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### Bible in Mission

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REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES  
Volume 18

# Bible in Mission



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## REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

The Centenary of the World Missionary Conference of 1910, held in Edinburgh, was a suggestive moment for many people seeking direction for Christian mission in the twenty-first century. Several different constituencies within world Christianity held significant events around 2010. From 2005, an international group worked collaboratively to develop an intercontinental and multi-denominational project, known as Edinburgh 2010, and based at New College, University of Edinburgh. This initiative brought together representatives of twenty different global Christian bodies, representing all major Christian denominations and confessions, and many different strands of mission and church life, to mark the Centenary.

Essential to the work of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, and of abiding value, were the findings of the eight think-tanks or ‘commissions’. These inspired the idea of a new round of collaborative reflection on Christian mission – but now focused on nine themes identified as being key to mission in the twenty-first century. The study process was polycentric, open-ended, and as inclusive as possible of the different genders, regions of the world, and theological and confessional perspectives in today’s church. It was overseen by the Study Process Monitoring Group: Miss Maria Aranzazu Aguado (Spain, The Vatican), Dr Daryl Balia (South Africa, Edinburgh 2010), Mrs Rosemary Dowsett (UK, World Evangelical Alliance), Dr Knud Jørgensen (Norway, Areopagos), Rev. John Kafwanka (Zambia, Anglican Communion), Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum (Korea, World Council of Churches), Dr Wonsuk Ma (Korea, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), Rev. Dr Kenneth R Ross (UK, Church of Scotland), Dr Petros Vassiliadis (Greece, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), and co-ordinated by Dr Kirsteen Kim (UK, Edinburgh 2010).

These publications reflect the ethos of Edinburgh 2010 and will make a significant contribution to ongoing studies in mission. It should be clear that material published in this series will inevitably reflect a diverse range of views and positions. These will not necessarily represent those of the series’ editors or of the Edinburgh 2010 General Council, but in publishing them the leadership of Edinburgh 2010 hopes to encourage conversation between Christians and collaboration in mission. All the series’ volumes are commended for study and reflection in both church and academy.

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REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES  
Volume 18

# **Bible in Mission**



Edited by  
Pauline Hoggarth  
Fergus Macdonald  
Bill Mitchell  
Knud Jørgensen

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## FOREWORD

“The Bible is alive – it has hands and grabs hold of me, it has feet and runs after me”. Thus spoke Martin Luther, as cited by Knud Jørgensen in a quotation that summarizes the deeper meaning of this book (p.317). To the authors of *Bible in Mission*, the Bible is the book of life, and mission is life in the Word. This core reality cuts across the diversity of contexts and hermeneutical strategies represented in these essays. The authors are committed to the boundary-crossings that characterize contemporary mission – and each sees the Bible as foundational to the *missio Dei*, to God’s work in the world.

While the essays in this volume contribute individually to collective reflection on the Bible in mission, the larger significance of the book is greater than the sum of its parts. First it must be noted that the volume is part of the larger 2010 process, a collection of essays that grew from a “transversal” theme identified for the centennial of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh. As such, it joins a rich collection of contemporary missiological reflection generated by the series of 2010 meetings.

Second, the volume reminds us that throughout mission history, new contexts for mission have always given rise to fresh reflections on biblical foundations. The Trinitarian nature of God, for example, was concretized during the late fourth century at the same time as the faith was spreading into Asia, North Africa, and Europe. As Christianity moved beyond the borders of the Roman and Persian empires, St. Patrick based his mission to the pagan Irish on what we now call the “Great Commission,” the risen Lord’s final command to go into all the world. The Orthodox, as Simon Crisp notes in this volume, historically focused on biblical vernacularization as an incarnational principle by which peoples made the gospel their own (p.119). The early Protestant movement was based on making ordinary Christians into ‘d’amateurs de l’Evangile,’ lovers of the Gospel who carried the Bible with them as they migrated across Europe, to the Americas and elsewhere. During the modern period, the rise of evangelistic movements was always accompanied by renewal and re-appropriation of biblical mandates for mission.

In the decades following the World Missionary Conference of 1910, the Bible remained foundational for mission motives as diverse as world evangelization and working toward the Kingdom of God. In 1939, the World Conference of Christian Youth in Amsterdam made daily Bible study a staple of international mission conferences, a practice that continues today. The mid-century Biblical Theology movement provided the backdrop for the formulation of concepts such as the *missio Dei*, the theological conviction that mission belongs to the nature of God and therefore exists beyond the human limitations of colonialism and culture Christianity. In 1962, Johannes Blauw’s *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* was published jointly by the International Missionary Council and the

World Council of Churches. Blauw's volume represented the urgent felt need of the ecumenical movement to forge a common missional framework. At the same time, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) enabled Roman Catholic missionaries and scholars to participate in interdenominational translation projects and to reflect on the Bible and mission. But secularization in critical biblical studies and missionary crises in the West combined to make the late 1960s and 1970s the low point of western scholarly attention to the Bible and mission.

The rapid growth of world Christianity in the late twentieth century soon showed that despite western decline, the Bible remained a living book, essential to communities as diverse as African Pentecostal churches, Latin American Base Christian Communities, and Christian ashrams in India. Living Christian communities steeped themselves in the Word. As new Christian movements bubbled up from the grassroots, academic questions about the reliability of Scriptures gave way to projects "reading with" the poor, and lay mission training courses. By the 1980s, publications like Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmuller's *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (1983), Lesslie Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989), and David Bosch's magnum opus *Transforming Mission* (1991) marked a renewal of scholarly attention to the biblical foundations of mission. As mission leaders around the world planned for the 2010 conferences to mark the centennial of the World Missionary Conference, they drew upon a wealth of contemporary reflections on what Christopher Wright, chief theologian of the Lausanne movement, calls the 'missional basis of the Bible' (Carriker p. 34).

Seen in historical perspective, *Bible in Mission* demonstrates the current reality of a broad, shared consensus over the centrality of the Bible for mission. Volume authors include Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical scholars and missionaries who work in Asia, Europe, the Americas, the Pacific, and Africa. In their diversity, they collectively see the Bible as a living book, whose meaning comes alive as believers pursue their missional callings in particular contexts. Readers of this book will not find herein questions about the reliability of the text, or various doctrinal or political disputes that have plagued the history of missions. Rather, the Bible is presented as a living resource for people suffering with HIV-AIDS, for earth care, for children at risk, for students in postmodern contexts, and for the poor everywhere. The focus of *Bible in Mission* is abundant life in Jesus Christ – the missionary God who creates diversity, yet unites believers into one community. In an era when Christianity has become a multicultural movement spread across every continent, what unites its people is the Bible, the book of life.

Dana L. Robert, Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission, Boston University School of Theology

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

This book is the 21st volume in the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, a publishing programme which was initiated to celebrate the centenary of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference by exploring key contemporary missiological thrusts, including the nine themes of the Edinburgh 2010 study process. Cutting across all the themes were some so-called 'transversal' focuses. One of these transversals was 'Bible and mission – mission in the Bible.' This volume seeks to follow up the Edinburgh conference exploration of that transversal, first by reviewing the different contemporary cultural and religious contexts in which churches are called to fulfil their mission, and then by articulating how the main Christian confessions interpret the role of the Bible in the *Missio Dei*. Finally, the book highlights a series of case studies that illustrate a wide range of roles played by the Bible in Christian mission today. The understanding of 'mission' undergirding this book reflects the Common Call from Edinburgh 2010 which is found in the Appendix.

A publication on such a theme surely requires no justification for the Bible is the manifesto of God's mission to the world. It also contains the mandate to go into all the world in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the church has found the Bible to be a key resource in fulfilling both the great commandment and the great commission. Adolf Harnack has reminded us that in the early centuries, 'The regular way to become a convinced Christian was to read the Holy Scriptures.'<sup>1</sup> According to Stephen Neill this practice continued to be the case, for in later centuries also, 'the Bible and evangelism went hand in hand.'<sup>2</sup> More recently, the history of Bible translation and distribution over the past two centuries provides evidence of the close link between the availability of Scriptures and the growth of the church. A M Chirgwin's one-liner: 'There is first a Bible, then a convert, then a church'<sup>3</sup> may be an over-simplification, but historians of world Christianity have identified a correlation between the growth in Scripture translation and publication with the multiplication of the church in numerous regions of the world.<sup>4</sup>

The Bible also indicates that evangelism and church planting are by no means the sole activities of the *Missio Dei*, for this is a mission that

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<sup>1</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Bible Reading in the Early Church* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Neill, *History of Christian Missions* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 229.

<sup>3</sup> A M Chirgwin, *The Bible in World Evangelism* (London: SCM, 1954), 76.

<sup>4</sup> Todd M Johnson & Kenneth R Ross (eds), *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 298.

embraces praxis as well as proclamation. The Bible emphasises the reign of God as well as the ministry of the church. The church may be God's primary agent in fulfilling his mission to the world, but it's not alone. Indeed, according to David Bosch, 'mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.'<sup>5</sup> Darrell Guder provides us with a helpful reminder of the breadth of the *Missio Dei*: 'We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. "Mission" means "sending" and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history.'<sup>6</sup>

Bible translation and distribution positively impact the realisation of the *Missio Dei* in this broader understanding. Lamin Sanneh contends that vernacular translation of the Scriptures in his native Africa changed the course of African history.<sup>7</sup> He argues that Scripture translation provided an antidote to the losses represented by colonialism and facilitated claims for political independence. The newly translated Scriptures made available 'a shelter for indigenous ideas and values,' enabling the receptor cultures to embrace the Bible as their own and not as a Western import.<sup>8</sup>

A second – and very different – example of the Bible motivating human agents of 'God's action in human history' is the trauma healing ministry begun over a decade ago among Africans traumatised by natural disaster, sexual and domestic violence, HIV and AIDs, and which has now spread to Asia, Latin America and the USA.<sup>9</sup> A key component of this project is the value given to lament by the Bible. Participants work with a biblical Psalm of lament and then compose their own lament. This can be a song, a dance, or a written piece of poetry or prose. The interactive process allows participants to release their pain by bringing it to the cross of Christ for

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<sup>5</sup> David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

<sup>6</sup> Darrell L Guder (ed), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Sanneh regards Scripture translation as the missional benchmark of the church. 'Being the original Scripture of the Christian movement, the New Testament Gospels are a translated version of the message of Jesus, and that means Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language. The issue is not whether Christians translate their Scripture well or willingly, but that without translation there would be no Christianity or Christians. Translation is the church's birthmark as well as its missionary benchmark: the church would be unrecognisable or unsustainable without it.' *Whose Religion is Christianity: The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 97.

<sup>8</sup> *Whose Religion*, 109.

<sup>9</sup> This ministry is now sponsored by the American Bible Society and its Trauma Healing Institute ([www.TraumaHealingInstitute.org](http://www.TraumaHealingInstitute.org)).

healing. Once healed of their trauma, they are often able to forgive and eventually to be reconciled with those who inflicted their pain.<sup>10</sup>

Following two missiological perspectives on the Bible in mission – one from the global north and the other from the global south – the book has two main sections. Section one deals with external and internal contexts, external referring to contexts outside the church and Christian faith, and internal to contexts inside the church. Section two contains case studies from around the world that reflect best practice in using the Bible within a variety of programmes and areas. It is our hope that the models of Bible engagement highlighted in the case studies may be replicable elsewhere and, as they are adapted to the local context, will help many to open the Bible and make its content the central core of discipleship and witness. In particular, we hope this volume may be used as a resource by people actively involved in furthering the *Missio Dei* (clergy, lay leaders, home group facilitators, missionaries, etc.). The final chapter draws out the broad implications of missional Bible engagement today.

Many people are finding that the Bible is essentially narrative in character, a discovery that resonates with the current revival of storytelling as a primary means of communication. True, there are many didactic texts in Scripture, but these emerge from the storyline. It is the events in the biblical story that generate the poetry of the Psalms, the wisdom of the Proverbs, the oracles of the prophets, the letters from the apostles and, above all, the good news in the four Gospels. Again, when they engage with Scripture some modern readers and hearers find themselves attracted to the sensitivity expressed in many biblical books to the problem of suffering as well as a deep concern for the plight of the poor and the marginalised. Many also find themselves resonating with the psalmists' courage to doubt and with the robust ways in which those ancient poets were prepared to call God to account.

Today, as print is supplemented by a growing range of electronic media, the Word of God is published in more languages and greater numbers than ever. Total sustained annual distribution is reckoned by the *Atlas of Global Christianity* to be 71 million Bibles, 150 million New Testaments, and 223 million portions.<sup>11</sup> As a result a growing number of people throughout the world are engaging with these Scriptures in new and exciting ways, a small selection of which is found in the second section of the book. It is not surprising that some of these models are inter-confessional, for the Bible is God's gift to all churches. While there are differences in the way our

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<sup>10</sup> For fuller details, consult H Hill, with M Hill, R Baggé, P Miersma, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help* (New York, American Bible Society, 2013; Revised Edition).

<sup>11</sup> Tables on 203. The 'Status of Global Mission, 2013,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (January 2013) reports 78 million Bibles and 4,990 million 'Scriptures including gospels, selections'.

various church traditions and theological schools of thought interpret the biblical story, there is general agreement regarding the storyline and plot.

As you read this book and reflect on the case studies culled from different parts of the world, think and pray over how the Bible engagement in which you may be involved might become enhanced by the energy, experience and creativity of others. Prayer is important because all engagement with Scripture is God-dependent. The Bible may be our book, but it is God's Word and as such it fulfils its missional task as we hear God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit calling and empowering us to play our part in the coming of his Kingdom.

November 2013

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Knud Jørgensen  
Fergus Macdonald  
Bill Mitchell

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# THE BIBLE IN MISSION – AND THE SURPRISING WAYS OF GOD

Ole Christian M Kvarme

If there were no Bible, there would be no Church and we would have no mission. But this order can also be reversed. The Church has given us the Bible and is an agent of mission. But if mission is God's, both Church and Bible are the results of his doing. The intrinsic relation between Bible, Church and mission is not static, but dynamic and evolving.

In recent decades our understanding of mission has broadened and deepened. Mission does not belong to our churches or missionary societies. It is God's mission – *missio dei*.<sup>1</sup> God is sending and acting in our world. He sent his Son, he constantly sends the Spirit, and he sends us. Archbishop Rowan Williams has stated that Christian mission is 'finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in'.<sup>2</sup> We begin by stopping and stepping back – in awe and reverence, in wonder and gratitude for what God has done and is doing. Then we join in.

The Edinburgh 2010 ecumenical gathering was a sign of this missiological renewal with its focus upon *missio dei*.<sup>3</sup> The study processes before and after the conference have demonstrated the impact of this renewal in most fields of missiology and missional practice. They also put the Bible back at centre stage of mission – as the story of God's mission, not only in the past, but as it now unfolds and will unfold in creation and for our salvation. It not only invites us to join, it accompanies and empowers us.

The contributions to this volume of the Edinburgh 2010 series discuss the role of the Bible in different contexts and present a number of case studies from various parts of the world. In this introduction I will reflect on some of the fundamental issues with regard to the Bible in Mission:

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<sup>1</sup> The use of this concept in missiological discourse goes back to the German missiologist K. Hartenstein (1934) and the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council in 1953. Cf. also T. Engelsen, 'Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology', *International Review of Mission* 92, 4 (2003), 481-97.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted according to K. Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: Epworth, 2009), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the preparatory volume D. Balia & K. Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today*, Edinburgh 2010 Series (Oxford: Regnum, 2010); and the conference papers and contributions in K. Kim & A. Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011).

1. What is the significance of the biblical canon – the totality and unity of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament?
2. What is the relevance of this old book for our contemporary context of globalization and cultural diversity, and how does it touch the lives of human beings today?
3. How do we read the Scriptures as the story of God’s people then and now, and what is its significance as churches and parishes seek to develop their participation in God’s mission in their diverse contexts?

### **The Book of God – Biblical Canon and God’s Mission**

*Bible* comes from Greek *biblia* – little books. The Bible is a diverse library of books. The Hebrew Bible had more or less found its form at the time of Jesus and the Apostles, and the New Testament canon was established in the second and third century AD. But throughout the centuries and into our own times, when Christian faith has taken root among new ethnic and linguistic groups, the first task to happen was that a Gospel or a portion of the Bible was translated into their mother-tongues. Today many language communities around the world still do not have the full Bible in their native language.

Fundamentally, Christian faith is not a faith in this book, but in a person. It is a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In the ecumenical creeds we profess our faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father sent the Son as the utmost sign and expression of his loving desire for communion with man. The Holy Spirit was sent and is constantly being sent to draw us into this loving communion of Father and Son and into participation in God’s mission in the world.

When Orthodox Christians enter church, they make the sign of the cross and silently recite, ‘Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ To be a Christian means to live in this Kingdom. It is also to live in this world which he loves, and in which his Kingdom unfolds. Thus when they leave church, these believers also speak of mission and service – of ‘the liturgy after the liturgy’<sup>4</sup>

But to live in this Kingdom and participate in God’s mission we need the book – the Bible with its many books, the Old and the New Testament. The significance of the Bible in its entirety is more than mere access to an arbitrary collection of books. What is at stake is our faith in Christ, our belief in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. I. Bria, *Go forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Geneva: WCC, 1988), 38-46.

### 1. Book of God – Creator and Saviour

Through the Gospels we get to know Jesus as the Christ, as Saviour and Lord. But the story of Jesus takes place in a larger context to which Jesus himself constantly refers. He prays with the Psalms and quotes ‘Moses, the Prophets and the Writings’ – the Hebrew Bible. The Early Church expanded its witness to Christ with the story of people united in him by the Holy Spirit, and it gave us not only the Gospels, but also the Acts of the Apostles, the apostolic letters and the book of Revelation. But this biblical canon was not always taken for granted or regarded as self-evident.

The classic example of a lesser canon comes to us from the second century AD. Marcion of Sinope was active in Rome and Asia Minor. Since its beginnings in Jerusalem and Galilee the Early Church regarded the Hebrew Bible as Holy Scripture, but the extent of the New Testament canon had not yet been finalized. Marcion established his own ‘Bible’ with only the Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters. For him Christianity was essentially a religion of redemption and mercy, with Paul’s emphasis upon grace as its centre. But Marcion was influenced by Gnostic dualism and its distinction between the material world and the spiritual world, between the god of this world and the highest God. Marcion rejected the Hebrew Bible and called Yahweh *demiurge* – ‘craftsman’, creator of the material universe and preoccupied with justice, revenge and punishment. Jesus, however, has revealed the Heavenly Father as full of compassion, benevolence and mercy. Marcion’s rejection of the Hebrew Bible leads to a rejection of everything Jewish, and he therefore also excluded certain ‘Jewish passages’ in the Gospel of Luke and the Pauline letters.

The example of Marcion highlights what is at stake with the biblical canon in its entirety. With his ‘reduced’ Bible he developed what is called a *docetic Christology*. The divine nature of Jesus is his genuine identity, whereas his human nature is only apparent. Marcion’s understanding of God similarly implies an emphasis upon a separate ‘spiritual world’ and ‘the soul’ of man, with a negative view of creation and the material order of human life. This led to a narrow focus on the ‘soul-saving perspective’ of the Gospel, which we can also find in our churches and communities today. But this narrow focus does not accord with the image of God, the anthropology and soteriology which we find in the Gospels.

The ‘soul’ of the Gospels and the Bible is not a Greek concept that can be separated from the body, but stands in a Hebrew context, integral to body and personality. The Gospels and the Bible do have a concern for salvation and eternal life (Jn 3:16). But Jesus interacts with people in their

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. i.a. B. Hägglund, *Teologins Historia. En dogmhistorisk översikt* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerups Förlag, 1966); Feine, Behm, Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1970); P. Jenkins, *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 171ff.

daily lives and takes their needs seriously. Jesus also speaks distinctly about his Heavenly Father as the God of the Hebrew Bible – as Creator and God of this world, about his involvement with humankind and creation both now and when he will make heaven and earth new.

In recent years a reaction against this ‘soul-saving perspective’ and a narrow Christocentrism has given a stronger emphasis to God as Creator and a concern for creation and the environment. This renewal in theology and missiology is welcome. However, it is also possible to be sidetracked here. We still see tendencies to a rather narrow focus upon Jesus as an example and a teacher of ethics. This stands in danger of reducing the Gospel to horizontal relations and moralism. As our churches interact with current political and popular movements for the protection of the environment, it is easy again to end up with a horizontal perspective: only us and our environment.

Indeed, Jesus elaborates on the ethics of the Kingdom and creation. The Bible emphasises our stewardship responsibility for what God has created (Gen 1:26-28) and that we as human beings are part of creation, made of earthly material (Gen 2:4-7). From its first to its last page the Bible is full of creation texts. But their emphasis is vertical, directed towards God.

In the Psalms and the Prophets ‘the heavens declare the glory of God’ and ‘the mountains and hills will burst into song’ (Ps 19:1; Is 55:12). Creation invites our awe, wonder and reverence – not for itself, but by way of itself for God. The prophet Joel shares in the lament of a climate crisis in his own land, calling people to repent and turn to God (Joel 1). The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans and expresses his longing for final redemption: ‘We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time’ (Rom 8:22).

