as to just how astonishing the growth has been. Some have suggested that there are currently 16 million Christians in China, while others have suggested as many as 200 million (10). It would seem that the data from the surveys suggests a more accurate number to be between 50–70 million as of 2007 (11). Even if we take the lowest number, the growth rate has been phenomenal.

The book then turns to a short history of Christian missions in China from 1860–1950. A surprising amount of statistical evidence is available from the Protestant missions endeavors of those years, but not so for the Catholic work. The wonderful historical and biographical elements of this chapter will be fascinating to most readers. Some of the more interesting aspects of this chapter include the significant amount of single women missionaries in China, the difficulties of Catholic missions, and how various Chinese political movements affected the number and type of missionary endeavors. It is fascinating to realize that Catholic missions to China began much earlier and subsequently had a more significant membership for many years, yet Protestants are by far the modern denomination of choice for Chinese Christians (26–27).

Having looked at the history of Christian missions, the repression of Christianity in China is then considered. For several years after coming to power, the Communist regime allowed certain missionary and religious enterprises, but in 1966, Mao Zedong changed all of that. Christianity was “forced into hiding, but not into hibernation” (43). As the authors assert, the expulsion of missionaries and persecution of Christianity may have been the “most beneficial event for the success of the Christianity in China” (44). The expulsion of missionaries forced the Chinese churches to become self-governing and self-sustaining. As the government imposed more restrictions, the churches



seemed to move farther underground. One of the highlights of this chapter is the consideration of many national pastors who came to prominence at this time.

The authors then seek to tackle a fascinating problem. Why does Christianity seem to have “such a great appeal to the most educated Chinese” (76)? The statistics are given that prove the more educated are much more likely to be Christian than any other religion, and the least educated are far less likely to be Christian. Social scientists are fond of looking to deprivation theory as the primary impetus for movement toward religion. The idea is simply that those who are in material poverty will look to religion for solace, and subsequently the poorer classes will always be the most willing to consider a new religion. Against this idea, the authors suggest that spiritual deprivation is the more likely explanation, and those who are more intelligent and wealthy often consider their spiritual lack as physical gains do not satisfy their deepest longings (81). The authors suggest that Christianity initially grows most prevalently in the educated classes and give case studies of several countries to test their hypothesis (86–90). These pages offer much food for thought.

Consideration is then given to various factors potentially effecting Chinese Christian growth. Rural and urban settings are considered as well as age and gender. Interestingly, gender is the only category that shows a significant variation (103).

The final chapter will be intriguing to all readers as the authors consider the future prospects of Christian growth in China and the potential consequences of such growth. While according to the most recent survey (2014), the rate of growth does not seem to have continued quite so strongly as before, the growth rate is still significant and future prospects are intriguing to consider.

While some of the ideas of Rodney Stark’s previous work are present in this volume, the reader need not study Stark’s other works in order to fully appreciate this volume. Perhaps the main criticism of this volume is its length. Many readers will be wishing for more and it is hoped that as further data become available, the book might be expanded. Stark and Wang provide a much-needed resource for those interested in the current spiritual awakening in China. The conclusions are based on sufficient data to please the missiologist and sociologist alike, while not being overly technical for anyone interested in the topic. Christian readers will be especially encouraged, non-Christians will be intrigued, and all readers will be prodded to further consideration of long-held ideas concerning religious growth.

*Nate Muse*

*Biblical Ministries*

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**David Watson and Paul Watson. *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014. 256 pp. \$12.99.**

I sat at breakfast with a missionary as he explained his team's new approach to reaching Muslims in a closed country. He rejoiced that they had been able to start over a dozen Discovery Bible Studies among the locals, yet admitted that to that point, there were no believers in any of the groups. This methodology my friend was describing is prevalent, if not pervasive, throughout missions endeavors now, and is the vision set forth in *Contagious Disciple Making* by David and Paul Watson.

What's evident throughout the book is made explicit in the first chapter: the approach to evangelism and discipleship articulated here arises out of the older *Church Planting Movement* (CPM) methodology. In fact, the elder Watson, David, worked alongside David Garrison at the International Mission Board for many years, and describes the initial development of the CPM approach. The similarities between the Disciple-Making Movements (DMM) advocated by the Watsons and the older CPM approach are in fact so close, some missions agency leaders have described the DMM approach simply as a "retooling" or even "rebranding" of the CPM ideas.

This is the DMM approach to disciple-making, in brief: 1) Identify a particular affinity group, or "silo", to engage. Pray diligently for them. 2) Live a conspicuously Christian life among them, serve their felt needs, and prayerfully look for a "Person of Peace," whom God has prepared to be the launchpad from which the gospel will advance through that silo. 3) Train the Person of Peace to host an inductive Bible study (Discovery Bible Study) among their family and friends, ensuring that they are seeking to obey all that they find in the Scriptures, even if they have not yet come to faith in Christ. 4) Mentor and coach the Person of Peace in their leadership, but avoid leading or teaching the group so as not to promote dependence upon an outsider. Rather encourage the group from afar as it discovers God. 5) While studying the Bible, some or even all of the group will desire to follow Christ and be baptized. 6) Identify the natural spiritual leader in the group. Mentor and train them to lead others and continue replicating the model among other silos.

*Contagious Disciple Making* offers a number of helpful reminders and even correctives to common missiological pitfalls. First, the Watsons' strongly advocate for dependence upon God in prayer. They contend that such a commitment to prayer is a prerequisite to any and all disciple-making fruitfulness. Second, they aim to ensure that the actual text of Scripture is kept central in evangelistic and discipleship efforts. Rather than relying on extra-biblical materials, the Watsons routinely advocate for a Scripture-centric approach. Third, they strongly advocate for the necessity of obedience for all followers of Christ. Whereas many evangelical churches continue to look more and more like the world, such a corrective is sorely needed. Finally, they encourage the long-term investment in mentoring new leaders. They describe that the DMM approach requires a commitment to the development of leaders, who can then lead the replication of new disciples in new communities and contexts. All of these encouragements are helpful and beneficial for the body, even if they are not particularly novel.