In the first article of the Apostolic Creed we profess our faith in the Creator, but the second article on Jesus Christ and the third on the Holy Spirit are also significant in relation to creation. Christ is co-creator (John 1:1; Col 1). He is the firstborn over all creation, by him all things were created, and through him God will reconcile to himself all things on earth and in heaven (Col 1:15-20). The Holy Spirit is also present when heaven and earth are created, is active throughout the history of Israel and the Church and at work in creation: ‘You send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth’ (Ps 104:30). The prophet Isaiah came to the House of God and heard the song of the seraphs: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory’ (Is 6:3).

In our present context this biblical material opens up a broader horizon in our understanding of God’s mission. It encourages our concern for the protection of the environment to be carried by a faith which is God-oriented, Christ-centred and Spirit-led.

The current state of earth and climate is critical and demands action. The Common Call from the Edinburgh 2010 also gave its voice to this, but with a Trinitarian perspective: ‘Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the

world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing life, we are called to be communities of compassion and healing ... where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.<sup>6</sup>

The implications of Marcion's reduced canon highlight for us the significance of the Bible in its entirety. The Reformers emphasized the necessary balance between a Christ-centred faith (*solus Christus*) and a faith based on the totality and unity of the biblical canon (*sola scriptura*). In line with both the early Church Fathers and the Reformers we may today add the necessary balance between God as Creator and God as Saviour. It is the biblical canon in its entirety that reveals to us who God is, how he acts and what the purpose and goal of his mission are. It also opens our eyes with renewed awe and wonder at what he has done and does in creation, in history and for our salvation.

## 2. Book of God – Word of God

There are many books *about* God. The Bible has been called the Book of God.<sup>7</sup> What does this imply? It often happens when the biblical texts are first translated into a new language and read aloud, that people express amazement: 'Now God speaks in our tongue!' What does it mean that God speaks to us? Are all the words of the Bible God's words, even when they are translated into our language?

Throughout the Bible we find repeated, 'Thus says the Lord...' The visions of the prophets describe how God will bring together the nations and they also speak of the word of God: 'The Law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem' (Is 2:3; Mi 4:2). When the book of Acts describes the growth of the early Christian community, it says, 'The word of God continued to increase and spread' (Acts 12:24). What is the relationship between the Bible and the Word of God, and what are its implications for mission?

The Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* of Pope Benedict XVI speaks about 'a symphony of the word' expressed in multiple ways:

- At the center stands Jesus Christ as the Word (logos). But this Word 'was from the beginning, was with God and was God', and it became flesh and shared our humanity in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14).
- Creation itself, the *liber naturae*, is an essential part of the many voices in which the one word is uttered.
- God has spoken in salvation history through the prophets,

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<sup>6</sup> Edinburgh 2010 Common Call, § 3. Cf. Also the contribution of Kapyra John Kaoma, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*, 296ff.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. G. Josipovici, *The Book of God. A Response to the Bible* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

- and further through the Apostles as they preached the word of God.
- This word of God is handed on in the Church's living tradition.
- At the end of this list of many voices, the Apostolic Exhortation concludes: 'Finally, the word of God, attested and divinely inspired, is the sacred Scripture, the Old and the New Testament.'<sup>8</sup>

In this list of the many voices the reference to 'the Church's living tradition' is a typical Catholic expression. In an Evangelical and Protestant setting we give expression to much of the same when we refer to the Pauline statement about the community of faith: they are a letter from Christ, 'written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts' (2 Cor 3:3). The word of God is always a living word, not a dead letter, and within the community of faith, the Holy Spirit points to the community's life and witness as it takes part in God's communication with the world.

*Verbum Domini* underlines that the expression 'word of God' compares the communication of God with something that we can grasp: 'word'. Indeed, the prophets, the Apostles and Jesus spoke 'words' that we may discover through Scripture. But when the New Testament speaks of Jesus as 'the Word', we are beyond the conventional use of language. We may nevertheless grasp the significance of God communicating with us in this way – through the person of Jesus, his life and ministry. The same can be said of Paul's expression, that the community of faith is 'a letter from Christ'. He uses a metaphor or an image that points beyond its literal usage.

Paul makes a connection between this language and the substance of the Gospel when he speaks of a hidden secret, a mystery, which has been revealed: the Christ of the Incarnation, the crucified and resurrected one who will return in glory (1 Cor 2:1-10; Eph 1:9; 1 Tim 3:16). This secret of what God has done for us remains a mystery to the world, but is revealed to us by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2: 10). To this we may add the insight of the philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who emphasized the living and personal aspect in the communication of God with the world: 'You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed.'<sup>9</sup>

So here are the three key elements in listening to and communicating the word of God: the mystery of what God has done in creation and salvation history through Christ, the personal encounter with this story, and the revelation of its mystery to us in our own lives by the Holy Spirit. It is this word of God – this mystery – that shines forth through the words and pages of the Bible.

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<sup>8</sup> Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2010, 16ff.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted according to E. H. Peterson, *Eat This Book, A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 79.

### 3. The 'dark' passages of the Bible

But we should not too hastily dismiss Marcion and his objection to the violence in the Hebrew Bible. There are 'dark' passages in the Bible,<sup>10</sup> particularly Old Testament stories of violence and massacre, of cheating and trickery which are not explicitly denounced. In stories in Numbers, Deuteronomy and the historical books of the Old Testament massacres are even initiated at the command of God (e.g. Num 21: 2,3; 25; 31; Deut 7:1,2; 20; 25:17-20; Joshua 6). What are we to do with these narratives in a collection of books that we refer to as 'the Word of God'?

When we read these stories, we are appalled. We are also appalled that they have been used in Christian history as motivation for warfare – in conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, in colonial combat against natives in North America, South America and Africa, and even in our times during the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and more recently in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> With such 'dark chapters' in Christian history we also have to deal with these biblical stories in the context of mission.

If we stop and reflect upon our own reaction to these stories, we may be surprised. We are not only appalled by the violence as such; we sense that the message of the Bible is 'different'; it is not a language of violence. It is a healthy reaction. But these violent stories should not be read in isolation, but as *biblical* narratives in their *biblical* context. Scholars have adopted different approaches as they have grappled with these stories.<sup>12</sup> Let me briefly point to three steps.

The *first* is to realize that the stories of conquest in the early history of the people are paralleled by later stories of defeat and exile. War is always evil. It is also part of human experience and the reality of humankind, both past and present. Nevertheless, in this story God is present and active. The stories of conquest and defeat were both told to invoke reverence for God, his holiness and his compassion for the people of Israel and all nations.

The *second* step is to listen to the prophets of the same period in which these stories were written. They 'vigorously challenged every kind of injustice and violence, whether collective and individual.'<sup>13</sup> One of them, Micah, coined a key statement about living according to the covenant with God: 'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Mic 6:8). The same prophet looked forward to a time when people would 'beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into

<sup>10</sup> *Verbum Domini*, § 42, 75.

<sup>11</sup> P. Jenkins, *op.cit.* 126ff; 140.

<sup>12</sup> G. Von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); P.C.Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978); P. Jenkins, *op.cit.*; E.A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> *Verbum Domini*, *op.cit.*

pruning hooks' (Mic 4:1-3; Is 2:1-4). Deuteronomy, where some of the violent stories are found, also declares, 'Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice' (Deut 24:17). On the contrary, 'You are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.' (Deut 10:19)

This also means that the radical newness of the 'Christ-event' cannot be understood except in continuity with the Old Testament, and the Father of Jesus is the God of the Hebrew Bible, 'compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness' (Exod 34:6).

This, then, is the *third* step. The violent stories must be brought into the context of the Gospel. It is through Jesus, his life and teaching, his cross and resurrection that God is fully revealed. Through him the Kingdom of God is made present. On the cross of Christ the anger of God is turned into loving compassion for our salvation. Incarnation, cross and resurrection constitute the way of God to conquer death and evil, and following Christ is the way of life for those who adhere to his Kingdom. Compassion becomes a priority, even to the point of 'Love your enemies' (Mt 5:44)!

Biblical revelation is rooted in history, and God's plan unfolds in stages, in the cultural and moral contexts of distant times. However, we would be wrong to pass over the 'dark passages' and the violent stories as belonging to an irrelevant past. They should be read in their broader biblical context, with reverence, confronted with the Bible's own critique of violence.<sup>14</sup>

Other difficult words and passages are to be found in the Book of Psalms. The Psalms are full of beautiful poetry, of praise and thanksgiving, of deep lament and protest. But they are not pious in our sense of the word. Not only is there realism when they cry to God from the depths of their suffering. Sometimes there are cries to God for revenge or protests against God that we may find hard to utter. Are these prayers 'words of God'?

Desire for vengeance is human. Its presence in the Psalms is part of the realism of Bible. But these are prayers, not stories of actions. They are directed to God, and in the end the expressions of desire for vengeance are left to God (e.g. Ps. 109). With the New Testament we are brought one step further – to the cross of Christ where God bears his own vengeance and all suffering in order that creation can have compassion. But praying these Psalms on the way of the cross is not easy. Walter Brueggemann writes that this is not the way of religious goodwill or moral indifference: 'It is, rather, the way of crucifixion, of accepting the rage and grief and terror of evil in ourselves in order to be liberated for compassion.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> P. Jenkins, op.cit., 232-241. Cf. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), 268: "... the standards by which those passages are criticized are impressed upon us by the Bible, which is the main factor ... in endowing us with the sensitivity that rebels against all cruelty."

<sup>15</sup> *Praying the Psalms* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 1980/2007). Cf. also W. Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

The Book of Psalms has been the prayer book of the people of God through the ages. With the Psalms we pour our individual lives out before God, and we pray alongside people all over the world. In the monastic tradition the daily reading of Psalms always concludes with ‘Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and in eternity.’ In this way we pray together with Christ, for this was also his prayer book. We bring the difficult elements in our own lives, in these Psalms, into communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Through ‘the symphony of many voices’ in the Bible, God speaks to us, and ‘the Word of God’ *par excellence* is Christ. On the one hand the Bible has a story to be told; on the other hand the Word of God is a personal word for individuals and communities alike, made present and revealed through the Holy Spirit. But if God speaks to us, he also wants our response. The Psalms and the Gospels, the stories and wisdom of Scripture invite us into prayer and communication with God.

### **Book of Man – Universality and Diversity**

The intrinsic link between Bible, Church and mission should not be interpreted introspectively. The Bible presents us with a vision of universal and cosmic history, from the creation of the world to its consummation in a new heaven and a new earth. The Old Testament is, to a large extent the story of one people, Israel, and the New Testament focuses on one person, Jesus Christ, and the communities united by faith in him. Nevertheless, the nations of the world are a constant part of the wider picture, as is the creation that surrounds us.

We often need others to remind us of key elements in our faith and tradition. Lesslie Newbigin quotes a Hindu friend who several times complained to him that Christians ‘misrepresent the Bible: ‘As I read the Bible, I find in it a quite unique interpretation of universal history and, therefore, a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. Your Christian missionaries have talked about the Bible as it were simply another book of religion. We have plenty of these already in India and we do not need another to add to our supply.’<sup>16</sup>

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#### *1. Picture gallery of humanity*

Christianity was long regarded as a Western phenomenon. The literature of the Bible, however, has its origin in the Middle East. It relates to Asia and Africa, Europe and ‘the ends of the earth’. The Bible is also a complex literary entity, not a narrative or a history book like those we read at school or like the narratives of a people or a civilization. True, it contains historical books and narratives, but also legal material, psalms and prayers,

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<sup>16</sup> *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 89.

poetry and prophetic messages, love-songs and wisdom literature. This literary and cultural diversity is important for us in mission.

The stories of the Bible connect with a variety of cultures. They unfold in urban centers like Jerusalem, Nineveh, Babylon, Rome and the multicultural city of Corinth. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are desert nomads and so are the Israelites when freed from slavery in Egypt. David is at home in the hills of Judea. Jonah sails on a ship in the Mediterranean, and the disciples of Jesus are fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is the son of a carpenter and at home in the villages of Galilee. These Scriptures tell stories of kings and queens, of temple cult and wisdom circles, of farmers and craftsmen, of poor and oppressed, of widows, orphans and lepers.

Sometimes people in the southern hemisphere feel more at home in the world of the Bible than we in the north. The African bishop Festo Kivengere once told how as an 11 year old shepherd boy in the Ugandan hills he felt close to the Good Shepherd of the Gospels.<sup>17</sup> Biblical stories such as the one about King Ahab and Queen Jezebel killing Naboth for his vineyards, or about the Good Samaritan, cross cultural boundaries. The Bible's variety of cultural references offers not only an opportunity for mission in contexts that are similar to the biblical cultures; it also presents a challenge to mission when cultural distance clearly exists.

But the significance of this universality and diversity in the Bible goes deeper. Newbigin's Hindu friend spoke about 'a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history'. A century ago when Helen Barrett Montgomery published her study of *The Bible and Missions*,<sup>18</sup> she called the Bible 'the Book of Man' – a picture gallery of essential humanity and a book characterized by social passion.

In both the Old and the New Testaments, in prose and poetry, human life unfolds in its breadth and depth, its joy and sorrow, suffering and struggle, loss and gain, sin and righteousness, oppression and freedom, war and peace and in its longing and hope. In the midst of it is the story of Jesus, his life, passion and resurrection. It is for this reason that the Bible is also read beyond the boundaries of the Church.

## 2. World literature – cultural heritage

Today people read the Bible as part of the literary and cultural heritage of humanity not only in the West and the North, but in the South and in countries like India, China and Japan.<sup>19</sup> Movies with biblical story lines are produced in Hollywood and seen throughout the world, and Gospels and

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<sup>17</sup> During a visit to Oslo in 1986.

<sup>18</sup> The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Mission: West Medford, Mass. 1920.

<sup>19</sup> P. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity. Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

stories from the Bible are presented in theatres as monologues or dramas. Does this have any significance for us in mission?

The British and Jewish scholar Gabriel Josipovici has made a plea for a renewed reading of the Bible as literature – both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament. Literature is never just ‘literature’. It engages us in a story, and its story engages our lives. Reading the Bible ‘as literature’ implies listening to its stories and being engaged by what it communicates through its different genres. We must do this before we start interpreting, analyzing and dissecting what is written. Josipovici is of course aware of the conceptual and mental horizon that we indwell when we start reading and listening, and his discourse is also full of interpretation. But his reading never starts with interpretation, but with an encounter.

‘How then ... are we to decide what is the right interpretation?’ asks Josipovici. ‘The question looks perfectly natural, but it isn’t. It is the sort of question that is asked when one is only theoretically interested in a work, not when one is actually involved with it. By asking it we give a wrong impression of what happens when we read. Consider what does happen. Because *Hamlet* has captivated us we read more and more plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. And the more we read and live the fuller will any re-reading of *Hamlet* be, and the more its elements will fall into place.’<sup>20</sup>

It is with this engaged involvement that Josipovici reads the Bible ‘as literature’. He reads the New Testament with great sensitivity and takes the Jewish tradition seriously. He does not find a unifying thread in the diversity of the Bible as literature: ‘Such reading will never be able to attain a universal perspective or come to an end.’ But he makes another significant observation: The Bible is complex, but nevertheless one literary entity: all its diverse books are linked and dependent upon one another.

Josipovici then proposes that one should not think of the Bible as a book, but rather as a person. ‘We do not decipher people, we encounter them.’ The story of Jacob wrestling with the angel at the river of Jabbok (Gen 32) is a model for our reading the Bible – for our encounter with this ‘person’. Here Jacob became both more and less than he was before: more because he had wrestled with the angel and received a new name, less because he limps as a result of the struggle. ‘Yet he is still the same man, Jacob, and still, naturally the center of his world, but we see him now within the larger world, created, like him, by God.’<sup>21</sup>

In our context I propose that there is a precedent in the history of mission to this reading of the Bible outside the boundaries of the Church. In New Testament times the Hebrew Bible had been translated into Greek (the Septuagint) and was read among non-Jews. When the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem discussed the inclusion of Gentiles in the household of God,

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<sup>20</sup> *The Book of God*, Op.cit. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Op.cit. 307ff.

James referred to the fact that ‘Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times’ (Acts 15:21). The presence of synagogues in the cities throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, and the reading of the Hebrew Bible, had caused many non-Jews to convert to Judaism, while many others remained as ‘God-fearers’, attracted to the faith, but keeping some distance. It was in this fertile ground that the Early Church grew and developed in the first century. Should we not also today welcome the appreciation and reading of the Bible as a unique book in world literature?

### God in Search of Man – The Surprising Ways of God

If the universality of the Bible, its stark realism and reflection of the human predicament are unique features of the Bible, these features become even more significant as they reveal to us God’s interaction and presence in the story from creation to consummation. It is here that its ‘grand narrative’ is most different from other metanarratives, secular and religious.

A *metanarrative* has an overarching character (*meta* = over). It is a narrative with a grand scheme, a beginning and a glorious end.<sup>22</sup> Examples are the grand narratives of the old Roman and Byzantine empires, of Medieval Christendom or the Enlightenment, or more recently of globalization. Despite its complex composition the Bible also has a universal outlook and may be regarded as a metanarrative. Post-modernity, however, has little taste for metanarratives. Post-modernity emphasizes individual stories, open-ended and without any overarching scheme. What is then the character of the Bible as a metanarrative and its significance in mission in our current context?

#### 1. A downward movement

The God of the Bible is a God in search of man.<sup>23</sup> In the story of creation God cries out to Adam, ‘Where are you?’ This is his call to every human being. In the case of Adam the conversation ends with Adam having to leave paradise, but not without protection and a commission. Then God calls Abraham and chooses the smallest of people groups to be a blessing to the nations of the earth. He makes clear to this people that he has a special concern for the poor and destitute, for widows and orphans. His eyes are on the suffering and broken-hearted.

There is a downward movement as God speaks, acts and becomes present in the Old as well as in the New Testament. The Hebrew Bible tells how God descended on the top of Mount Sinai, called upon Moses and

<sup>22</sup> R. Bauckham, *Bible and Mission. Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Milton Keynes/Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press/ Baker Book House, 2005), 4ff.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955).

spoke to him (Exod 19:20; 34:5).<sup>24</sup> During the journey of the people through the desert, the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle, and his presence follows them as a cloud during the day and a fire at night (Exod 40:34-38). In Jerusalem he comes and dwells in the Temple.

This coming down, this presence of God call forth both reverence and awe (2 Sam 22:10ff; Ps 18:10ff). Both Testaments portray God as a God of judgment, but all the time with a view to justice and vindication. 'He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap' (Ps 113:7; Lk 1:52). 'The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed' (Ps 103:6). The Hebrew Bible also reveals God as a God of compassion and mercy, 'abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin' (Ex 34:6). Constantly in search of man, he is on the move and says to the people, 'I am the Holy One among you' (Hos 11:9). God's mission is a downward movement.

The lowest point of this downward movement comes when God sends his Son – in the story of the incarnation, the life and ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus. In God's downward movement this story is radically new. But it has been prepared in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible and the promise of the prophets. This new and radical downward movement is described in the Early Christian hymn when it speaks of Christ as 'emptying himself', using a Greek phrase meaning 'removal of high status or rank by eliminating all privileges or prerogatives associated with such status or rank'.<sup>25</sup> 'Being in very nature God, (he) did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing (emptied himself), taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross' (Phil 2:5ff).

On the cross God's downward movement reaches the lowest level of human suffering and predicament, not in order to confirm it, but to carry it and redeem it. As in the Hebrew Scriptures, this is in order to raise up the sinner and the downtrodden, to liberate our death-bound humanity. The Philippian hymn then speaks about the resurrection and ascension of Christ as 'exaltation'. This is not separate from the downward direction of God's mission, but part of it, and it now becomes his 'mission from below' to carry, redeem and bestow new and everlasting life.

This downward movement does not stop with the coming of Christ, his death and resurrection. It is also present at the consummation. The New Jerusalem will come down from heaven, the earth will be made new, and 'now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them' (Rev 21:1-5). It is this downward movement in God's mission we are called to join.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. also Neh 9,13

<sup>25</sup> Louw & Nida (eds), *Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 740, § 87.70.

## 2. Closed – or open-ended?

But the overarching narrative of the Bible has another surprising aspect that is significant in mission. The biblical story has a beginning and an end, creation and consummation. But this story with its universality is not ‘a closed metanarrative’; it is remarkably open – in various ways.

The last book of the Bible ends with the vision of a new heaven, a new earth and a new Jerusalem filled with people from all nations. The end is a new beginning, and we are given a glimpse ‘behind the veil’, without seeing or knowing the full unfolding of this new beginning. But it is not only in Revelation that we find this theme. The five books of Moses, the Torah, end with the people of Israel standing on the threshold of the promised land. Moses looks into the land of ‘milk and honey’, but does not enter. The book of Joshua and the other historical books narrate what then happened, about the entrance into the land and the unfolding story of the people. The Torah is in itself a literary entity which since early times has been read annually in the Synagogue. Every year its reading ends with the people standing on the threshold of land and promise.

The same is true of the Gospels and Acts, but with a different landscape in view. The Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus taken up to heaven, but only after having pointed to the nations and sent his disciples on their way. The other Gospels offer the same emphasis with variations. Luke’s book of Acts ends with Paul’s unfinished task, but the last Greek word of this book has a surprising openness: ‘without hindrance’ (*akolytoos*).<sup>26</sup> Despite Paul’s being imprisoned, Luke concludes his story: ‘He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance! This reflects what Paul himself wrote to Timothy, that he was ‘being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained’ (2 Tim 2:9).

The biblical narrative tells us how God is leading history and humankind to its universal goal. As we are called to join his mission, we not only have a share in this future goal, we share its downward movement. But the story is not closed. Every day we stand on the threshold of promise where God opens the horizon and calls us to join in. When Moses stood with the people on the plain of Moab, with the Promised Land in sight and before they should enter, he delivered a long sermon or several sermons (the book of Deuteronomy) and constantly repeated to them: ‘Today! This is also how God speaks to us in the stories and the wisdom of the Bible: ‘Today!’ Then he will lead us into known, unknown and often surprising territory.

If mission is God’s and he is in charge, we are always on the receiving end, when we are called to join and equipped to participate. Scripture is full of examples of how God speaks and acts in surprising ways, contrary to our ways of thinking, speaking and acting (Is 55:8f). The

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. E. H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 296f.

fullest expression of the surprising ways of God is his sending of his Son. Scripture also tells us how these surprises continue through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world.

A current theme in missiological discourse is the presence of the Spirit within the Church and outside the Church (*intra ecclesiam* and *extra ecclesiam*). In the Hebrew Bible the Spirit is active in creation as giver, sustainer and renewer of life, and God speaks and acts not only through the prophets, but through persons outside the people of Israel like Balaam, Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar. Although the Hebrew Bible is full of judgment upon the nations, no less than upon the people of Israel, God will let his glory shine over his people and bring the nations together (Is 60:1ff). In the book of Isaiah, God says to the prophet, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance’ (Is 19:25).

In the New Testament the situation is similar. In the book of Acts the disciples are often surprised by what the Spirit is doing and the way he is leading with regard to the Gentiles, as in the case of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10). The precondition for growth is that the Spirit is already at work where they go. In Antioch they report ‘how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles’ (Acts 14:27).

This biblical perspective on God’s mission not only prevents us from thinking that we are in control of creation, history and the salvation of humankind. It makes us rest in the gifts that he gives, at the same time both more humble and more alert with regard to his leading. It heightens our expectation and surprise at what he is doing in the lives of individuals, in contemporary movements, in creation. The Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel once wrote, ‘Just as it is impossible to conceive of God without the world, it is impossible to conceive of His concerns without the Bible.’<sup>27</sup> It is always God and the world, the Bible and God’s mission in the world.

### **Book of a People – History, Identity, Destiny**

At the intersection between revelation story and universal history we find the people of God in both the Old and the New Testament. The story of this people, however, is not closed, but open – to other peoples and to the future. The people of God find their identity in the Bible. But as this story is both revelation and universal history, the Bible also outlines the destiny of the people of God and their participation in God’s mission.

#### *1. One people – many nations*

The Bible begins with creation and ends with a new heaven and a new earth. In between it is primarily the story of a people, Israel in the Hebrew

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<sup>27</sup> Heschel, op.cit, 245.

Bible and the Early Church of Jews and Gentiles in the New Testament. We often speak of *continuity* and *discontinuity* with regard to this transition from Israel to the Church. Both are important in mission, for which reason we need today a fresh reflection on this continuity and discontinuity.

The Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament are embedded in the life of the Jewish people. Jesus is a Jew, in his identity (the genealogy of Mt 1), in his life and behaviour, and in his concern for his people. On the cross Pontius Pilate puts up the inscription ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews’, and the Apostles emphasize that his resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit are at the heart of the hope of Israel (Acts 2:36.). The first growth in the Christian community takes place among Jews in Jerusalem, in their land and among their diaspora – in Antioch, Asia Minor and Rome. There is continuity both with regard to their faith and in their communal life.

But there is also a radical newness with the coming of Christ and the Early Church in Jerusalem, often described as discontinuity. The coming of Christ is fulfillment of the promises of Scripture and takes place in ‘the fullness of time’. The same can be said about the community of Jews and Gentiles that develops. The inclusion of Gentiles is not the result of a natural development, but takes place by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. This is different from Jewish proselytization when non-Jews became Jews and had to live according to the Torah as interpreted by the rabbis. The first Christian communities, however, regarded this presence of people ‘from the nations’ with a diversity of cultures and customs to be in accordance with the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The most significant break in the transition from Israel to the Church, comes within the people of Israel itself. For Paul it was an enigma that so many among his people turned against Jesus and the Gospel. But neither is this situation new to the Hebrew Scriptures. It is there all the time – when the people rebel against Moses at the foot of Mt. Sinai; in the many stories of the prophets about a people with their back to God; in the accounts of failure and restoration. There is a turning away from God, but also a coming back. It is in this context that Paul struggles with the enigma.

In Romans 9-11 Paul deals at length with his own people and their relation to the gospel. On his missionary journeys he usually began in the Synagogues, speaking to Jews, proselytes and ‘God-fearers’, and then to non-Jews. In all groups there were people who came to faith in Christ. But he was also met with opposition from non-Jews and imprisoned by the authorities. However, he was most disturbed by the rejection by so many of his fellow Jews of the Gospel.

In this situation Paul nevertheless affirms the election of his people (Rom 11:1ff) and does not give up hope of their salvation. His experience makes him broaden the Old Testament perspective, not forgetting that ‘salvation comes from the Jews’ (John 4). He approaches the situation with expectation: if Jewish rejection has become a blessing to the Gentiles, how

much more will the acceptance of the Gentiles become a blessing to his own people (Rom 11:28-32). The Gospel is on its way, among Jews and from Jews to Gentiles and from the Gentiles back to the Jewish people. Paul is struggling to find a solution, but the enigma stays with him, and he ends with a wider horizon for his hope: ‘Oh, the depth of riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God ... from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!’ (Rom 11:33-36).

We as Church are linked to this people in our history and identity, in hope and mission. The story of God’s people begins after the creation story with the call and promise to Abraham, ‘Go... and I will make you a blessing to the nations.’ Throughout the story of this people, the nations are the concern of God. One day God will gather and unite Israel and the nations. The promise to Abraham and the story of the people not only point to Christ and the Jesus-story. In him it gets a fresh beginning: ‘Go... and make all nations my disciples.’ Matthew has the nations in mind. Luke completes the picture with the commission of the resurrected Lord: to begin ‘in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).

In line with this Paul offers a further emphasis, a break, not with the Hebrew Bible, but with the ethnic, cultural and social divides in Roman and Greek, Oriental and Jewish societies at the time. In Christ ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female’ (Gal 3:28). Paul’s statement of his faith in Christ renews the basic dignity of every human being – the *imago dei*. He does not abolish the distinction of ‘Israel and the nations’, but the story of the people of God now continues as a story of a community of Jews and non-Jews across social and cultural divides, a people called to participate in God’s mission for the salvation of ‘Israel and the nations’.

## *2. The story of the people of God*

When Paul writes about non-Jews and their belonging to the people of God, he uses the image of a tree: non-Jews are wild branches grafted on to its trunk and deriving life from its roots (Rom 11:11ff). The community of Jews and Gentiles live in continuity with the people of God in the Hebrew Bible. Not only the New Testament, but the entire Bible is their story.

I am often surprised when I learn how closely biblical stories and wisdom can reflect the current situation in contemporary cultural contexts, stories and wisdom that in the North and the West we often overlook. In recent decades Christian communities in the southern hemisphere have brought to our renewed attention stories and prayers of liberation and concern for the poor and the oppressed. But these are not the only

examples.<sup>28</sup> From West Africa I have learned that new Christians in certain tribes treasure the genealogies of the Bible.<sup>29</sup> In their cultural context tribal identity and genealogies are fundamental from both a social and religious perspective. When people come to faith in Christ and are baptized they may feel alienated from their tribal identity. In this situation the genealogies of the Bible provide them with a new identity as members of the household of God.

An Israeli told me a similar story, but with a different perspective. He belonged to a family with a long history of rabbis, had little knowledge of Christian faith and no connection with any church. But then he started to read the New Testament, and the opening verses of Matthew – the genealogy of Jesus – suddenly opened his eyes: Jesus is one of ‘us’! This became his first step toward faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the nations.

The letter to the Hebrews has a particular focus on the story of God’s people in the Hebrew Bible, not only in the past, but as present for us here and now. To believe in Christ Jesus is to be surrounded by ‘a cloud of witnesses’: Abel, Enoch and Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Rahab, Gideon and Barak, Samuel, David and the prophets (Heb 11-12). The author Elie Wiesel has given poetic and forceful expression to the significance of this presence: ‘Jewish history unfolds in the present. Refuting mythology, it affects our life and our role in society. Jupiter is a symbol, but Isaiah is a voice, a conscience. Mars died without ever having lived, but Moses remains a living figure... Thanks to Abraham whose gaze is our guide, thanks to Jacob whose dream has us spellbound, our survival, prodigious as it is, lacks neither mystery nor significance... Job is our contemporary.’<sup>30</sup>

In northern Romania I was fascinated by some unique churches that give colorful expression to the same presence of the biblical story, in line with Orthodox tradition and its iconographic heritage. The walls are covered with beautiful paintings of biblical persons and scenes. Both inside and outside we have before our eyes stories from the Bible and are surrounded by ‘a cloud of witnesses’. This is our story, and in this story we find our identity and destiny.

The biblical narrative constantly urges us, ‘Remember!’ This remembering awakens the people of God to their identity as one-time slaves under Pharaoh in Egypt; it is a remembrance of the deeds of God and a remembrance of the seventh day. In the Hebrew Bible this remembrance is not only for the sake of the past, but for the present life of the people and

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<sup>28</sup> For a fuller and outstanding treatment of this, cf. P. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> From Gen. 5 through the genealogies in the Books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah to Matt 1.

<sup>30</sup> E. Wiesel, *Messengers of God. Biblical Portraits and Legends* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), 9ff.

the presence of God in their midst – here and now. It is with this perspective that Jesus speaks to his disciples when they celebrate Passover and he institutes the Eucharist: ‘Do this in remembrance of me!’ It is a remembrance that evokes the mystery of his presence here and now and the hope for our future presence with him in his Kingdom.

Identity is also rooted in a specific landscape and country, in culture and customs. Does the identity of new Christians in their diverse local contexts extricate them from their culture and their people when they become members of the one people of God? On the contrary, belonging to the ‘household of God’ of both Jews and non-Jews, of Israel and the nations, implies a new opportunity for their culture and a new commitment to their own people.

The Early Christian communities were marked by ethnic and cultural diversity. Today we experience this diversity in the growth of Christian communities around the world. Such diversity has not always been present in the history of Church and mission, often marked as it was by a tendency to cultural uniformity. In the book of Revelation, however, there is a beautiful passage describing the New Jerusalem. The city has come down from heaven and is now inhabited by a countless multitude from every nation and people, from every tribe and language. ‘The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it... The glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it’ (Rev 21:24ff). It is not stated what this splendour and these gifts are, but I cannot but think that they also include treasures from their cultures – music and songs, poetry and folklore.

And here is another fascination: as Christian communities grow up in new cultural contexts, they not only become part of the one people of God and share in its past history, but their story now becomes part of the story of the people of God. They already bring gifts from their treasures into the fellowship of the people of God, and they will do so into its fullness in the future. To be part of the people of God is to belong to a distinct and different people, but this always unfolds within our local, regional or national context. It is there that God now is at work in his mission.

### *3. Pilgrims – a people on the move*

The letter to the Hebrews describes the people of God as a pilgrim people. As pilgrims we have our eyes ‘fixed upon Jesus’ and we are surrounded by ‘a cloud of witnesses’. The Gospel of John gives us a different, but comparable image: the Word of God has set up his ‘tent’ among us (John 1:14). A tent is a home for travelers, for people on the move. The people of Israel travelled through the desert, and ‘the Tent of Meeting’ was the physical sign of God’s presence among them. It also gave direction to their journey, led by the glory of God as a cloud during the day and a fire during the night (Exod 40:34-38). The tent of the Word – Jesus Christ – now gives

direction to our journey, going before us and with us. It is our home as we travel, and it sets us on the move.

The people in the desert were longing for the Promised Land. The people of Christ are longing for him and his return to the earth that he will make new. As pilgrims we are not citizens of this world, but of a different Kingdom and a city to come (Heb 11:10; 13-14). But as pilgrims we nevertheless rejoice in our surroundings, and we sing as we walk, 'All the earth is full of his glory' (Is 6:3).

The pilgrim people of God are moved by his compassion for the world. In the story of Jonah, when the prophet had been led to the city of Nineveh and had completed his mission, the last words of this story and of God are, 'Should I not have compassion with this great city? (Jon 4:11).<sup>31</sup> This compassion is reflected in the two words of movement that echo through the Bible: 'Come!' and 'Go!' Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' (Mt 11: 28). He also issues the invitation, 'Follow me!' and commissions his disciples, 'Go and make disciples of all nations! (Mt 28:19).

Richard Bauckham has shown how the New Testament sets the people of God on the move, and points to its temporal, geographical and social openness. In *time*: 'Mission is movement into the future of God, into ever-new future'; in *space* a 'movement into ever-new horizons'; and by connecting with *people* 'a movement that is always joined by others, the movement, therefore, of an ever-new people.'<sup>32</sup>

This is also reflected in the Hebrew Bible. The people of Israel were constantly reminded of their origin and identity as pilgrims: 'Remember that you were slaves in Egypt' (Deut 15:15). This is God's reminder to the people in order to emphasize God's – and therefore their – compassion for strangers and poor, for widows and orphans. There is an often overlooked passage in the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt: during their journey into freedom they were joined by a large number of other peoples and tribes (Exod 12:38). It is this social openness and compassion that are carried forward and extended in the New Testament. As the pilgrim people of God are on their move through the world, they share in his compassion for creation, salvation and life in its fullness.

Bauckham refers to Paul. Paul anticipated that the universal goal of God's mission had almost been achieved, and that the Parousia of Jesus was imminent. He nevertheless reckoned with the possibility of his own death. He was very conscious that there were many parts of the Roman Empire and beyond without churches. Nevertheless he tells the Roman Christians that 'faith is proclaimed throughout the world', and that it 'has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven'. According to Bauckham,

<sup>31</sup> My translation of the Hebrew '*achus*. NIV: "Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

<sup>32</sup> Bauckham, 13ff.

‘these Pauline hyperboles are not just “rhetorical” but express the dynamic of the Gospel towards its universal goal and Paul’s overwhelming sense of his personal vocation within that dynamic’.<sup>33</sup>

The Gospels are stories about Jesus Christ as Messiah, Lord and Saviour, the focal point of Scripture. The Bible in its entirety is the story of the people of God and the fuller story of God’s mission. As Christ opens the door to God’s Kingdom, so the Gospel leads us into the house and the world of Scripture and invites us to participate in God’s mission.

When as children we learned to speak from our parents, words and then sentences helped us to relate to life and our surrounding us. We are ‘at home’ in our native languages. To be at home in the story of the people of God, we need the language and the stories of the Bible in our mother-tongue. And before the Bible has been translated in its entirety and is available in print or in audio, its story needs to be told. It is a story to be appropriated as our story, providing identity, hope and guidance to each Christian community in its life and ministry.

### **Book of Life – and Mission**

The Haitian artist Jacques Chery made a colourful tapestry, ‘The tree of Life’.<sup>34</sup> The central motif is the crucified Christ on the Tree of Life. Around the tree are eight scenes of biblical stories describing reality as it is, but also with hope. Under the tree are three scenes of struggle and hopelessness: a boat in danger with people crying for help (Mt 8); people at war and prisoners (Lk 23); people struggling to climb a hill (tower of Babel, Gen 11). On both sides of the tree are motifs of Jesus conquering evil – cleansing the Temple (Mt 21), and as the Messiah on a globe together with the lion and the lamb (Is 11). Above the tree are images of hope and promise: some people pointing to a stone with the ten commandments and the words ‘human rights’ (Ex 20); Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden with animals and people working in the garden; and twelve people around a table and a child with a basket of fruits from the Tree.

#### *1. Life orientation*

The images pictured by Jacques Chery are close to life as experienced by people in Haiti. The wide distribution of copies of the tapestry shows that his art and the biblical images also speak to people in other contexts. There are many stories in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, that are distant and difficult to relate to. But the fascinating aspect of the Bible,

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<sup>33</sup> Bauckham, 21f.

<sup>34</sup> E. Hesselund & S. Eide, *Livstreet – et arbeidshefte for fasten* (Oslo: Kirkens Nødhjelp, 1991).

even with regard to its difficult stories, is its realism. These narratives are close to life and life-oriented.

But the significance of this tapestry goes further. The biblical images let us see our lives as they are, reality as it is, but with faith and hope. In ‘base communities’ in Latin America they speak of the Bible as ‘a mirror’ which helps us to see and understand our lives. In their *context* they identify the stories – or *text* – of the Bible with their own experiences and hopes, their *pre-text*: We are the children of Abraham. We are in Egypt, in slavery. We are David. Or we are Bartimeus – when Jesus asks, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Thus the biblical stories set in motion a process of transformation in the lives of people.

Lesslie Newbigin uses a different metaphor. The Bible is the pair of glasses that God has given us to interpret and understand life and the world around us.<sup>35</sup> Too often we discuss how we can understand the Bible, with our ‘intellectual spectacles’. But then we have to ask about the starting point of our understanding. Newbigin stresses that contemporary understanding of reality, its plausibility structure, has little room for the cross of Christ. It is in this respect that the tapestry of Jacques Chery is illuminating. Its realism – both the pre-text and the context of our lives – moves us towards the centre, the Crucified on the Tree of Life, a new point of departure for our understanding of life and the world, of God’s mission and our participation in it.

The stark realism of the Bible connects with our actual lives and the predicament of humankind. But the purpose of its narrative is to transform this reality with love and hope, and the Bible is given us to provide this new life-orientation to the world around us and to our participation in his mission.

Some years ago the Catholic Biblical Federation put into words what this implies for use of the Bible in mission and evangelism.<sup>36</sup> Their global meeting in Bogota should be seen in the light of the Bible renewal in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council. With a distinct Christological focus they spoke of ways of sharing the Bible with a distinct dynamic:

- from the Book to the Word taking root in people’s hearts;
- from institution to creative presence with liberating power in the lives of people;
- from priesthood to laity, with the responsibility of every Christian to share the Gospel;

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<sup>35</sup> In a lecture in Oslo in May, 1989. Cf. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, op.cit. 95ff. Also N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego, New York, London: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1983).

<sup>36</sup> Bogota 1990.

- from private reading to a transforming power in society. Personal piety and Bible reading should lead to a presence in society with the transforming power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.

## 2. The Bible and God's mission

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal once wrote, 'A servant sometimes goes in front, carrying the light, sometimes behind, carrying the luggage.'<sup>37</sup> This proverbial statement also accurately describes the role of the Bible in the growth of the Church and in mission throughout the centuries, among new peoples and in new linguistic and cultural contexts.

It is already a long time since David Barrett pointed to the connection between the publication of the Bible in a certain language, the growing of spiritual maturity in indigenous churches and their desire for independence and indigenous leadership.<sup>38</sup> But this link has existed even prior to Gutenberg, and particularly in the last two centuries of Church and mission history. It was also true of the Early Church even before the biblical canon was established as such, with the distribution of handwritten Gospels and Psalms, as was the case in the Middle Ages. Today electronic media open new horizons for the communication of the biblical text.

Today there is more to be said about the link between Bible, Church and mission. In the introduction I referred to the renewal in missiology with its focus upon *missio dei*, and that this renewal also puts the Bible back at centre stage of mission. One hundred years after the missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910, we marvel at the growth and transformation of the Church universal. There has been unexpected growth in the south and the east, and today traditional and indigenous churches there constitute the majority in the Church universal with a voice, a life and a ministry which certainly would have surprised the leaders in Edinburgh in 1910. In this process it is the live interaction with the Bible in churches and communities around the world that has caused us to recognize and emphasize that mission is God's.

At this point I therefore stop and step back in wonder and amazement at the surprising ways of God. Amazement at the story of God's mission in the Bible and in his interaction with the world, his compassion for creation and salvation. Amazement at how he has used and uses the Holy Scriptures in the life and the growth of the Church, but also how the Bible opens our eyes and ears to join in on what he is doing.

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted according to U. Fick, at the General Assembly of the United Bible Societies in Budapest 1988.

<sup>38</sup> The Spread of the Bible and the Growth of the Church in Africa, *United Bible Societies Bulletin* 128/29 (1982), 5-18; D. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

The Bible is the common heritage of the Church and unites Christians to participate in God's mission with an ecumenical heart and mind. It empowers us to witness as well as to diakonia, to evangelism and dialogue. The Bible provides room for cultural diversity, but renounces secular power for an attitude of service. And it opens the horizon before us, calling us as individuals and communities to participate in God's mission 'from everywhere to everywhere', Christ-centered and Spirit-driven.



# THE BIBLE AS TEXT FOR MISSION<sup>1</sup>

Tim Carriker

## Introduction

To speak of the Bible as a text for mission seems simple enough, but in fact it is not simple at all. Whenever one deals with the interpretation of Scripture there is always plenty of room for disagreement. Just consider the number and diversity of groups to which this book has given birth through the years. So the task of developing this theme in as simple a manner as possible is harder still. The task reminds me of a famous story about the great Brazilian politician and writer, Rui Barbosa:

Once, a thief set out to steal chickens from, of all places, the home of Professor Rui Barbosa. The thief jumped over the fence and closed in on the chickens. In the midst of the bustle, Rui Barbosa woke up from his deep sleep and approached the chicken coop. When he got there he saw the thief already grasping one of his chickens, so with all the elegance for which he is well known, he said,

*It is not because of the beaked biped, nor the intrinsic value of the gallinaceous, but because you dared bypass the threshold of my residence. If that is from mere ignorance, I forgive you. But if it is to abuse my prosopopoeial soul, I swear to you, by the metabolic heels of my shoes, that I will give you such a thwack that I will transform your brain matter into cadaverous ashes.*

The thief clumsily turned and replied,

*Wha-da-ya-say Mr Rui, can I keep the chicken or not???*

I hope that at the end of this rather complex presentation you don't turn to me and say, 'So wha-da-ya-say, is the Bible a missionary book or not?'