Without dismissing these strengths, there are a number of significant concerns about the book and the methodology it promotes.

### Missiological Pragmatism

While the Watsons would likely affirm the sovereignty of God in missions, the book is peppered with statements that belie an underlying pragmatism. What seems to be truly determinative in the creation of a dynamic movement and thousands coming to faith is implementing the right method. Consider the following examples:

1. “A DMM is *causative*; a CPM is the result.” (7)
2. “Stick with the process and there will be fruit. (We know this from experience from working with silos and training teams around the world.)” (114)
3. “Actually, if we do things right, the Person of Peace finds us.” (123)
4. They describe visiting a troubled missionary team who was failing to create a DMM. The Watsons diagnosed the problem: “Groups they started were leaving out several elements of the study—important DNA elements for multiplication—and were not replicating the Discovery Group blueprint.” (144). Methodological changes were considered and implemented, with the result that, “In a year after that trip, they started three hundred Discovery Groups” (145).

Such pragmatism, even if unintended, is unhelpful and even damaging. Surely God deserves the glory and praise for any and all spiritual fruit; not man and his methods. First, we honor God by making it abundantly clear that spiritual fruit is caused by a powerful God using a powerful gospel message of salvation proclaimed by weak fools. Second, such pragmatism, expressed in the above ways can easily lead toward real discouragement among missionaries. If DMMs naturally flow from following the prescribed pattern, then those who fail to create a DMM, despite zeal and diligence, must assume they are at fault and unqualified.

### Disparagement of Doctrine and Teaching

Paul instructs the young pastor Titus with these words, “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). But the Watsons discourage both teaching and doctrine throughout the book. Teaching is taboo because it leads to dependency on the outsiders, rather than dependency on God’s Word and the Spirit. They explain, “we have to avoid the role of explaining Scripture. If we do, we become the authority rather than allowing Scripture to be the authority” (149). Doctrine is dismissed because it promotes a “branded Christianity” that is more cultural religiosity than it is biblical faith. Both of these concerns have some validity, but the solutions are overstated. In an effort to avoid these pitfalls, the Watsons throw out both the bath water and the baby.

The Bible is replete with examples of leaders teaching sound doctrine. Jesus was called “Rabbi” and his ministry centered on preaching and teaching both to crowds and individuals. Jesus could have left scriptural interpretation to the Holy Spirit, but instead he explained all of the Scriptures to two of his disciples as they walked to Emmaus after his resurrection. The Apostle Paul planted the church in Ephesus through declaring everything that was profitable, and teaching in public and in private (Acts 20:20). Paul made sure his younger colleagues, Timothy and Titus, both of whom were “outsider” missionaries left to continue leading these young churches, adopted roles of teaching and preaching with authority (1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2:15). A methodology that denounces central aspects of the ministry of Jesus and his Apostles must be re-examined according to Scripture.

Moreover, everyone, including the Watsons, does theology. To suggest that evangelists and disciples should not teach or instill doctrine is a self-defeating statement. *Contagious Disciple Making* is a theological treatise on God’s design for evangelism, what hinders people from following Jesus, and what it means to follow after Christ. Furthermore, despite the concern for “branded Christianity”, the entire DMM approach functions clearly as a “brand.” The Watsons capitalize their core principles, such as Disciple-Making Movement, Obedience-Based Discipleship, and Discovery Bible Study, indicating their particular and unique take on these concepts. The repetition and highlighting of these particular terms suggests a branding principle at work—seeking to promote adoption and allegiance. Everyone does theology, and it would be best if the Watsons simply acknowledged this and provided a rubric to distinguish between teaching “sound doctrine” and promoting “foolish controversies” that are unprofitable and worthless, and thus should be avoided (Titus 3:9).

### **Gospel Assumptions**

Despite the extended efforts to explain their systematic approach to disciple-making, there is no systematic statement on the gospel. Rather than laboring to ensure that all DMM practitioners understand the gospel on the same basic terms, here it is assumed. A few points in the book indicate a clear evangelical understanding of the gospel, and yet some points cause confusion.

Of particular concern is the understanding and articulation of faith as the basis of a believer’s right standing before God. While seeking to describe “Obedience-Based Discipleship”, the Watsons describe faith this way: “*faith is defined as being obedient* to the commands of Christ in every situation or circumstance, regardless of the consequences.” (15) Contrast this with the Apostle Paul’s teaching that Abraham’s “faith was counted to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:9). At best, a focus on Obedience-Based Discipleship protects from a cerebral faith that is disconnected from daily life and practical godliness. But at worst, it confuses disciples and practitioners about the fundamental truth that salvation comes by faith alone in the Savior who died for sinners. As others have said, a better description of the New Testament teaching would be speak of Gospel-based discipleship leading to Gospel-based obedience.

### **Conclusion**

Contagious Disciple Making presents helpful contributions for those who long to make disciples of all nations. Sadly, the book also includes a variety of overstatements and oversights that hinder me from being able to recommend it. The basic encouragement to seek to bring many unbelievers into inductive, evangelistic Bible studies so that they might encounter Jesus through God's word is laudable. The encouragements toward prayer, avoiding a domineering approach to discipleship, and training and mentoring others for disciple-making are also all helpful. Sadly, readers of *Contagious Disciple Making* have to wade through much other material to get to these rather simple reminders.

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