A second analogy: recently, various well-known biblical scholars were asked to summarize the message of the Bible in just one sentence. My favourite response was given by Gordon Hugenberger, who grumbled,

The message of the Bible in one sentence is that genuine truth, different from human philosophy, is much more exuberant, more captivating, more personal, more embracing, more sovereign and more transforming of lives than can be reduced to just one sentence (or, as Einstein once put it, the challenge is to 'Simplify everything as much as possible, but not more than that.').

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<sup>1</sup> Essay originally given in Portuguese at the VIII Forum of Biblical Sciences sponsored by the Brazilian Bible Society on June 21, 2012.

So that is the task at hand: to simplify as much as possible the relation between ‘mission’ and the Bible, but not more than that. This task requires a number of clarifications. First, the place of the Bible in the relationship requires clarification. Is the Bible the subject of the conversation with ‘mission’, or is the Bible the object? Secondly, our task is complicated or simplified depending on our understanding of ‘mission’, either as the institutional endeavours of the church (usually denoted as ‘missions’, or *missiones ecclesiae*), or more broadly as God’s plan for the world (‘mission’ or *missio Dei*).<sup>2</sup> The following table aims to clarify four ways to relate mission and the Bible:

	<b>Bible as subject</b>	<b>Bible as object</b>
<b>Mission of God</b>	<p>The Bible as the story of God’s mission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘mission’ as a hermeneutical key</li> <li>• The narrative of God’s plan for the world</li> <li>• The ‘construction’ of the identity of God and of his people</li> <li>• <i>The Missionary Study Bible</i> project</li> </ul>	<p>The Bible as a product of God’s mission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The historical origins of the Bible (books, collections, manuscripts)</li> <li>• The resurgences of Scripture (Law, Nehemiah, synagogues, early Christianity, Protestants Reformation)</li> <li>• New translations or thematic study editions</li> </ul>
<b>Churches’ missions</b>	<p>The Bible as the <i>history</i> of missions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biblical foundations for the missionary ministry of the church</li> <li>• The missional place of the readers</li> <li>• <i>The Missionary Study Bible</i> project</li> </ul>	<p>The Bible as a missionary <i>tool</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication and distribution of the Bible</li> <li>• Preaching and hearing of the Bible</li> <li>• Special-needs audiences</li> <li>• New translations or thematic study editions</li> </ul>

Our task is to clarify the relation between the two from the perspective of the missionary activity of the church, represented by the lower two

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<sup>2</sup> In *Proclamando boas-novas. Bases sólidas para o evangelismo* (Brasília: Palavra, 2008), I suggest that ‘evangelism’ and ‘evangelisation’ are better suited to describe this major plot throughout the Bible that often is characterized as ‘mission.’ There are two reasons for that. First and above all, this is the routine terminology used by the authors of the New Testament and once their original wider significance is recovered, different from the more narrow use popularly of ‘evangelism’, this term can embrace the same wide range of meanings as ‘mission.’ And secondly, contrary to the terms *euangelioni* and *euangelizomai*, ‘mission’ has no biblical precedent (even though it is possible to relate ‘mission’ to the biblical terms *pempō* and *apostel*) and for that reason it is far too easy to import other alien meanings into the discussion.

quadrants in the table above. But we must first note that this subject is meaningful only within the larger context of our understanding of God's own mission, represented by the upper two quadrants of the same table. Because of that, we will first make mention, though briefly, of the relation of the Bible to 'mission'.

### The Hermeneutical Relation between Mission and the Bible

The relation between the concept of 'mission' and the Bible is similar to the relation between 'culture' and anthropology. Anthropology, for instance, uses the word 'culture' to describe all the customs and perspectives on life of a specific social or ethnic group. Prior to its use by anthropologists the word 'culture' was already used more commonly in the area of agriculture to refer to specific crops. It also commonly refers to the accepted conventions of behaviour and proper etiquette and, especially in Latin America, to describe someone who has acquired an advanced academic degree or is simply considered higher up on the social ladder. Anthropology, therefore, borrowed the word 'culture' to describe a different phenomenon and so transformed its meaning. Additionally, in anthropology the reasoning behind the meaning of 'culture' is circular rather than intrinsic. That is, anthropologists identify a specific phenomenon, a people's set of customs and worldview, and call that 'culture' which then is used to refer back to those same customs and worldview as an example of 'culture'.

Similarly, the word 'mission' is derived from the Latin *missionis* (nom. *missio*) for 'dismissal, discharge,' 'sending' or 'reprieve'. The verbal form is *mittere* for 'to send'.<sup>3</sup> 'Mission' was originally used by the Jesuits to describe the sending of members of their order to other lands. Today it is used to describe evangelisation, church planting and various church sponsored social ministries in other lands. But just like the word 'culture' in anthropological circles, the definition of 'mission' is also circular. As such it becomes necessary to explain *what* exactly is being referred to. The word 'mission' is more inclusive and at the same time, broader than 'missions'. Currently, 'mission' is often understood as 'God's mission' (*missio Dei*), or 'God's plan for the world he created', which in turn includes an incumbency ('missions') on a people whom God calls out to participate in and contribute to this plan. 'God's mission' is not confined to the activities of expansion employed by various denominational and missionary organizations. The Bible as the *story* of God's mission, and consequently, as the *history* of the missionary call of God's people, then launches us into the complicated field of hermeneutics. We are proposing 'the mission of God' as a key to the interpretation of the Scriptures. Even

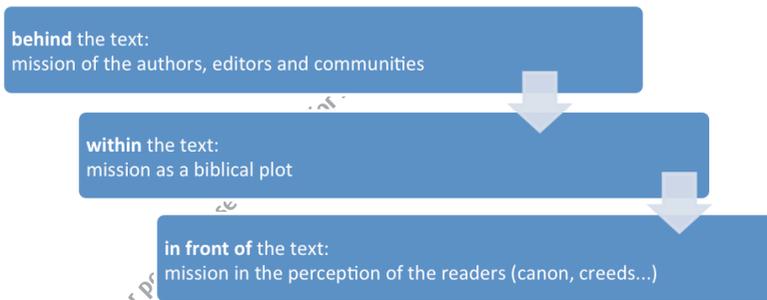
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<sup>3</sup> The contemporary idea of 'foreign missions' is probably best described in Latin as *mandatum* rather than *missio*.

the simplest phrases used to summarize this key, as proposed above, are full of meaning:

- God exists, implicitly one God over all
- This God has a plan
- The plan involves all that God created
- The world is not fickle or inconstant for there exists a God who is in control

The relatively simple hermeneutical model originally suggested by Paul Ricoeur helps clarify the mission of God as the hermeneutical key of the Bible. He addresses three interpretative locations: the meaning ‘within’ the text, the meaning ‘behind’ the text, and the meaning ‘in front of’ the text.



These three hermeneutical planes correspond to the four relationships mentioned above between mission and the Bible in the manner shown in the table overleaf.

Scholars have expounded the theme of mission in the Bible for some time now.<sup>4</sup> Their contributions are multiple, varied and important. There is now a certain consensus that in some form ‘mission’ can be seen as a broad biblical theme. But there is no consensus on how to develop a missional hermeneutic of the Bible, although George Hunsberger has proposed a map of the current conversation and the relative consensus that it has already provoked.<sup>5</sup> In my view the lack of consensus is due largely to the different hermeneutical planes where each of the authors operates. For instance...

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<sup>4</sup> The International Association for Mission Studies (<http://missionstudies.org/>) initiated a ‘Biblical Studies and Mission’ group that has been active since 1976. Similarly, about 13 years ago a group of American missiologists and biblical scholars created a network called ‘The Gospel and Our Culture’ (<http://www.gocn.org/>).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gocn.org/resources/newsletters/2009/01/gospel-and-our-culture>

	<b>Bible as subject</b>	<b>Bible as object</b>
<b>Mission of God</b>	Mission ‘within’ the text The Bible as the story of God’s mission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘mission’ as a hermeneutical key</li> <li>• The narrative of God’s plan for the world</li> <li>• The ‘construction’ of the identity of God and of his people</li> <li>• <i>The Missionary Study Bible</i> project</li> </ul>	Mission ‘behind’ the text The Bible as a product of God’s mission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The historical origins of the Bible (books, collections, manuscripts)</li> <li>• The resurgences of Scripture (Law, Nehemiah, synagogues, early Christianity, Protestant Reformation)</li> <li>• New translations or thematic editions</li> </ul>
	<b>Church’s missions</b>	The Bible as the <i>history</i> of missions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biblical foundations for the missionary ministry of the church</li> <li>• The missional place of the readers</li> <li>• <i>The Missionary Study Bible</i> project</li> </ul>

**Mission behind the text.** Darrell Guder’s contribution operates on the hermeneutical plane “behind” the text. That is, he emphasizes the missionary purpose of the authors and editors that produced the biblical text and the missionary concerns of the communities that they represent. To illustrate, Paul’s letters reflect his own missionary concerns and to some extent, those of the communities to which he wrote. When he encourages union between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church in his Letter to the Romans, chapters 12-14, he appeals to Old Testament Messianic passages that anticipate the praise both of Jews as well as Gentiles for the mercies of God already demonstrated (Romans 15:1-13).<sup>6</sup> The Letter to the Romans, then, reflects the missionary challenges both of Paul and of the Roman Christians. Similarly, the differences between the four Gospels are due, in part, to the different perspectives and agendas of the authors and communities “behind” these Gospels and so offer an interesting case study of the missionary challenge and activity of the early churches. The same can be said concerning the various documents of the Old Testament. The important thing to observe in all of this is the missionary theme as a hermeneutical key to biblical interpretation “behind” the text. This perspective inquires about the *historical origin* of the biblical texts and the

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, my *A missão apocalíptica de Paulo* (The Apocalyptic Mission of Paul) (São Paulo: Abba Press, 2007).

*original* missionary purpose that these texts served in the communities of their initial readers. In this way Guder brings an important contribution to the dialogue about the relevance of mission for the Bible. He concludes: “[t]he purpose of this ‘Word of God written’ was and is the continuing formation of the missional church.... This formation happens as the biblical word works powerfully within the community.”<sup>7</sup>

**Mission within the text.** The majority of missiologists who defend mission as a primary biblical theme operate within the plane that Ricoeur calls ‘within the text’. In their biblical reading they ask more theological than historical questions. Their focus is specifically on the authors’ various literary plots and on the canonical development of the narrative. Johannes Blauw was one of the first to propose this theme in 1964.<sup>8</sup> In Brazil I have written with this hermeneutical perspective as well.<sup>9</sup> But today Chris Wright is one of the most prominent missiologists and biblical theologians to propose the narrative of mission as the key to biblical interpretation.<sup>10</sup> To clarify his own perspective Wright speaks about the missional basis of the Bible rather than the biblical basis of mission. In this way, he emphasizes the mission of God as the key biblical narrative plot, the purpose for which the Bible exists. ‘The Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation.’<sup>11</sup> Further, he states, ‘that a strong theology of the mission of God provides a fruitful hermeneutical framework within which to read the whole Bible.’<sup>12</sup> In summary, by emphasizing the literary sequence and plot of the Bible, Wright and other writers operate from a perspective that highlights hermeneutical meaning ‘within the text’.

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Biblical Formation and Discipleship’ in Lois Barrett (ed), *Treasure in Clay Jars* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 62, quoted by George Hunsberger in ‘Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic: Mapping the Conversation’ (<http://www.gocn.org/resources/newsletters/2009/01/gospel-and-our-culture>). In Portuguese some of the better known authors that write missiologically about the Bible from the perspective of the origin of the text, or as Ricoeur puts it, “behind the text”, are Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Os fundamentos bíblicos da missão* (The Biblical Foundations for Mission) (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1987); and H.H. Rowley, *A fé em Israel* (The Faith of Israel) (São Paulo: Ed. Paulinas, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> In the publication of his book, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, that actually was concerned more for the missionary nature of the Bible.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *O caminho missionário de Deus: uma teologia bíblica*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Brasília: Palavra, 2005) and *A visão missionária da Bíblia. Uma história de amor* (Viçosa: Editora Ultimato, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Especially, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) and also, *The Mission of God’s People* (Biblical Theology for Life) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> *The Mission of God*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> *The Mission of God*, 26.

This is probably a good place to mention a project that has been under way for five years now, *The Missionary Study Bible*, to be published in Portuguese next year by the Brazilian Bible Society<sup>13</sup> in time for the VII Brazilian Congress on Mission in October 2014.<sup>14</sup> While there are several Study Bibles already available that propose a mission theme,<sup>15</sup> we believe this one is the first to offer notes on the biblical text for all the books of the Bible. This is especially surprising in light of the intimate link between the Bible and missionary expansion on the one hand, and between the Bible and its major plot concerning God's plan for the world and missionary incumbency on God's people. It is our hope that this Study Bible will make this plot even more explicit and so contribute to the missionary motivation and understanding of individuals, churches and missionary institutions.

**Mission in front of the text.** Finally, some authors are more interested in the missiological interpretation that the Bible provokes in the reading of the various contemporary communities that the Bible has generated. For example, for Michael Barram, a missional hermeneutic is 'an approach to the biblical text rooted in the basic conviction that God has a mission in the world and that we read Scripture as a community called into and caught up by those divine purposes'.<sup>16</sup> This particular perspective is characterized by a commitment to articulate faithfully the mission of God and the role that the community has in the fulfilment of that mission. In more formal and theoretical terms this leads to the elaboration of local or 'contextual' theologies. In more pragmatic terms, the perspective leads to the missionary engagement of communities of faith.

The church understands its task in the world – the motivation, means, priority, goal, breadth and meaning of that mission – as derived from God's own 'mission' to and on behalf of the world. That understanding is informed by careful reflection on God's revelation in Scripture and by critical attention to the various specific contexts. The church's reflection on her task in the world – missiology – never ends, just as her mission in the world will only be complete at Christ's return. Contextual theological reflection always remains essential to the church's effective engagement in her mission.

The church today continues the task of God's people throughout the centuries ever since Abraham's call, that derives from God's own mission

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<sup>13</sup> The Brazilian Bible Society is the largest Bible society in the world by the number of Bibles published and the size of their Printing Press.

<sup>14</sup> Jamierson Oliveira is coordinating the project. I am the General Editor.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., the *Global Study Bible* (English Standard Version) (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); and *The Mission of God Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2012). Neither of these publications, however, offers biblical commentary on the Biblical passages.

<sup>16</sup> Cited by Darrell Guder, *op. cit.*, from 'The Bible, mission, and social location: Toward a missional hermeneutic.' in *Interpretation* 61.1 (January, 2007), 57; and *Mission and Moral Reflection in Paul* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

and ultimately from God's nature. The nature of that task today is clarified by careful reflection on the previous manifestations of God's mission through the centuries, with prominent attention given to the Scriptures and to recognizing the hermeneutical priority of the New Testament as its fullest expression.

It is not only the biblical and *historical* continuity of the church with previous generations that is essential to her reflection on, and engagement in, mission. Her *spatial* continuity is also essential, that is, her unity with the church universal. At least that was the desire Jesus expressed in his priestly prayer for the unity of his followers (Jn 17:21).

**Implications of the three hermeneutical planes.** The advantage of this map of various ways to treat the Bible from a mission perspective, using Paul Ricoeur's three hermeneutical planes analogy, is that it both legitimates these three perspectives by adopting different hermeneutical starting points as well as helping to relate them to each other. It also becomes apparent that to harmonize the various contributions into one missional hermeneutic of the Bible is neither necessary nor desirable. Each of the three makes its own important and legitimate contribution.

But perhaps it is possible to better relate the three general perspectives. For example, the attempt to make more explicit the missionary motives and intentions of the authors and the communities that contributed to the production of the various biblical documents – the missional meaning 'behind' the text – clarifies the missional plot 'within' the text that runs through Scripture. And that in turn is the essential basis for more responsible reflection on the missional location of the readers of these texts throughout history to this day and in each social and ethnic context.

And so we may proceed to consider the Bible as a text for the missionary endeavours of the church today in two parts: first, the Bible as a text of the *history* and for the *study* of mission; and secondly, the Bible as a missionary *tool* both of God's mission as well as the church's missionary enterprises.

### **The Bible as a Text for Mission**

In the second part of this reflection we consider mission 'in front of the text', the Bible, not so much in theoretical or hermeneutical terms, but rather in terms of specific mission activities. We will do this in two parts: first, the Bible as a text for missionary *preparation* and secondly, the Bible as a tool for missionary practice.

**The Bible as a text for missionary preparation (the study of mission).** In Brazil as elsewhere the Bible has always played a fundamental role in both pastoral and missionary preparation. In the mid-1970s a new

awareness of missionary responsibility began to emerge.<sup>17</sup> Typically there were heavy appeals to widely understood ‘missionary’ passages such as the Great Commission in the Gospels. But there were also early attempts to elaborate the missionary theme throughout the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

With the missionary challenge before the churches during the early 1970s, programs for preparation and sending soon followed. Initially, these programs were short, generally just a few weeks, sometimes one or two months. Then more substantial programs emerged that often included biblical training. Today it is common to study the ‘biblical theology of mission’ or ‘biblical foundations for the missionary work of the church’. In these courses the wider biblical themes of election, covenant, justice and judgement, messianic hope and salvation, creation and new creation, are typically all interconnected and woven together into an essentially missionary biblical background.

Regional, national, continental and international mission conferences are another important context where the Bible is studied and expounded from the perspective of the missionary nature of the church. Recently, the Letter to the Ephesians was studied in small groups for one hour a day by thousands of Christian leaders from all over the world attending the III Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town – Lausanne III. For years the World Council of Churches have begun their daily gatherings with reflections from the Bible on the mission of the church and the same can be said of the periodic Brazilian Mission Congresses.

**The Bible as a missionary tool.** The history of the missionary expansion of God’s people – mission – simply cannot be told without reference to the translation of the Bible. One closely accompanies the other, beginning with the birth and recovery of the Scriptures by the Jews.<sup>19</sup>

When the Jews were taken into captivity in the sixth century, the first translations (the *Targum*) were made into Aramaic, which was the common language of the exile. These translations served both to maintain Jewish identity while they were far from their homeland, and to propagate the precepts of Scripture among the foreigners.

With the return of some of the Jews from the Babylonian exile to their homeland and the dispersion of an even larger number throughout the ancient world eventually dominated by the Greeks, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek during the second and third centuries (the Septuagint) was instrumental, once again, in maintaining Jewish religious and cultural identity. And this new translation into Greek along with its

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<sup>17</sup> The Brazilian chapter of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship promoted the first national missionary congress in Curitiba in 1974.

<sup>18</sup> For example, my own *Missões na Bíblia. Princípios Gerais* (São Paulo: Vida Nova, 1992) began as a series of lectures given at a mission conference in 1983 that was the springboard of the establishment of the first long term mission training center in Brazil, the Evangelical Missions Center, also in 1983.

<sup>19</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible\\_translations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations)

reading and interpretation in the synagogues became the principal Jewish missionary instrument to the non-Jews and the inclusion of these 'God-fearers' in the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire shortly before, during and after the emergence of Christianity.

The compilation of the documents of the early church took some 300 years and was completed only in the fourth century A.D. They were all in Greek, the common language of the time and appeared in various collections. These documents and the consequent 'New Testament' exercised a fundamental role in the consolidation and expansion of the early Christianity. The fifty or so quotations of the Old Testament by Paul in his Letter to the Romans, the witness in the Book of Acts to the regular reading of the Scriptures in the meetings of the church, and Peter's assertion of the circulation of Paul's letters among the first Christian communities all attest to the pastoral and missionary role of the Scriptures.

The rapid expansion of Christianity throughout the empire did not take long. Many factors contributed to the expansion, above all, the missionary drive and tremendous courage of the early Christians.<sup>20</sup> Today we know that physical and linguistic factors facilitated the expansion, such as the Roman roads built all over the empire, and Greek as the common language for at least the eastern part of the empire. But another factor was the existence and subsequent translation of the Bible. From the beginning, the Jewish-Christian faith was a faith of the Book and this book accompanied the growth. Soon it was necessary to translate the Bible into Latin; Jerome undertook the consolidation of previous efforts and eventually produced the Vulgate between 382 and 420 A.D. This boosted the efforts of missionary expansion in Rome and the Western and Northern regions.

In the regions of ancient Syria conquered centuries ago by the Greeks, the Old Testament was translated into Syriac in the second century A.D. and the New Testament in the second and fourth centuries. There, one of history's largest ever missionary movements emerged, the Nestorians, who spread the gospel near and far all the way to India and China. Christians throughout the Middle East use the translation known as the Peshitta to this day.

There were other translations during these same first centuries of Christianity and their missionary impact was great. Ulfilas translated the Bible into Gothic in the fourth century. This translation was key to the evangelisation of the Germanic peoples of Romania. The Bible was also translated into an ancient Egyptian language, Sahidic Coptic, about the same time. In the fifth century, Saint Mesrob translated the Bible into Armenian and so evangelized the better part of Armenia, so much so that this became the first officially 'Christian' country. Other translations from

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<sup>20</sup> Stark, Rodney, *The Rise of Christianity. A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

this period include Coptic for Egypt, Old Nubian for the Sudan, Ethiopic and Georgian for southern Russia.

Throughout history important translations accompanied the evangelization of numerous peoples including Old English by Saint Bede and Old High German in the eighth century. The first translations into Chinese were also made by the Nestorians in the eighth century, and in 863 the translation into Old Church Slavonic was started by Cyril and Methodius for the Balkan and Moravian regions. And the list goes on. By the thirteenth century the Bible had been translated into 22 languages.

In the seventeenth century Matthew's Gospel was translated into Malay in Polynesia. In the same century John Elliot translated the Bible into Algonquin, one of the indigenous languages of Massachusetts. In modern times, important translations for world evangelization include Tamil in India by the German Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, and in the nineteenth century Bengali, Sanskrit and other languages by the English missionary to India William Carey. During that time the American Adoniram Judson, serving in Burma, translated the Bible into Burmese, and the Englishman Henry Martyn translated the New Testament into Urdu, Persian (Farsi) and Judaeo-Persic. The Norwegian Paul Olaf Bodding translated the Bible into Santali, an Eastern Indian language. By the nineteenth century the Bible had been translated into approximately 400 new languages and in the twentieth century another 800.

All this information is readily available from numerous sources. What is usually neglected, though it is rather obvious, is the intimate correlation between Bible translation and the evangelization of the peoples who speak those languages. Even more rare is the recognition that this follows from the very missionary nature of the Scriptures themselves.

### **Conclusion**

The correlation between the Bible and the missionary work of the church is not surprising. Neither is the practical role of the redaction, compilation, translation and distribution of the Bible in the advancement of God's purposes in the world from earliest times. What is surprising is that it has taken so long to recognize this relationship, promote academic inquiries and careful study in order to ask how we can better promote God's mission that envisions ultimately a new creation, new heavens and a new earth, by the use of this precious instrument and compass?

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**SECTION ONE**  
**THE BIBLE IN MISSION**  
**IN THE WORLD AND**  
**IN THE CHURCH**

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# BIBLE AND MISSION: THE MODERN/POSTMODERN WESTERN CONTEXT

Richard Bauckham

To characterize the culture of the contemporary West is no easy task. In the late twentieth century it was commonly said that western society was in transition from a 'modern' to a 'postmodern' worldview (though some preferred the term 'late modern'). But key characteristics of modernity continue to play an important role, especially in the dominant political and economic discourse, alongside the postmodern cultural current that continues to influence both popular and 'high' culture. The younger they are, the more the average person's outlook on life can be characterized as postmodern. But it may be that we are witnessing, not a transition from modernity to postmodernity, but an emerging culture that mixes features of each. At any rate, we have currently to reckon with features generally considered modern and features generally considered postmodern, coexisting to varying degrees according to generation and region. With reference to this last factor, for example, the USA remains a more modern culture than western Europe.

## Metanarratives

### *The metanarrative of progress*

A defining characteristic of modernity, since the European Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century, has been its metanarrative of progress. This was first called a 'metanarrative' or 'grand narrative' by French postmodernist philosophers, among whom Jean-François Lyotard famously defined the postmodern as 'incredulity towards metanarratives.'<sup>1</sup> He was thinking primarily of the various versions of Enlightenment progressivism. But the concept of a metanarrative, defined in a somewhat more general sense, provides a useful way of comparing religious or secular worldviews, especially those that provide a framework of meaning for life by telling a story about the world. Broadly western metanarratives, including those of Marxism, Islam, Christianity and secular humanism, include some account of where human history is heading.

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<sup>1</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

The overriding idea that has made the modern world is that the extension of knowledge and the application of human reason are able to shape the world and human society in a process of constant improvement of the human condition. History is a great march of human reason towards utopia. Progress is conceived as somehow inevitable, a law of history, though one that requires all the best efforts of human reason to implement it. Progress can be expected to occur in a gradual process of incremental reform, as in liberal democratic versions of the idea, or in a dialectical way, requiring revolution, as in Marxism.

The enormous optimism of modernity derived from its confidence that human reason can master both the natural world and human history, so as to direct history in a progressive direction: towards the greatest human good. The extraordinary achievements of science and technology in the nineteenth century made it the heyday of unqualified faith in progress, but education, bringing enlightenment to the masses, was also a great focus of hope. The progress of reason would make life better in every respect. At the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectuals and politicians confidently expected the abolition of war in the foreseeable future. Against that background, the First World War, which was unprecedented in its cost to human life, was for many deeply disillusioning. The horrors of Nazism and Stalinism dispelled for many the confident expectation that civilization is succeeding barbarism. After all, the Holocaust was not merely atrocious, but a specifically modern sort of atrocity, accomplished with modern technology and modern organizational efficiency. It was also a European act of atrocity, which, along with the exposure of the acts of atrocity committed elsewhere in the world by European powers in the heyday of empires, undermined the previous century's belief that Europe was in the vanguard of progress, exporting enlightenment to the rest of the world.

It might seem that such refutations by history should have been mortal blows to the idea of progress, but so essential is it to the modern West's sense of meaning, that it has bounced back. It may be widely admitted that progress is not an entirely inevitable, unilinear process. Setbacks and relapses are possible, but they are still evaluated as such, still measured against progress as the norm. In the politics of the United Kingdom, the words 'modernizing' and 'progressive' (as opposed to reactionary) are necessary buzzwords even for the elite of the Conservative party. The duty of government is to improve everything. Above all, in the late twentieth century a constantly improving standard of living, funded by economic growth, came to be the confident expectation of people across the whole social spectrum. In a period of unprecedented affluence, the idea of progress, implicit in all economic and political discourse, took especially the form of an expectation of unending economic growth, an expectation that no other society in history has entertained. The financial crisis of 2008 provoked some questioning of the axiom and mechanisms of constant growth, but without major effect.

Although the economic aspect of progress is currently dominant, we should also notice that in western culture there is a strong sense of moral superiority over the past. It is focused on equality (especially equal rights for women and gay people) and on tolerance of diversity and of people's right to lead their private lives as they choose. Western society is constantly reminding itself that, judged by these standards, it has made huge progress since the 1960s. At the time of the papal election in 2013, the burden of secular comment in the media was that the Catholic Church needs a pope who will 'modernize' in these respects.

Postmodern relativism in ethics (see below) does not seem able to dislodge these key symbols of moral progress. Perhaps because they represent success stories for western societies, they seem to trump what might be regarded here as signs of moral decline, such as increasing poverty, the decline in charitable giving and volunteering in community service, or the sexualisation of children. A major weakness of the idea of progress is that its credibility depends on telling a selective story that favours the beneficiaries of change over the victims. (This is not, of course, a reason for Christians to neglect those moral concerns that contemporary society prioritizes; it merely implies that they should also be alert to moral concerns that contemporary society neglects.)

One recent version of the idea of progress is the neo-liberal economic project of globalization, which advocates the unrestricted operation of free market capitalism and free trade. To its critics this is the latest version of western imperialism, an ideology that, under cover of a claim to benefit the world, increases the prosperity of the rich at the expense of the poor. Moreover, just as the old imperialism was combined with cultural imperialism (since the superiority of western culture was axiomatic for the nineteenth-century idea of progress), so economic globalization is accompanied by the Americanization of the world. Dependent for its success on consumerism in both the West and the developing nations, globalization exports the kind of cultural goods that the American dream makes irresistibly attractive to the rest of the world.

Economic globalization, especially in its American version, can also be seen as promoting liberal democracy along with free market capitalism. The claim is that the two go necessarily together. (Examples as different as Singapore and Russia would seem to contradict this claim.) In this form economic globalization is an idealistic goal, the contemporary version of the myth of America as a messianic nation with a mission to benefit the world. Some of the cultural differences between the USA and Europe are understandable in this light. The loss of their empires by the European powers (including Britain) in the twentieth century was accompanied by a weakening of the notion of European cultural superiority. In the same period the USA was not losing but gaining an empire, and saw itself as victor in the Cold War, i.e. in the ideological battle between conflicting narratives of emancipation (the Marxist and the liberal democratic), in both

of which notions of political and economic freedom were closely related. In this light it is not surprising that American culture remains more modern (as opposed to postmodern) than Europe, more wedded to the idea of progress and the values of the Enlightenment (as enshrined in the constitution), more idealistic and optimistic about itself and its role in the world.

Close to the heart of the modern idea of progress was the scientific-technological project of mastering nature and adapting it to human benefit. It was conceived as a kind of liberation of humanity from the constraints of nature. The actual achievements of modern science, not just its vastly increased understanding of the material world but the fact that this knowledge has been put to so much tangible human advantage, are undoubtedly the major evidence of progress. But such progress has come to seem much more ambivalent in the light of the ecological crisis. Many people in western societies are more aware that the unintended and unforeseen consequences of reaching for mastery of nature can turn out to be disastrous, while it no longer seems so obvious that there is a single, indisputably beneficial direction for technological advance to take. Nonetheless, science retains great prestige.

The obvious success of science leads some to the view that science is the only sort of real knowledge. In the so-called 'new atheism' the scientific understanding of the world is represented as superseding a religious worldview. Religious beliefs are merely primitive ways of attempting to explain what science now explains in a properly rational way. The progress of reason should therefore lead to religion becoming obsolete. If religion has actually been making a comeback, as some observers claim, ardent secularists are all the more anxious to oppose it in the name of progress.

### *The postmodernist critique of the modern metanarratives*

For modernity the metanarrative of progress is a way of salvation, the route to solving the problems of human life. For postmodernists (and for the time being I refer to intellectual people who deliberately adopt a postmodern approach) metanarratives are the problem. We need to be liberated from them, because all such grand projections of universal truth and meaning are oppressive. This charge has two aspects. The first is that a metanarrative is a deceptive ideology, disguising military domination or economic exploitation with the claim to be in the vanguard of history, advancing the cause of humanity at large. Such a critique can be devastating to ideologies of empire and globalization.

However, the second way in which metanarratives are considered oppressive is more far-reaching. It holds that all claims to universal truth are necessarily oppressive, because they amount to imposing someone's truth on others. To live within a metanarrative is to be given certain goals and values as though they were the only valid ones. We have to be liberated

from metanarratives in order to choose our own goals and values for ourselves. We must and can make our own meanings, without regarding them as uniquely valid. As Andrew Lloyd-Webber's song puts it, 'Any dream will do.'

This form of relativism has permeated western culture. It takes popular form in such common expressions as 'Everyone has the right to their own opinion' and in the frequently expressed dislike of religion because it tells people what they must believe and what they should do. Actually most people who readily express such views also endorse at least some of the certainties of Enlightenment progress. They would probably not support the teaching of creationism in schools as a valid alternative to Darwinism. They would almost certainly not support the right of paedophiles to pursue their preferred sexual practices. In a society subject to a variety of cultural influences such inconsistency is not surprising.

Another relevant aspect of postmodernity is that it gives primacy to the present. The metanarrative of progress privileges the future: the best is still to come. Postmodern disillusion with the grand political projects and utopias of modernity stresses instead the enjoyment of the present for its own sake. Life does not have to be seen as a journey or a task. It can be a series of liberating moments of euphoric experience. For some observers of culture, however, this cultural moment is already passing, succeeded by a foreboding sense of the demands of the future. In insecure times, the individual detached from the corporate goals and values of modernity may nevertheless become a new kind of responsible individual: the person who keeps fit, lives healthily, lives with a degree of self-imposed discipline, stays flexible to fit into a transient and changing job market, thinks about their pension. This too can be a postmodern choice – or perhaps a 'hyper-modern' one.<sup>2</sup>

### *The biblical-Christian metanarrative in post/modernity*

The modern idea of progress undoubtedly has its roots in the Christian tradition, which first taught western society to envisage history as a meaningful process orientated to the future. What transformed the Christian view into the modern idea of progress was the loss of divine transcendence and the substitution of human mastery over nature and history. The future goal of history was now down to human reason and human power, working solely with the immanent potential of this world. In an important sense humans assumed what, in the Christian tradition, had been the role of God. The promethean character of the idea of progress, in its more utopian political or more visionary scientific forms, is the obvious consequence of this assumption of divinity. But Christians were frequently able to

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<sup>2</sup> See Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times* (trans. Andrew Brown) (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

assimilate the biblical metanarrative to the modern idea of progress, envisaging the working of God through human agency and identifying the goals of progress with the coming of the kingdom of God. The idea of progress remains, indeed, a core assumption of many Christians.

In a situation where the idea of progress has proved remarkably durable but also problematic, some hard questions need to be asked. Is the idea of progress an appropriate modern form for the biblical metanarrative to take in our time, or do we need to recover the distinctives of the biblical metanarrative? Is the biblical metanarrative itself vulnerable to the postmodern critique? Or does it present a credible alternative to both the modern metanarrative and the postmodern rejection of metanarratives?

As a preliminary response to these questions, I shall briefly indicate some features of the biblical metanarrative:<sup>3</sup>

(1) What perhaps most distinguishes the biblical metanarrative from all versions of the modern one is that it is not a narrative of human mastery. What accounts for history in the biblical view is neither human mastery nor meaningless randomness but the freedom and purpose of God and the freedom of humans to obey or to resist God and his purpose. The 'plot' of history is the purpose of God within which there is space also for human freedom. So human achievement is celebrated where it should be and human evil condemned where it should be, but history cannot be mastered and directed by humans. Since history is often manifestly what turns out rather than what humans intend, this seems a more reasonable understanding of history that nevertheless does not abandon history to meaninglessness, but sets hope for ultimate meaning on God.

(2) History is not rationally explicable and calculable in the way that the modern project of mastering and directing it requires. God's purpose is revealed but his workings are often mysterious. In particular, the biblical metanarrative does not explain evil as though it were a problem reason can solve and surmount. God is at work where humans resist evil, but the biblical metanarrative engages evil not with explanation but with hope for God's redemption from, and incalculable overcoming of, evil.

(3) The trans-historical dimension is essential to the biblical metanarrative. In other words, its hope is that God will bring his whole creation to fulfilment in a new creative act that takes it far beyond the potentialities inherent in this world alone. God works within history for the sake of his kingdom that transcends history. This does not render human activity for good in this world pointless, because all that is good in this world will be taken up by God into his new creation. On the other hand, it avoids the progressivist tendency to value activity for good only if it adds to an incremental process of progressive improvement. Even the most

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<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion see Richard Bauckham, 'Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story', in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (eds), *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 38-53.

transient good is worth achieving for its own sake and in the new creation it will not be lost.

(4) Limited to the immanent possibilities of history, the idea of progress can offer hope and a kind of salvation only to the beneficiaries of progress. It offers no hope for the victims of history, the countless numbers whose lives have been short and largely miserable, or for the victims of progress itself (for modern achievements always benefit some at the expense of others). The biblical metanarrative opens a future for the dead, when God 'will wipe away every tear from every eye' (Rev 21:4).

(5) The Gospel at the heart of the biblical metanarrative invites without compelling. This belongs to the very nature of the Gospel and is compromised whenever the church aligns itself too closely with coercive power. That it is more than just someone's truth imposed on others becomes apparent only as the true nature of God becomes apparent to people in a form of conviction that is more than narrowly rational. It is neither the universal truth of the Enlightenment, evident to any rational person, nor a purely subjective truth 'that works for me' but actually lacks transformative power. The biblical metanarrative requires the church's mission to convey *this kind* of truth.

(6) The relationship of the particular to the universal in the biblical metanarrative is important. Again and again the focus is on the particular – Israel, Jesus, specific communities of early Christians – but in such a way as to claim universal relevance for these historical particulars. God's purpose moves always from the particular to the universal, and takes seriously the particularity of every human context into which the Gospel comes. It values the particular in a way that the abstract universality of Enlightenment rationalism does not, but it gives the particular more than the purely local meaning that is all that is available in the postmodern shift to the particular. It is important for the church's mission to embody the biblical way of relating the universal and the particular.

(7) The biblical metanarrative offers a framework for meaningful living in both the individual and the social dimensions. The Bible has many small-scale stories of the kind that would not appear in history written as a grand narrative of advancing progress. But the individual does not have to invent a private meaning of his own. In relationship with the God who values both the individual and the world, individuals and groups can participate in a meaning that opens up their own lives to the wider context of God's purpose for his whole creation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

### **Freedom and Individualism**

In the contemporary West freedom is a hugely potent and alluring word. It is the primary value of modernity and postmodernity alike. But it is a ‘big’ word, with a wide and flexible range of meaning, and any attempt to analyse and engage with contemporary culture needs to reflect seriously on what it has come to mean today.

It was the Enlightenment that first gave freedom the primacy it has come to enjoy, and there is an aspect of the Enlightenment’s legacy that almost all contemporary people would agree is valuable: its insistence on the rights of the individual over against the power of society or the state. Ideas of the dignity of the individual and the fundamental human rights of the individual, which must be universally respected, took their modern form through the Enlightenment, though they have roots in the Christian tradition. Some people now associate talk of human rights with hyper-individualism and the decline of social obligation – rights without responsibilities – but this is the fault, not of the idea of human rights itself, but of the decay of a wider context of values.

However, modern concepts of freedom range much more widely than those that are enshrined in democratic political systems. In the spirit of modernity there is an aspiration to freedom from all limits whatever. The notion that humanity can break free of nature by transcending any limits was an influential factor in the modern scientific-technological project of domination of nature. The ecological crisis has reminded those who attend to it that there simply are limits in the nature of things that cannot be disregarded with impunity. In other words human beings are finite creatures.

The understanding of freedom as an ability, even a right to break out of all restrictions, has also been very damaging when adopted as an idea of individual freedom. Modern individuals came to think that the more freedom they had the better, and that the freedom they wanted was self-determination. For this understanding of freedom other people can only be restrictions on my freedom. Society becomes a sort of contract in which independent individuals promise not to exercise their own freedom to the extent of impinging on other people’s freedom. This makes freedom and community seem incompatible. Obligations to other people restrict freedom. Accordingly, the lowest-common-denominator morality of contemporary western culture puts obligation to others in an entirely negative form: do what you like so long as you don’t harm anyone else. This is what we are left with if freedom for the individual is understood as transcending all limits, and if freedom is detached from a context of other values, as has tended to happen in the contemporary West.

### *Freedom as maximal independence*

Modern individualistic freedom is in full-scale revolt against the given. This means not only that it regards given limits as unwelcome restrictions, but that freedom is conceived as complete independence. That is, it rejects dependence. Freedom is not received from others or enhanced by others. Freedom is an inherent capacity that the individual deploys in an exercise of self-creation. Each has the freedom to choose who they will be.

This kind of freedom as maximal independence makes people unwilling to make long-term commitments or to stick with relationships or situations that are not going well. People want the right to move on. They want to keep their options open. They hate being dependent on others. All these facets of freedom are antithetical to community, which requires such old-fashioned virtues as faithfulness and commitment. Or, to put it another way: maximal independence is incompatible with belonging. Of course, people still want to belong, but they often experience the desire to belong as in considerable tension with freedom. They get divorced and then they regret it. Or they want lifelong loving commitment to a partner, but feel it would be unbearably restrictive actually to marry. Family relationships are obvious victims of freedom as maximal independence, but neighbourliness is another.

### *Freedom as consumer choice*

Alongside freedom as maximal independence the other dominant aspect of freedom in contemporary western culture is the freedom of consumer choice. Having choice can certainly be a good thing, but we may well wonder whether our society has not gone about as far as it can in multiplying choice in every aspect of life that can be bought. Consumer choice can be a means of commercial manipulation cloaking itself in the illusion of freedom. But probably the worst manifestation of a consumer culture occurs when the model of consumer choice is applied to things other than those we purchase, such as choosing our moral values.

The effect of a culture that overvalues consumer choice is to give the impression that freedom is really enhanced by the mere multiplication of choices, regardless of how we exercise choice. What matters is having the choice, not making the right choice, not choosing well or rightly. This is one of the points where one may fear that freedom is becoming the only value. Distinguishing good choices and bad choices is serious when there are accepted notions of good and bad. In a culture that socializes people into a range of values and virtues that constitute good life, the main value of choice will be that it enables the making of good choices. Freedom is a faculty and choice an opportunity *for the good*. But without a widely accepted range of values and virtues, choice becomes the good that is valued in and of itself.

### *Freedom and consumer choice*

Usually regarded as a postmodern development of freedom is the notion that truth is a matter of wholly subjective choice. If this really does mean that any choice of values is equally valid, then it makes freedom the only necessary and common value. Few people really go to such an extreme. But relativism gains what strength it has from the value placed on freedom as mere individual choice as well as from the pluralism of contemporary western society. Where a wide variety of cultural and religious traditions co-exist, it seems difficult to respect difference without treating the differences as matters of indifference. The real problem does not lie in pluralism itself. It is within particular traditions that values are fostered and people learn to practise them. The problem arises as an increasingly secular society encourages people to stand outside all such particular traditions. Modernism could rely on supposedly self-evident universal values that exist independently of particular traditions. But when, in a postmodern perspective, these Enlightenment values come to be seen as themselves just one tradition among others, it is up to the individual to shop around for the values they prefer. Then freedom is in danger of becoming the one value that always trumps others.

### *A biblical-Christian understanding of freedom*

In the contemporary context it is vital that Christians develop a positive understanding of freedom that provides a real alternative to the highly problematic dominant one. Some key ingredients would be:

(1) The Bible does value freedom *from* oppressive conditions or forces of all kinds. God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. Jesus delivered people from demonic oppression, crippling physical impairments and social isolation. But the New Testament is also notable for its profound diagnosis of humans as in bondage to sin (e.g. Jn 8:34; Rom 6:6). Liberation from external constraints is not enough. There are compulsions and addictions to evil from which one must be freed.

(2) Freedom is finite. It has to be exercised within given limits. Independence is possible only in dependence on God and within the complex web of interdependence that is human society. Both for the sake of community and for the sake of the ecological health of the planet, recovering a notion of limits is vital.

(3) Freedom is not merely *from*, but also *for*. It is for the living of the good life for which humans are created. In particular, freedom is fulfilled in service to God and to others. It is significant that the Bible's understanding of freedom requires this paradox (e.g. 1 Pet 2:16; Rom 6:16-19). Unlike the compulsion to sin from which Christ sets believers free, the service for which they are freed is the willing commitment of love. Indeed, freedom is properly conceived and exercised only in relationship to love, love which both grants freedom and makes service an expression of freedom. True

freedom thrives, not in isolation, as independence of others and as choice of values for oneself, but in reciprocity with others (God, other humans and other creatures) and within a framework of normative values.<sup>5</sup>

### Consumerism and Excess

Over the last half-century western societies have achieved a degree of affluence that is wholly unparalleled in history. Not everyone has benefited: in Britain and the United States the gap between the poorest and the wealthiest is actually increasing. But most people enjoy a material 'standard of living' of which their forebears, even in the early twentieth century, never dreamed. Few would deny that some real benefits have accompanied this. But it has also been accompanied by a consumerist culture in which buying and consuming what can be bought (and this can include experiences as well as things) dominate much of life. This is more than old-fashioned greed. Consumerism is an ideology promoted by commercial interests in such a way that it permeates the cultural context that forms people's desires and values. We have already noted the progressivist expectation of constant economic growth and the understanding of freedom as consumer choice. These are vital supports for an economic system that depends on constantly creating new 'wants' and frequently turning them into 'needs' for what has never before been considered necessary. The presupposition is that human needs are unlimited and human desires are insatiable.

There are many signs that western society is suffering a damaging addiction to excess. We can no longer distinguish 'enough' from excess. Yet psychological studies have shown that, although people's level of income does increase their sense of wellbeing up to a point, beyond that point it makes no difference at all. The significance of such 'happiness studies' must be treated with caution. Happiness can refer to everything from shallow hedonism to the conviction that a considerable sacrifice is worth making because it is the right thing to do. A Christian view of the good life cannot take for granted that happiness, however understood, is the goal of life. But whatever we think about happiness, the evidence of serious damage caused by the pursuit of excess is worrying. Depression, chronic anxiety and other kinds of mental illness, often caused by excessive stress, have greatly increased, as has obesity. For many people, coping with the recent economic downturn has been much more difficult than it need be because both their way of life and their goals in life depend on a level of affluence that, by any standards other than those of the contemporary West,

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<sup>5</sup> For Christian critiques of consumerism, see John Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society* (New York: Orbis, 1981; new edition 2006); Craig Bartholomew and Thorsten Moritz (eds), *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

is very high. If the downturn continues, western society's inability to distinguish needs from wants and its neglect of goods that cannot be bought will need urgent revision. Of course, this is not to deny that there is genuine hardship among those on very low incomes, but our society's addiction to excess impedes the kind of sharing of resources that is needed to protect the vulnerable.

The biblical category for such an addiction to excess is idolatry. It fits well into the key characteristics of idolatry: (1) Idolatry consists in treating something relative as though it were absolute. It is to give to creatures the devotion that belongs only to God. In the case of consumerism, the material goods may often be just that, material *goods*, but when buying and consuming them become overriding values, unconstrained by other kinds of good, not subordinated to any higher aims or values, then they become idols and human life that treats them in that way is debased.

(2) Consumerism is idolatrous in the way that it treats human desires for what can be bought as unlimited. In the ordinary way of things human desires for what money can buy can be relatively quickly satiated. We do not really want to over-eat to the point of getting ill. We can't watch more than one television programme at the same time. But there is also human desire for more than what money can buy: the desire for nothing less than God. Consumerism distracts the insatiable desire for God into an insatiable desire for the products of the market. Because the market offers endlessly new objects of consumption it can channel the human search for fulfilment into a path on which people may take a long time to realise that fulfilment is not to be found in what can be bought.

(3) Idolatry is enslaving. Because the object of devotion is not the true God, in whose worship and service true human fulfilment is to be found, but an object unworthy of such devotion, the result is compulsions and addictions that spoil human life. In consumerism the drive to possess and to consume dominates lives. People are food junkies, fashion addicts, chocoholics, captive to computer games or television, not to mention binge drinking, and not to mention addiction to shopping as such. Some are addicted to immediate gratification, of which the consequence is often debt. Others are held captive to future goals that must be purchased – a bigger house, a good pension, that extravagant holiday – such that the present must be sacrificed for them. Either way real freedom is reduced.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on some key features of contemporary western society: its dominant metanarrative of progress, freedom as its dominant value, and the ideology of consumerism that permeates it. It has also suggested how the Bible – its metanarrative, its understanding of freedom, and its critique of idolatry – can resource a critical assessment of these

features and inform the church's life and mission within this particular context.



# THE BIBLE IN MISSION IN THE ISLAMIC CONTEXT

Kenneth Thomas

## Introduction

Why do Christians want to introduce the Bible to others? The basic answer is given in an *Edinburgh 2010* statement: ‘The Christian faith has a foundational text: the Bible. The reading, interpreting and dissemination of this text lie at the core of the missionary task.’<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to suggest how the Bible, as the Christian’s foundational text, may be shared with others who are Muslims as a witness and as a means toward peace and understanding.

The Christian community makes the Bible available in varied ways that range from sharing its contents with a friend to impersonally selling it in a public bookstore. In any of these cases, when the recipient is a Muslim, there are some particular challenges that need attention.

We need to begin by recognizing the human tendency to stereotype persons who are in some way unknown to us. At the simplest level, we can ask: Do the persons with whom we wish to share live in their traditional homeland or are they part of a diaspora community? In social location, are they from a majority population or a minority? Are they members of a community whose general orientation is open to relationships with others or are they opposed to any kind of active contact with non-members of their community?<sup>2</sup>

Any conviction that the West and Islam are at war tends to reduce each to some oversimplified essence. The term, ‘clash of civilizations’, as articulated by the American scholar, Samuel P. Huntington,<sup>3</sup> originally referred to power struggles between a variety of cultures but has been popularized with an almost exclusive emphasis on religion. In this view of a ‘clash’, the West can become rather questionably identified with one’s own understanding of what it means to be Christian, and Islam becomes identified with some stereotypical picture of all Muslims.

Both Muslims and Christians need to avoid making invidious comparisons about one another, setting the ideals of their own religious

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Fresh Perspectives on Christian Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University, 2010), 19.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter will not deal with the more technical differences in belief between Shi’ites and Sunnis, or other groupings. In speaking of Muslims, it addresses possibilities for interactions with those Muslims who will choose to relate to Christians.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

community over against the worst practices of the other. Such polarizing views are exacerbated by lack of ordinary human contacts and personal relationships. It is important for there to be more intentional opportunities for Christians and Muslims to live and work and share together.

### **1. Jesus and People of Other Faiths**

Christians profess to orient their lives by the example of the life of Jesus. Thus it is important for them to give attention to Jesus' significant contacts and relationships with people outside his own community. Although Jesus was Jewish and understood himself to be sent primarily to the people of Israel, he related to non-Jews as well. Unfortunately, it is not always very obvious when this was occurring. Whenever Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee into the Decapolis, he was going among non-Jewish people (Mk 4:35–5:20; 7:31–8:10 and parallels). In addition, he went to Tyre (Mk 7:24–30; Matt 15:21–28) and Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27–9:1 and parallels), which were areas outside Israel. A Roman officer in Capernaum begged him to heal his servant (Matt 8:5–13). There is also an account of some Greeks who came to Jerusalem seeking Jesus (Jn 12:20–26). He had contacts with Samaritans, considered by the Jews to be of another faith, as well (Luke 9:52–56; 17:11–19; John 4). And Jesus referred to non-Jews and Samaritans in his teachings (Matt 5:47; Luke 10:30–37).

In all these contacts of Jesus with people of other faiths and in his references to them in his teachings, what do we observe? We see Jesus carrying on the same ministry of healing and meeting human needs with them as with the Jews. He healed the Gerasene demoniac, the girl with an evil spirit who was the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman, and a Samaritan leper. He fed the 4,000 in the non-Jewish territory of the Decapolis (a parallel to the feeding of 5,000 in Jewish territory). We do not see him turning down any request from a person of another faith. The account of the Syro-Phoenician woman might seem to be an exception, but Jesus appears to be testing the attitude of his disciples in that incident, for he did heal the woman's daughter and commended the response of the woman (Mk 7:29). In fact, Jesus was very positive towards those 'outsiders' who came to him for help. He said of the Roman officer, 'I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel' (Matt 8:10). To the Samaritan who returned to thank him after being healed of an incurable skin disease, Jesus said, 'Your faith has made you well' (Luke 17:19). Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman who came to the well (Jn 4:26). He told the Greeks who came to see him that God will honour 'whoever serves me' (Jn 12:26). In his teaching he used a Samaritan as an example of one who acted as a neighbour by showing mercy to a stranger in need (Luke 10:30–35). Jesus is responsive to the needs of people of other faiths, recognizes their positive characteristics, and commends their virtuous actions.

These accounts in the life and teaching of Jesus are important for both Christians and Muslims to consider in their relations with one another. Among Muslims there is an interest in the person of Jesus, who is considered by Muslims to be one of the prophets and is an important figure in the Qur'an. Christians and Muslims can begin talking about him through looking at his life rather than discussing Christology.

## 2. Views of the Bible

Muslims do face difficulties when hearing and reading the Bible. They consider the Qur'an to have superseded the Bible, which includes all of what they call the 'Previous Scriptures'. They have also been taught that the original text of the Bible has been corrupted. In addition, the Qur'an attributes to Christians false doctrines about God's having a son and about the 'Trinity'. Muslims are frequently puzzled by the existence of four Gospels from four authors when they believe that the *injl* ('The Gospel') was given to Jesus.

The Bible is a form of scripture and revelation different from the Qur'an, and the Bible and the Qur'an function differently in their two communities. Muslims believe the Qur'an to be the very Word of God dictated by God to Muhammad. According to Islamic belief, God spoke directly to Muhammad in Arabic and revealed to him the exact words written in the Qur'an. Muslims expect to find in the Bible the words of God as they are found in the Qur'an. The definitive Word of God for Christians is Jesus, the incarnate Word: 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us' (Jn 1:14 NRSV). Christians also refer to the Bible as the Word of God because they believe that it contains the revelation of God mediated through the prophets and apostles and is a witness to the Word of God incarnate, Jesus Christ. Christians interpret the whole of the Bible in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Bible describes how God was revealed in the life and experiences of the people of Israel, through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, and in the experiences of his disciples and the church. The Bible provides detailed and coherent historical narratives that are not found in the Qur'an. A Muslim looks to the *hadith* (reports by contemporaries of the Prophet) for the historical context of the life of Muhammad and the Islamic community.

It is significant that in 2007 138 Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim leaders and scholars from 44 countries invited Christians 'to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is most essential to our faith and practice: the *Two Commandments* of love'. In *A Common Word between Us and You* the authors state that

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<sup>4</sup> Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life* (Malen, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 19, 26; Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 78.

The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity.

Whilst Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions – and whilst there is no minimising some of their formal differences – it is clear that the *Two Greatest Commandments* are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur'an, the Torah and the New Testament. What prefaces the Two Commandments in the Torah and the New Testament, and what they arise out of, is the Unity of God – that there is only one God. . . Thus the Unity of God, love of Him, and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that *A Common Word* uses texts from the Bible as a basis for its invitation and appeal for peace and understanding. This is a demonstration of Muslims' respect for the Bible and recognition of common religious concerns. The scholars' interpretation of the biblical texts, along with parallel texts from the Qur'an, exhibits a deep knowledge of the Bible. By November 2012 the *Common Word* invitation had resulted in seventy official responses from Christian denominations, councils of churches, and scholars, in addition to fostering consultations, seminars, and publications.<sup>6</sup> While not all Muslims may accept the view of the Bible described in the document, it opens the door for a discussion of the Bible with Muslims represented by the signatories and perhaps with others who hold different views.

It is significant that the English word 'God' is used throughout the English version of the document. The reading of the Bible by Muslims can be encouraged by recognizing that the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur'an are one and the same. Many words are used for 'God' in the translation of the Bible into different languages. The word for God in Arabic is *Allah* and was used by Arabic-speaking Christians from before the time of Muhammad; it continues to be used regularly in Arabic translations of the Bible. Muhammad had no difficulty naming the God of the stories of the Old Testament prophets as *Allah*. Dr. Ingrid Mattson, a Muslim scholar, writes:

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... in the Qur'an the primary name used to refer to God is 'Allah'. The Arabic word *Allah* is a cognate of the Hebrew *Elohim* and the Syrian and Aramaic *Alaha*. In English, the word that signifies this eternal, self-sufficient creator is

<sup>5</sup> *A Common Word between Us and You* (Amman, Jordan: *The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Jordan, 2007 C.E., 1428 A.H.*).

<sup>6</sup> 'A Common Word', n.p. [cited 21 February 2013]. Online: <http://www.acommonword.com/>

‘God’, and this is the term into which Muslim theologians therefore do not hesitate to translate the Arabic *Allah*.<sup>7</sup>

Jews, Christians, and Muslims all affirm that there is only one God. That one God may be known by the name *Elohim*, *Theos*, *Allah*, *Gott*, *Dios*, or *Khoda*. We can help Muslims who read ‘God’ in the Bible to know that Jews and Christians are using that name to refer to the one God that they call *Allah*. We should not confuse the issue by arguing about whether we are referring to different ‘gods’ in the way that Marcion, the second century Christian heretic, did when he asserted that the ‘gods’ of the Old and New Testaments are different gods.

### 3. Sharing the Bible

The Edinburgh 2010 Common Call states that

... we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.<sup>8</sup>

This approach denotes openness and transparency. There is no reason to be ashamed of the Bible. It is possible for the Bible to be part of the conversation between Christians and Muslims because Muslims recognize the *Tawrat*/Torah, *Zabur*/Psalms, and *Injil*/Gospel to be scripture, that is, a Word of God. The Bible itself teaches us to be honest and ethical in all our dealings. In spite of every temptation to do so, to resort to subterfuge and illegal means to make the Bible available is to contradict and undermine the very message we are seeking to communicate. When severely restricted or facing legal prohibitions against various means of making the Bible available, Christians may be challenged to share their knowledge of the Bible orally and through personal relationships. Handwritten, digital, and various other technological forms for sharing texts may also exist. It is important that whatever is done be perceived and recognized as consistent with the message of the Bible.

#### A. Sharing through Interfaith Cooperation and Activities

It is most desirable to be able to share the Bible in an interfaith context where both Christians and Muslims can learn from one another while being faithful to their own convictions.

<sup>7</sup> Mattson, *The Story of the Qur’an*, 36. See also Kenneth J. Thomas, ‘Allah in Translations of the Bible’, *The Bible Translator: Technical Papers* 52 (2001), 301–305; Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 81–82.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Edinburgh 2010: Common Call’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35 (2011), 3.

In response to *A Common Word between Us and You*, a number of interfaith seminars and dialogues have been held to discuss the statement's content. Venues included the Vatican, Yale University, Cambridge University, Georgetown University, the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (in Amman, Jordan), the World Council of Churches, the University of Oxford, and the University of London. For many years the World Council of Churches and other organizations have sponsored international Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogues. Such meetings also take place at national and local levels.

Earlier, between 1978 and 1982, a particularly fruitful Christian-Muslim interfaith project was undertaken by the Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien (Muslim-Christian Research Group). These scholars specifically studied the Bible and the Qur'an to find common ground and to look at each scripture through the faith of its own community. It faced directly the problematic issues and in the end made a series of suggestions about how to read and approach the scriptures of the other faith community.<sup>9</sup>

Such interfaith studies and conversations are not confined to scholars. In some places Muslim and Christian children in classroom settings also study the Bible and the Qur'an together. For example, Francien van Overbeeke-Rippen prepared a school textbook for religious education in the Netherlands with parallel passages from the Bible and Qur'an about Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Saul, David, John the Baptist, and Jesus; its study guide helps teachers to lead students through discussion of the common and distinctive elements in their own and the others' stories. The book was later translated into English and published with a new study guide appropriate for American children meeting together in various situations.<sup>10</sup>

A contemporary interfaith sharing of scriptures has come through the Scripture Reasoning program, with groups in the UK and the USA. Jews, Christians and Muslims meet in small groups to read and discuss their sacred texts. The guidelines for the groups are very clear: keep to the texts, give space to others' readings, be open, and be honest about the things you don't know or understand. You may not agree with other people's interpretations, but it is acceptable to say so – respectfully.<sup>11</sup>

Working together on translations of the Bible is an especially rewarding way for Christians and Muslims to come together in a common task. In South Asia and Africa, Bible translators have worked with Muslims who have brought to the task their understanding of Islam and Muslim use of

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<sup>9</sup> Muslim-Christian Research Group, *The Challenge of the Scriptures: The Bible and the Qur'an* (trans. Stuart E. Brown; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Francien van Overbeeke-Rippen, *Ibrahiem en Abraham: Koran en Bijbel verteld voor kinderen* (3d ed.; Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2000); translated by the author as *Abraham and Ibrahim: The Bible and the Qur'an Told to Children with a Study Guide* by Kenneth and Margaret Thomas (Louisville, KY: Bridge Resources, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Information and contact information can be found at <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/> and <http://www.scripturalreasoning.com/>.

religious terminology. They have worked as full team members on translation projects and have been fully committed to having the most accurate and literarily acceptable translations possible. The history of Bible translations in the Middle East includes instances of such procedures in that region since at least the seventeenth century.

Another kind of Muslim-Christian cooperation on a translation project occurred when a translator was rendering stories from the Gospels into a local South Asian language that previously had no printed literature. As part of the testing of the translation for comprehension, a local imam who was a native speaker of this language was invited to meet with the translator to hear a reading of the stories. The situation allowed for real mutual communication in which the imam chose to respond to the reading of each biblical story by telling a story from Islamic tradition that had some equivalent teaching. In this mutual interchange, the translator had a gauge for judging whether the stories in the new translation were understandable.

Dialogues and joint projects serve as bridge-building experiences that help the participants to understand each other and, in the process, to appreciate the Bible. It becomes evident, though, that Islam and Christianity have two different worldviews; while there is a historical relationship between the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths, they have had distinctive developments. To present only their differences is to deny their common heritage and shared beliefs. Likewise, to present only their commonalities is to deny the distinctive aspects of their beliefs. The introduction and study of the Bible needs to maintain a balance between the historical continuity between the Christian and Islamic faiths and the discontinuity between their views and scriptures.<sup>12</sup>

### *B. Sharing through Storytelling*

Both Muslims and Christians historically belong to storytelling communities, and storytelling can be a direct means for them to share both their common heritage and their distinctive views of God, the world and human life. The Bible can be viewed as a story of faith that comes out of the experiences of ‘two communities, Israel and the church, struggling to understand and put into practice their commitment to God’, to use the words of Wesley Ariarajah.<sup>13</sup> Copyrighted Material

While Muslims may wish to tell stories from their non-Qur’anic Traditions, it is the references to common stories that are found in both the Bible and the Qur’an that frequently capture the attention of Christians. In pre-Islamic Arabia, before there was a written Arabic literature and before

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth J. Thomas, ‘Hermeneutic in Relation to People of Other Faiths’, *United Bible Societies Bulletin*, 140/141 (1985), 42.

<sup>13</sup> Wesley Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 59.

the revelation of the Qur'an, Jews and Christians can be assumed to have orally told stories from the biblical tradition. Ingrid Mattson writes, 'We do not know if the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslims knew of these biblical stories, but the Qur'an seems to assume that the listener has general knowledge of the figures involved.' The source of this knowledge may extend back to the Jewish and Christian communities, she says, or (as she thinks is likely) may involve oral traditions of the Arabs themselves.<sup>14</sup> In any case, these mutually shared stories, as found in the Qur'an, contain interpretations and emphases that vary from the biblical accounts. This should not surprise the Christian, since repeated stories within the biblical text itself may be set in different interpretational contexts.

Storytelling as a form of communication stimulates thought, initiates discussion, and creates community. This has long been true for the Jewish community as they tell about their experiences with God and the origins of their faith. Storytelling is still a cultural tradition and a primary means of communication in many parts of the world, and the oral recounting of the stories of the Bible continues unabated. Among Christians, the stories about Jesus and those told by him are a particularly important part of this storytelling.

A retired Christian evangelist in an Islamic country of the Middle East describes frequent visits to teashops where he would sit and tell stories from the Bible. These evoked lively discussions among the hearers, who would debate what was meant by what they had heard. Similarly, a translator of a recent version of the Bible in a language primarily spoken by Muslims tested whether his draft translation was comprehensible by going to a public park and reading it to the people sitting there. He discovered that his listeners found the stories entertaining and thought provoking. They were attracted by the oral rendition and entered into discussion with one another about its significance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that stories are a non-confrontational, non-controversial, and non-objectionable form of communication even when the narratives of two communities of storytellers may introduce ideas and views at some variance with one another.

### *C. Sharing through Selected Portions of the Bible*

The Bible strikes most first-time readers as a big, dense volume. Consequently, portions of the Bible, such as the Gospel of John or the Psalms, have traditionally been offered as starting points for new readers. Even these individual books involve large segments of reading. Still smaller selections that contain biblical passages within their original context are needed. In considering what would be appropriate shorter texts to offer Muslims – portions that would be a bridge with what is familiar to

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<sup>14</sup> Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 192–3.

them and provide an introduction to biblical concepts – the United Bible Societies developed a series of brief selections that have been translated into various languages and made available in a number of countries through local Bible societies and Christian organizations. These selections included the stories of Old Testament figures referred to in the Qur'an but about whom very little information is given there, figures considered to be 'prophets' by Muslims though they are called 'patriarchs' and 'kings' by Christians.

The series includes narratives of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Job, Jonah, and Daniel. For each figure, passages from both the Old and New Testaments have been chosen to tell the story and also introduce a particular biblical concept related to it. The biblical concepts within the series include the nature of sin, repentance, faith, God working for good, God's deliverance, God's kingdom, and God's love and mercy. These have been presented without comment, allowing the Bible to speak for itself and be its own interpreter.

Muslims understand prophets to be persons who were called by God to give a message in the form of a 'book'. The task of the prophets was to warn people of the coming wrath of God and to admonish them to submit to God and live righteous lives; generally that message was rejected by the people to whom it was preached. According to Islamic tradition, the prophets are considered sinless. By contrast, the Old Testament figures in the selection series are presented as men who, despite their clear human failings, were used by God to become leaders of a community of faith in God. The biblical portions include texts that speak about their sins and show that they sought forgiveness for these sins.

Christians and Muslims share many social concerns. The teachings of the Bible are relevant to many pressing contemporary social and economic questions that involve such issues as freedom, justice, reconciliation, and peace. For example, the Sermon on the Mount, passages from the biblical prophets and the Epistle of James speak particularly and directly to social and economic injustice. The Muslim-Christian Research Group concluded,

Christian scripture can be of interest to Muslims. They can find in it an emphasis on certain values that are certainly not absent from the Qur'an, but are insufficiently cultivated in Muslim circles, like love, forgiveness, the rejection of pharisaism, and the concern with the spirit rather than the letter of the law.<sup>15</sup>

Bishop Michael Nazir Ali, a Pakistani then serving in his own country, reported in 1983 that Christians had been able to prepare a response to Pakistan's draft laws on 'retaliation and compensation' by presenting 'the biblical (Old Testament) view of retaliation (along with its qualifications and restrictions) ... followed by Jesus' prohibition of retaliation as commonly understood and his positive teaching of retaliating with good for

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<sup>15</sup> Muslim-Christian Research Group, *The Challenge of the Scriptures*, 85.

evil'.<sup>16</sup> The biblical view stood in sharp contrast to the Islamic view as construed in the drafts. The laws were eventually revised in 1990, but in accordance with the Islamic *shariat*.

The Bible Societies have developed and published selections of biblical texts to address social concerns that Christians and Muslims share. Such thematic booklets have helped to enable discussion (which can also occur through other means by which Christians and Muslims share the reading of social justice-related biblical texts). One such booklet was *Life in All Its Fullness: The Word of God & Human Rights*; it included biblical passages and additional study material.<sup>17</sup> First published in English, it was later picked up for translation into a number of languages. Another Bible society product is a series, *Searching for Peace*. This set includes six selections of Old and New Testament texts with the titles, *Our Need for Peace*; *Peace with One Another*; *Peace in the Family*; *Peace in Society*; *Peace with Nature*; *Isa Masih, the Prince of Peace*.

#### D. Sharing through Study Materials

There are Muslims who are interested in a more serious study of the Bible but find it challenging to read without appropriate introductions, notes, and helps. When Muslims read the Bible they are not reading something its original writers were addressing to them. As R S Sugirtharajah reminds us, 'Present-day Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and the adherents of other faiths did not figure in the theological reflection of the biblical writers.'<sup>18</sup> We need to be aware of what people see when they enter into the worldview of a faith community other than their own.

One United Bible Societies project involved preparing notes for all the books of the New Testament and parts of the Hebrew Bible that are relevant to the questions and concerns that both Christians and Muslims have when living together in an Islamic context. All information in the notes is intended to be non-sectarian and objective in presenting the best scholarly information available. The simple notes were prepared over a ten-year period by a committee of Translation Consultants of the United Bible Societies and reviewed and tested by Christian and Muslim groups in a number of countries. The notes include information about the content,

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<sup>16</sup> Michael J. Nazir Ali, 'The Place of Holy Scripture in Muslim-Christian Encounter' in *Building Bridges: Papers presented to a Bible Society Consultation in Lahore (Pakistan) during November 1983* (Lahore, Pakistan: Pakistan Bible Society, n.d.), 29f.

<sup>17</sup> Published for the Human Rights Office, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA by the American Bible Society, New York, 1992.

<sup>18</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, 'Multi-Faith Hermeneutics on Using the Christian Scriptures: Some Reflections', in Israel Selvanayagam (ed), *Biblical Insights on Inter-Faith Dialogue* (Bangalore: The Board for Theological Text-book Programme of South Asia, 1995), 31.

people, places, events, customs, religious background, and related passages in the Old and New Testaments. As much as possible, the goal is to let the Bible speak in its own voice. The study edition was first published in 2001 in English by the United Bible Societies<sup>19</sup> and in Urdu by the Pakistan Bible Society.<sup>20</sup> At that time it was the first study Bible of any kind published in the Urdu language and was warmly welcomed by both Christians and Muslims as a resource for the study of the Bible. It has since been published in a number of languages in countries from Indonesia to Egypt and from Kazakhstan to Nigeria. It has been used by individuals, Christian and Muslim study groups, and interfaith dialogue groups.

#### IV. Witness of the Bible

‘Ultimately’, Bishop Kenneth Cragg writes, ‘all presentation of Christ and of God must hinge upon the biblical and, particularly, the New Testament expression.’<sup>21</sup> There, Christians affirm, God speaks within the context of our human life and in a language that is open to our understanding. Lamin Sanneh describes this by saying that ‘there was nothing God wanted to say that could not be said in simple everyday language’.<sup>22</sup> It is the Christian conviction that the Bible is capable of proving itself; for those who read it seriously, we are confident that it is self-authenticating because the Holy Spirit, the Teacher, will reveal its meaning.<sup>23</sup> Our affirmation is that the Bible itself is a witness to God and God’s revelation and action in the world. When the Bible is shared in a spirit of peace and mutual understanding – in a form that is non-confrontational – this is a witness to the teaching of the Bible itself. The Bible in combination with the life of Christian community is a witness to Christian faith.

It is of course this witness that Christians covet for Muslims. Christians who practise invitational evangelism trust that the witness of their Scriptures will be winsome. Christians who share the Bible as a part of a dialogical exchange offer what is their defining foundation, expecting also to listen carefully to the witness of the Muslim in the hope that God may

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<sup>19</sup> *The Holy Gospel also called The New Testament: Study Edition* (Brisbane, Australia: United Bible Societies, Asia Pacific Region, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> *Enjil Moqadas* [The New Testament (Study Notes Edition)] (Anarkali, Lahore, Pakistan: The Pakistan Bible Society, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 275.

<sup>22</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 98.

<sup>23</sup> Muslims also claim that the Qur’an is self-authenticating: “The proof that the Qur’an was the word of God devolved upon the Qur’an itself. It constituted its own proof by its inimitability, its superior beauty, and its moving appeal which no human composition can match.” Isma’il R. and Lois Lamya al Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 103.

speak to each through the interchange. Christians engaged in action together with Muslims for the common good in society may offer the Bible as a means of explaining the motivation by which they live. In all these cases, the Christian conviction is that God speaks through the Bible and guides the listener in response to it.



# THE BIBLE IN CHRISTIAN MISSION AMONG THE HINDUS: THE COMMUNICABILITY AND RECEPTION OF THE BIBLE IN THE HINDU CONTEXT

Lalsangkima Pachuau

In attempting to articulate a distinct way of reading the Bible in the Hindu-dominated context of India, an Indian Bible scholar George M. Soares-Prabhu delineates two prevailing ways of reading the Bible. He calls them 'religious reading' and 'social reading'.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the former pursues 'a dialogue with the traditional Indian religiosity', the second (social reading) reads the Bible 'in the light of a liberating praxis among the socially oppressed'. The rise of Dalit liberation theology<sup>2</sup> in India since the 1980s has elevated and popularized the social reading method almost to the detriment of religious reading. But Christian theologians associated with the Hindu community of India as well as Hindu scholars studying the Bible have been applying the religious reading method. This essay is on the 'religious reading' of the Bible as it applies to the Hindu community. Analyzing the way Hindus and Christians of Hindu background received and interpreted the Bible in India, we try to understand how the Bible is communicated to the Hindus in Christian missionary practice.

We may cluster the positive responses of Hindus to the Christian message until the present time under three broad groups. First, there are baptised converts who accepted Christianity with sincere commitment, even to the point of being ostracized by their families and communities. Secondly, there is a growing group who accept the sole lordship of Jesus Christ without being socially converted to Christianity. This group has now been called *Christ-bhaktas* (or 'Hindu devotees of Christ').<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, there

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<sup>1</sup> George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., 'Towards an Indian Interpretation of the Bible', in Isaac Padinjarekuttu (ed), *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today: Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.* Vol. 1. (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999), 216.

<sup>2</sup> Both describing and prescribing liberation of the 'outcastes' of Hinduism from their oppressive condition, Dalit theology is an Indian liberation theology. Dalits (often referred to as 'outcastes' or 'untouchables' because of 'impurity') comprise the largest group within the Indian Christian community.

<sup>3</sup> For a study of this movement in South India, see Dasan Jeyaraj, *Followers of Christ Outside the Church in Chennai, India: A Socio-Historical Study of a Non-Church Movement* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Academic, 2010). For a study in North India, see Vinod John, 'Believing without Belonging?: Religious Beliefs and Social Belonging of Hindu Devotees of Christ, A Case Study in Varanasi' (Ph.D. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, 2013).

are those who responded to the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Bible positively but selectively as Hindus and from Hindu viewpoints. To delineate how the Christian teaching of the Bible is most commonly understood by Hindus who responded to the Bible and its teaching, we trace their encounter with the Bible in history, together with the accompanying scriptural concepts in Hinduism.

Anyone who has made a comparative study of Hinduism and Christianity would not miss the striking differences between the two religions. From their basic presuppositions about existence to the general worldviews they hold, Hinduism and Christianity operate on different planes. Keith Ward pointed out what is different about the Hindu traditions when he compared Hinduism with the Semitic religious traditions in which 'prophets possessed by the Word of God' serve as intermediaries between human beings and the personal, morally just and merciful God.. 'There were no prophets who felt challenged by a morally judging God and who issued condemnations on oppressive social systems. There was no development of belief in a historical purpose or goal. And there was little sense of one creator God who stood apart from creation, as a being quite different in kind...'<sup>4</sup> For Christians, the Bible presupposes a linear development of the universe and tells the story of how the entire creation came into being; it then explains how God has been dealing with human beings in history. Hinduism, on the other hand, views the existence of the universe to be without a beginning and presupposes cycles of creation going back through infinite time. Although Hinduism has been thought of mostly in the religious category, since it does not hold a strict sacred-profane separation or a religious-secular dichotomy and because it holds no unifying and universal religious creed, it can be more fittingly described as a system of living, or a civilization, rather than a religion.

Given these significant differences, how do we meaningfully communicate Christian beliefs to our Hindu brothers and sisters? This brief study intends to analyze the meaningful communicability of the scriptural message between Hinduism and Christianity by looking into their understandings of their scriptures. The intention is missional in that it seeks to help Christian communicators to bring the biblical message home to their Hindu friends. Meaningful communication of this kind can happen only when one understands the basic Hindu teachings and their concept of scriptures. Our focus is thus on Hindu scriptural interpretation and the Hindu 'reception' of Christ and Christianity, from which we try to glean meaningful implications for Christians.

Although the intention is to chart ways of communicating their basic messages meaningfully between the two religions, such a study can be done only within the larger context of the 'meeting' between the two religions. As some studies on the history of this encounter have clarified, frank and

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 135.

honest dialogue has been hard to achieve. On the other hand, it seems plausible to argue that the first serious Christian theological encounter with other religions in modern times happened with the Hindus in India. As we will see, the relativistic nature of Hinduism provides room for Hindus to consider seriously the message of Christians from their own Hindu viewpoint. Thus, the modern theology of religions may be claimed to have begun with the Hindu encounter with Christ and Christianity in India.

### Scriptures and their Interpretations in Hinduism

‘No other living tradition can claim scriptures as numerous or as ancient as Hinduism; none of them can boast unbroken tradition as faithfully preserved as the Hindu tradition,’<sup>5</sup> wrote Klaus Klostermaier. How do Hindus conceive of their own scriptures, and how does that understanding compare to that of Christianity? Hindus classified their scriptures (or sacred authoritative literature) into two main categories: *śruti* (‘that which has been heard’ or ‘seen’) and *smṛti* (‘that which has been remembered’). Because of the human agency in the second and the completeness of divine work in the first, *śruti* is considered more authoritative, while the open-ended *smṛti* occupies a secondary position. This, however, is not to ignore the popularity and efficacy of *smṛti*. As Howard Coward has rightly observed, ‘It is the *smṛti* scriptures that in practice evoke spiritual experience for the vast majority of Hindus.’<sup>6</sup>

*Śruti* (‘that which is heard’) is considered identical with the Veda (literally “knowledge”).<sup>7</sup> The Veda is composed of four collections or books (*R̥g*, *Sāma*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*). Each of these collections has four parts (*Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*). These sectional parts are also considered to be chronological in order. ‘Modern scholars ... consider the *Sahita* section of *Rig Veda*, dated 1200 B.C.E. or earlier, to be the oldest, and the *Upanishads*, dated 500 B.C.E. or earlier, to be the latest.’<sup>8</sup> As those ‘heard’ or ‘seen’ by ancient sages, the Veda is given highest authority as ‘revelation’ from God. As the revealed word of God, the Vedas are ‘*apauruseya*, without human origin,’ and thus, ‘free from human fallibility and limitation.’<sup>9</sup> Yet in comparison to the concept of scripture in other religions, the Hindus do not understand the Vedas

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<sup>5</sup> Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, third ed. (Albany, NY: State University New York Press, 2007), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Coward, ‘The Experience of Scripture in Hinduism and Christianity,’ in Harold Coward (ed), *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 233.

<sup>7</sup> Klaus K. Klostermaier, *Hindu Writings: A Short Introduction to the Sources* (Oxford: One World, 2000), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Anantanand Rambachan, ‘Hinduism,’ in Harold Coward (ed), *Experiencing Scripture in World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 89.

<sup>9</sup> *Experiencing Scripture in World Religions*, 91.

dogmatically. 'The four Vedas are neither sacred history nor doctrine; they are the instruments for the performance of *yajna*, the sacrifice, which stood at the centre of Vedic religion.'<sup>10</sup>

*Smṛti*, often called 'tradition,' is secondary in authority. It is the sacred literature that connects the heart of the Hindu system with the ordinary people in their daily lives. The term is sometimes used in a narrower sense, having an exclusive reference to the scarce authoritative literature, or alternately in a broader and more inclusive sense. This variety in classification also extends to the authority given to the collections, as the authority attributed to the different collections differs widely. In fact, there is no agreement on where *smṛti* ends as it fades into vernaculars and ethno-regional literature. *Smṛti* is open-ended and new writings are acquiring their place in it. A good example is 'the *Gitanjali* of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1914)', which, says Anantanand Rambachan, 'has already taken its place among India's devotional works'.<sup>11</sup> In its narrow sense, *smṛti* is often used as a reference to the codes of law (*dharmasastras*). Within this collection, some such as *Manu-Smṛti*, *Yajnavalkya-Smṛti*, and *Visnu-Smṛti* 'rank very high'<sup>12</sup> in the authoritative literature. *Itihāsa* (history), which comprises the two ancient epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and the *Purānas* (ancient books) are the other authoritative collections within *smṛti*. As the Vedic religion began to fade and the new devotional (*bhakti*) movement became popular, some parts of *smṛti* such as the *Bhagavad Gita* of the Mahabharata gained significant authority and popularity. The Gita, as it is known, became such a popular scripture that many leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, took it as a governing text for their lives.

How do Hindus use and interpret their scriptures? What role do the scriptures play in the lives of the many millions of Hindus? Before we deal with the more formal, well-defined and authoritative *śruti*, we may briefly highlight the role and use of *smṛti*. Although secondary in its authority, it is the *smṛti* collection that directly feeds the spiritual and social life of the vast majority of Hindus in their day-to-day lives. 'The epics, *pūranas*, and *tantras*...became the basis for widespread popular devotion in the many regional languages of India...' declares Harold Coward. 'Since the Hindu religion has no institutional or church basis,' he adds, 'these texts are the heart of Hindu life.'<sup>13</sup> On the importance of *Itihāsa* and *Purāna* in the intellectual and religious thoughts of Hindus, Klostermaier said,

*Itihāsa-Purāna* is in a very real sense the heart of Hinduism, with all its strength and weaknesses...They have shaped Hindu religious and theological terminology and have become the medium for imparting secular knowledge as well. They are the source of much of Indian sociology, politics, medicine,

<sup>10</sup> Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Rambachan, 99.

<sup>12</sup> Klostermaier, *Hindu Writings*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 110-111.

astrology, and geography. Reading *Itihāsa-Purāna* one can recognize the character of the Indian people, enlarged, typified and idealized – true in an uncanny sense.<sup>14</sup>

In the Hindu socio-religious hierarchy, the priestly Brahmins are at the top. They are the only people endowed with the privilege of studying the Vedas. It is their duty to study, recite, and teach the Vedas. Since the Vedas are learned, recited, and transmitted orally, the technique of doing that, called the six *Vedangas*, is very important. They are considered ‘limbs of the Vedas’.<sup>15</sup> The following are the six *Vedangas*: phonetics for correct intonation (*Siksha*) of the verses (*mantras*), grammar, meters, etymology, proper timing of rituals, and the process of the rituals themselves. In the learning of the Vedas, intonation and correct use of phrases are important; so are the understandings of the meanings.<sup>16</sup>

The verses from the Vedas are used in sacrifices as well as other public and private rituals including life-cycle rites, consecrations of icons and offerings. Daily chanting (*japa*) of scripture verses (*mantra*) is a religious practice for all Hindus while only the Brahmins have daily *Gayatri Mantra*. The use of scripture in Hindu experience is predominantly oral in nature. To quote Harold Coward, ‘In the conduct of religious rituals individual devotees chant verses of scripture (mantras) from memory or after the priest... In Hindu spiritual experience the chanting of such mantras puts one in direct touch with the divine power... By concentrating one’s mind on such a mantra, through repeated chanting, the devotee invokes the power inherent in the divine intuition and so purifies consciousness.’<sup>17</sup> While Hinduism is steeped in rituals, the meanings of Scriptures are equally important. If the Vedic hymns are mostly for rituals, the Upanishads (often called ‘Vedanta’ meaning ‘end of the Veda’) lay out philosophies of life and meanings of existence. The Upanishads are the foundations of Hindu philosophy, and different schools of philosophers comment on them with varying distinctions. These schools are very different and even seemingly contradictory in their philosophies, which is a reflection of Hinduism itself. In Hinduism, different ways and means can coexist without cancelling each other, and thus plurality characterizes the Hindu way of thinking.

The highest religious goal is liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of rebirth. There is not just one way to reach that goal. There are at least three major paths to this highest goal: the path of knowledge (*jnanamarga*), the path of works and purity (*karmamarga*), and the path of devotion (*bhaktimarga*). Truth is many-sided, and the meaning of truth varies according to the different schools of philosophy.

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<sup>14</sup> Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 59-60.

<sup>15</sup> Rambachan, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Rambachan, 93-94.

<sup>17</sup> Coward, ‘The Experience of Scripture in Hinduism and Christianity,’ 235.

Because of their connection to theologizing in the Hindu context, the sources of knowledge or *pramāṇas* are very important. An Indian Christian religious scholar K. P. Aleaz lists six sources of knowledge recognized by Indian philosophy: perception (*pratyaksha*), inference (*anumāna*), testimony (*śabda*), comparison (*upamāna*), postulation (*arthāpatti*) and non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*).<sup>18</sup> While the Advaita school recognized all six sources, other schools recognized some and excluded others. On one source they all agree, according to Rambachan, that is, *śabda* (Scripture or testimony),<sup>19</sup> which testifies to the importance of scripture in the Hindu philosophies. Indian Christian theologians have attempted to adapt these *pramāṇas* in their contextual theological interpretations.<sup>20</sup>

### Hindu-Christian Interaction

‘Despite its long presence in India, Christianity does not seem to have impinged on Hinduism to any remarkable degree...till after the establishment of the British Raj in India,’<sup>21</sup> commented Arvind Sharma. As part of their attempt to communicate the message of the gospel, missionaries came to learn elements and aspects of the religion. Geoffrey Oddie has shown how missionaries, drawing their knowledge from their Hindu Pundits-informants, encountered difficulties in acquiring any comprehensive knowledge about Hinduism.<sup>22</sup> Their motivation to convert alongside some missionaries’ lack of respect for the religion made the missionaries’ knowledge of Hinduism susceptible to doubts by Hindus. Interest in understanding Hinduism for its own sake among Westerners in the colonial context began outside the missionary circle in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A group of rationalists including Sir William Jones, H. T. Colebrook, Charles Wilkins and H. H. Wilson began what came to be called Indological studies by translating a number of Hindu scriptures.<sup>23</sup> In the course of the nineteenth century, they were followed by other scholars often referred to as ‘Orientalists’ such as Friedrich Max Mueller, who changed the future of the study of Asian

<sup>18</sup> K. P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology* (Calcutta: Punthi-Pustak, 1991), 12.

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<sup>19</sup> Rambachan, 103.

<sup>20</sup> A. J. Appasamy, *What Shall We Believe?: A Study of the Christian Pramāṇas* (Madras, Delhi, Lucknow: CLS, ISPCCK, LPH, 1971); Aleaz, 68-71, 118-119.

<sup>21</sup> Arvind Sharma, preface to *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity* (Leiden et al. : E. J. Brill, 1988), vii.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey A. Oddie, ‘Hindu Pundits and Missionary ‘Knowledge’ of Hinduism,’ in Richard Fox Young (ed), *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding – Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical – in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 158-180.

<sup>23</sup> Eric J. Sharpe, *Faith Meets Faith: Some Christian Attitudes to Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 10.

religions with the publication of his monumental *Sacred Books of the East*.<sup>24</sup> On the Hindu side, serious and respectful consideration of the Christian gospel began in the 1820s with reformist Ram Mohun Roy.

The Hindu response to Christianity cannot be studied in isolation from its encounter with modernization from the West through colonization. Hindus reacted to the intruding civilization quite slowly. 'Up until the beginning of the nineteenth century there is very little indication of the reaction of Indians to the ideas and values of the West, even though there was opportunity at least from the beginning of the fifteenth century for cultural interchange,'<sup>25</sup> wrote Ainslie Embree. Although one should be very careful not to conflate or confuse colonialism with the Christian missionary enterprise, both were heavily influenced by the modernization project of the West. From the native viewpoint, especially before the middle of the nineteenth century, it would be difficult to differentiate colonialism, modernization, westernization, and Christianity. If Hindus understood modernization and westernization as synonyms, they also saw Christianity as a part of the mix. The close connection between religion, culture and society in Hinduism would support such a conflation in the understanding. Diverse as Hindus were in their philosophies and religious viewpoints, their response to Western modernization was also diverse. Embree identified four responses: (1) 'indifference', (2) 'acceptance of everything Western' by rejecting 'the old tradition', (3) 'critical and selective' acceptance to 'reform' society, and (4) 'outright and hostile rejection of the values and ideas of the Western world'.<sup>26</sup> Because of the diversity of responses even within each of these, it may be better to use these four as common markers in a spectrum of responses. These markers help to identify some common responding positions that can be loosely categorized together. For instance, some of the reformers (group 3) did so with a rather hostile response to the West and sought to revive Hinduism by reforming it. They may belong to both the third and fourth categories. Those in the first two categories left little or no impact on the ensuing history of Hindu-Christian interaction. The third and fourth responses redefined Hindu-Christian relations and changed the course of India's history itself. While the new tradition that emerged from the reformist line led India as a nation to becoming a modern 'secular' state, the teachings and influence of the rejectionists later resurfaced in different forms as challenges and impediments to Indian secularism. Because of the seriousness with which they consider the biblical teachings, we focus on the reformists and the tradition that followed.

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<sup>24</sup> Published by Oxford University Press in 50 volumes from 1879 to 1910.

<sup>25</sup> Ainslie Embree (ed), *The Hindu Tradition: Readings in Oriental Thoughts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 275.

<sup>26</sup> *The Hindu Tradition: Readings in Oriental Thoughts*, 275-76.

### Hindu Reformation, Revival, and Christianity

Two reforming societies, the Arya Samaj and the Brahma Samaj represented opposite stances on Christianity and Western society. The Arya Samaj, founded by Dayananda Saraswati, gave absolute authority to the four Vedas and interpreted them as teaching monotheism. Not only did he strongly oppose Christianity and western values, he was also critical of contemporary polytheistic Hinduism. To quote his words against Christianity and its scriptural teaching:

The Christians go about preaching ‘Come, embrace our religion, get your sins forgiven and he [sic] saved.’ All this is untrue, since had Christ possessed the power of having sins remitted, instil faith in others and purifying them, why would he have not freed his disciples from sin, made them faithful and pure [?]. . . Now disciples of Christ were destitute of as much faith as a grain of mustard seed and it is they that wrote the Bible, how could then such a book be held as an authority [?]<sup>27</sup>

The Brahma Samaj, on the other hand, seriously considered modern education and technology for the benefit of Hinduism and adapted them for Hindu tradition. The founder of the movement, Rajashri Ram Mohun Roy initiated serious studies of Christianity. His and his followers’ responses to Christianity paved the way for indigenous Indian theology. With the publication of his *The Precept of Christ* in 1820 and the ensuing debate with Joshua Marshman of Serampore Mission,<sup>28</sup> Roy publicized his morally-driven monotheism for the reform of Hindu society. As with most other Hindu intellectuals’ reflections on the Bible in the ensuing period, Roy was fascinated by the great teachings of Jesus, but would not affirm him as divine or believe in his atoning sacrifice.<sup>29</sup> Roy’s theological position became the typical Hindu intellectual response to the Christian faith in the years to come. This is not to say that all Hindus received and responded to Christian teaching in the same way. In his case, his monotheistic religion led him toward Unitarianism.

The progressive tradition that emerged out of this reforming spirit broadened and eventually helped the renascent Hinduism of the twentieth century. This emergent Hinduism produced a new breed of the religion often called ‘Neo-Hinduism’. In being open to modernity, especially its educational and technological aspects, the reformists and the emergent Neo-Hindus facilitated this openness largely by introducing modernizing changes to the Hindu tradition. In other words, to facilitate change, they connected modern ideas with the Hindu tradition.

<sup>27</sup> *The Hindu Tradition: Readings in Oriental Thoughts*, 307.

<sup>28</sup> See the debate between Roy and Joshua Marshman in M. M. Thomas, *Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), 1-29.

<sup>29</sup> Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989), 19-26.

While Roy and most other Neo-Hindus who followed him lacked a religious commitment to the Christian teaching of Christ, one of Roy's successors in the Brahmo Samaj, Keshub Chandra Sen did not. Considered by some to be 'the most innovative, charismatic, and influential Hindu religious reformer of the nineteenth century',<sup>30</sup> Keshub Chandra Sen did some of the best theological expositions using Hindu religious tradition. Christocentric in his religious faith, but self-consciously Hindu, Sen provided in-depth exposition of kenotic Christology using John's theology of the oneness of God and Christ (Father and Son).<sup>31</sup> He used the *advaitins*' (proponents of non-dualistic understanding of Brahman in the Upanishad) theology of Brahman (or the Ultimate Reality) as *Sat, Cit, Ananda* (being, intelligence and bliss), in order to describe the meaning of the Trinity. In this as well as the theology of fulfilment and the hidden Christ of Hinduism, he was to be followed by other Indian Christian theologians.<sup>32</sup> Confessedly eclectic, he was considered by Hindus to be Christian, but Christians considered him a mere eclectic Hindu and a strong critic of the church and missions in India.

The Brahmo Samaj, as a reforming society of Brahmanism, arose as a response to both modernization and Christianity. Consciously or otherwise, its organizational scheme and sense of societal identity seemed to have been imitated from the Christian Church. Given the non-institutional character of Hinduism, this was a radical move. Keshub Sen went further by proposing what he called 'the Church of the New Dispensation', which he idealized as the ultimate amalgamation of the best of Christianity and Hinduism. Not only did he fail in promoting the church, but the church did not achieve any organizational existence. However the attempt points to the possible character of an indigenous church in a Hindu context.

Most Hindu intellectuals who made meaningful responses to the Christian message learned the teachings from direct contacts with Christians. But there was one significant and influential Hindu 'theologian' who responded to Christ positively without any direct and formal interaction with Christians. His name was Sri Ramakrishna. After hearing portions of the Bible read to him by a Hindu friend, Ramakrishna had an extraordinary experience of a divine expression of Christ while gazing at the picture of the child Jesus in his mother's lap.<sup>33</sup> Like many other Hindus, Ramakrishna came to accept Jesus Christ as an incarnation of God. Two things distinguished him from others, however: his experiential

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<sup>30</sup> David Kopf, 'Neo-Hindu Views of Unitarian and Trinitarian Christianity in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Case of Keshub Chandra Sen,' in Arvind Sharma (ed), *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity* (Leiden et al.: E. J. Brill, 1988), 106.

<sup>31</sup> Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 34-38.

<sup>33</sup> H. W French, 'Reverence to Christ Through Mystical Experience and Incarnational Identity: Sri Ramakrishna,' in Arvind Sharma (ed), *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity* (Leiden et al.: E. J. Brill, 1988), 68.

methodology and his own feeling of identity with Jesus through his growing consciousness as Jesus' incarnation. Ramakrishna's was a religion of inclusivity as he sought authentic religious experience in different religious traditions. He became one of the most influential spiritual leaders of India in modern times. If Christians found it difficult to accept his consciousness of being an incarnation, he was critical of the Christians' emphasis on sin and their exclusive truth claims.

If one combines the positions of Ram Mohun Roy and Sri Ramakrishna, one can perceive the main trend of Neo-Hindu views of Christ and Christianity. Yet other Neo-Hindu thinkers are more critical towards Christianity than Roy and Ramakrishna. If some are more combative against Christians than others – people such as Swami Vivekananda, whose vibrant and courageous criticism of Christianity during his trip to North America earned him the nickname of 'the cyclonic monk of India'<sup>34</sup> – others such as Gandhi identify closely with Jesus, Gandhi claimed to be more Christian than many so-called Christians<sup>35</sup> while rejecting Jesus as the only son of God, as well as his atoning work.<sup>36</sup> The one common thread is the respect for Jesus Christ given to him without claiming him to be the saviour. The main theological agenda of Hindu intellectuals includes:

- A deep respect for the moral teachings and examples of Jesus Christ with no faith in the atoning effect of his death for salvation.
- A strong monotheism accompanied by a firm faith in Jesus as God's incarnation without excluding other incarnations.
- A respectful but selective reading of the Bible, especially those passages on moral and exemplary teachings.
- A critique of Christians on moral grounds for their cultural and political domination as well as their exclusive truth claims.

### A Christian Reflection and Observations

Thus far, we have deliberately focused on the Hindu concept of scripture and the response to the Christian message. As we have discussed above, Keshub Chandra Sen and others who followed him in the later history of Brahma Samaj went further with their Christocentric affirmations. In fact, a few of those associates influenced by Sen became Christians; among them were Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya and Manilal Parekh. Upadhyaya later described himself to be a Hindu-Christian with his distinct Vedist (and later

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<sup>34</sup> H. W. French, 'Swami Vivekananda's Experience and Interpretation of Christianity,' in Arvind Sharma (ed), *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity* (Leiden et al.: E. J. Brill, 1988), 87.

<sup>35</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa, second ed. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1941, 1957), 33.

<sup>36</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *The Message of Jesus Christ*, ed. Anand T. Hingorani (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, n.d.), 23.

Vedantin) theology. Before we close this brief study with some observations, let me mention how we may outline the development of Christian thought in its interaction with Hindu responses. There are a few writings on the subject tracing this development, both historical and theological. While some such as Bob Robinson<sup>37</sup> focus on the process among Indian scholars and leaders, others such as Wesley Ariarajah<sup>38</sup> locate it within the ecumenical history of the World Council of Churches. Overall, the development may be captured under these headings: (1) the various missionary approaches ranging from proselytizing confrontations to life-sharing transformations; (2) the Ashram (community living) approach; (3) pluralistic relativism; (4) roundtable dialogical approach; and (5) being Christians within Hinduism (Hindu devotees of Christ), which some called the 'insider movement'. Since it is beyond the scope of the present study, we will not deal with these points in this chapter.

We may close by drawing out the implications of this discussion for the current realities of Christian witness among the Hindus. First, we must recognize the profound differences between the two religions. For any meaningful communication between them, the foundational worldview of each needs to be taken into serious consideration while being faithful to the tradition. The tension between openness to other traditions and faithfulness to one's own tradition is true in all religions. While some features of Hinduism are definite and exclusive, other parts are imprecise and inclusive. The *śruti* is clearly defined and its authority unquestioned. But the *smṛti* has no clear boundary and is vested with a great deal of inclusivity. While *smṛti* is secondary in authority, it is primary in its impact on human life. The Hindu intellectuals who responded positively to Christ and the Bible seem to have done so because of the secondary *smṛti* authority and its vague bounded-ness. The Bible can easily be included as a part of *smṛti* or given a place of equivalence. The selectiveness of what is affirmed and what is rejected in the biblical teachings seems to reflect the place of selection in the *smṛti*.

The open-endedness of Hinduism especially through the *smṛti* channel and the tradition's relativism make Hinduism open to other spiritual paths as long as these do not exclude others. Much of what we now identify as the theology of religious pluralism not only resonates with the thoughts of Neo-Hindus such as Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, but is actually founded on the teachings of these Neo-Hindus. In other words, the founding inspiration of pluralist theology is what Radhakrishnan calls 'the hospitality of the Hindu mind' which accepts almost all varieties of beliefs and doctrines' and treats them 'as authentic expressions of spiritual endeavours, however

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<sup>37</sup> Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991).

antithetic they may appear to be'.<sup>39</sup> This relativism of Neo-Hindu teaching has left an indelible mark on Christian theology of religions as it spawned a relativist theology of pluralism.

The strength of Hindu tradition is shown in its powerful hold on the identity of its adherents. For most Hindus who have responded positively to Christ and to biblical teaching, including converts who have affirmed Christ's atoning work and have been baptized, the longing to combine Christian and Hindu Scriptures and to identify with the Hindu tradition has been strong. The degrees to which they desire this seem to vary. Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, who famously called himself 'Hindu-Catholic' even as the Catholic Church was distancing itself from him once said, 'By birth we are Hindus and shall remain Hindu till death. But as *dvija* (twice born) by virtue of our sacramental rebirth, we are Catholics, we are members of the indefinable communion embracing all ages and claims.'<sup>40</sup> Later in his life, Rev. Yisu Das (1911-1997), a Methodist minister and theological teacher, identified himself as a 'Christ *Bhakta*' and said he experienced Jesus Christ as his *ishtadevata*, *saguna* Brahman and *shabda* Brahman, his guru and the image of God.<sup>41</sup> The life story of N. V. Tilak, M. C. Parekh, and even such an 'evangelical' figure as R. C. Das show deep affinity to reading the Bible from the Hindu viewpoints.

In his inquiry of how Hindus would respond to the Christian proclamation of Jesus Christ as the life of the world, an Indian Catholic thinker Samuel Ryan raised an important question of how such a proclamation might be done from within.

Is it at all possible to bring life or be life to, or share life with, any tradition or situation, secular or religious, while remaining outside it, without becoming enfleshed in it, without giving ourselves to it in firm commitment and deep involvement, without immersing ourselves in the Jordan of its cultural and religious reality and participating in its life, its wealth, its poverty, its limitations, struggles and agony?<sup>42</sup>

Ryan strongly suggested that Christians enter into Hindu tradition and en-flesh life from within. 'When we speak a global word about Jesus and present him as the life of the world,' he continued, 'it is incumbent upon us to help that word become incarnate in global reality. Not only are the world cultures to become its body, but the world religions as well as every spiritual quest and God experience.'<sup>43</sup> Inspired by an empirical finding of

<sup>39</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, 'Hinduism,' in A. L. Basham (ed), *Cultural History of India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 70.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted from Thomas, *Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 107.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Ravi Tiwari, *Reflections and Studies in Religion* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 153.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Ryan, S.J., 'How will the Hindu hear?' *International Review of Mission* 71, 281 (January 1982), 54.

<sup>43</sup> 'How will the Hindu hear?', 55.

positive Hindu responses to Christ outside the church<sup>44</sup> as well as other contextual missiological endeavours in world religions, a group of evangelical missiologists advocates an insider effort along similar lines.<sup>45</sup> In this endeavour, one may need to determine if and how the biblical message might be given not only the secondary (*smṛti*) role, but also the *śruti* primacy status. Such an enterprise will need time and consistency. We may draw a lesson from the Hindu concept of time and its stress on time-proven tradition; Christians should refrain from haste and impatient communication in their ministries. There is no room for haste in the Hindu world. The biblical message and essential Christian beliefs will have to be translated into practical and realistic living principles. Just as we began this essay with the words of George M. Soares-Prabhu, we close with them also. He wrote, ‘An Indian exegesis ... [is] greatly concerned about relevance...Relevance has always been the goal of traditional Indian (Hindu) theology, where a study of the sacred books was never merely an academic exercise (‘truth for truth’s sake’) but always a severely practical quest after liberation.’<sup>46</sup>



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<sup>44</sup> See Herbert E. Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: W. Carey Library, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> For an example of its approach, see H. L. Richard, *Hinduism: A Brief Look at Theology, History, Scriptures, and Social System with Comments on the Gospel in India* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Soares-Prabhu, S.J., 216.

# CHILDREN, MISSION AND THE BIBLE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Wendy Strachan

I wonder what would be the response if you showed a Bible to a group of children in your community and asked them for their opinions of this book.

Try it. You might discover that there is quite a diversity in what children are saying. Comments like, 'a book about God', 'a story book' reveal some understanding. From many children though, the responses are discouraging: 'a book for adults', 'a church book', 'a book of magic', 'hard to understand', 'rules', 'boring'. And very often in my own community in a secular country, 'I don't know.'

Compare this with the description on the back of a children's Bible on my shelf:

So! You picked up the BIG Rescue Bible. You are in for the adventure of your life. The BIG Rescue is the best story ever told, and it's all in this book. If you thought God hung out in the sky doing nothing...think again. Read the BIG Rescue Bible and find out how God saves people and a planet that can't save themselves!<sup>1</sup>

Now that sounds like a story that any child could become absorbed in. So how have children become so confused, uninterested or negative about a book that invites them to link their lives with the God of the universe?

The stakes are high. As Christians, we believe that the Bible unfolds a story that gives meaning to all our lives. Yet as Stonehouse and May point out, children live in cultures that are permeated by very different stories which they are learning whether we want them to or not. The question these authors pose: 'Which story – the biblical story or the culture's story – will be the primary one our children use to make sense of their lives?'<sup>2</sup> is one that challenges the way that we are engaging the Bible with children.

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## Information, Entertainment – or...

It's not that we haven't been trying. In some parts of the world, children win competitions that display biblical knowledge or an aptitude for Bible memorisation that adults find impressive. In other parts of the world, multi-media programs keep children engrossed as stories from the Bible flash

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<sup>1</sup> *Big Rescue Bible*, CEV (Australia: Bible Society, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Holly Catterton Allen (ed), *Nurturing Children's Spirituality* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2008) 367.

before their eyes. But the reality is that neither *information* nor *entertainment* should be the main outcome of a child's experience of the Bible. Information that is unrelated to life has little impact in a world of information overload. Entertainment can reduce Bible stories to caricatures – and will always be superseded by something more exciting, more stimulating. If these are our aims as we open the Bible with the younger generation, we should not be surprised that, around the world, the church is faced with an exodus of children in alarming numbers. God – as understood through their experiences of the Bible and the community of faith that reads it – does not seem to be relevant to their lives. The story of the surrounding culture is more powerful.

Information is important – it can help children make responsible choices. Entertainment is engaging – it helps the story to come alive. But we cannot be satisfied with these outcomes when the Bible is so clearly about *transformation*. This Bible is '*...God's story and the story of our ancestors in the faith, which we want our children to enter into as their story, on God's side*'.<sup>3</sup> It is the place where children encounter God, and where he invites them to join their lives to his life and to partner with him in changing their world. The keys to engaging this story are imagination and emotion, relevance, response and action.

## **Towards Transformation**

### *Imagination and emotion*

The Bible is primarily narrative in character and story is the natural playground of children. That is our starting point. If we encourage children to 'imagine' themselves in the story, they will make their own connections. And as they do so, we must allow the Bible to speak for itself, resisting the temptation to make it conform to our pre-determined idea of how a child will meet God in a particular biblical passage.

Imagine yourself in this Australian classroom: it's almost the end of the session with a group of 11 year olds. They've been listening to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. The earlier parts of the narrative – Jacob's favouritism and the brothers' treachery – have captured the imagination of at least some of the children. The story of the attempted seduction is a little trickier. But the teacher sticks carefully to the text, and is relieved to reach the climax when she triumphantly announces that despite this powerful woman's advances, Joseph says 'No!'.

Silence.

Until one boy blurts out, 'Miss, I think he's an idiot!'

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<sup>3</sup> Terry Clutterham, *The Adventure Begins* (UK: Scripture Union 1996) 138.

How would you respond? Would you ignore the boy and hope that the others didn't hear? Would you reprimand him because he seems to have treated the story irreverently? Or would you grasp an opportunity? This boy has actually entered the story in his imagination – and in so doing has made a connection between the Bible narrative and real life. The story he's just heard is familiar material in the TV programs he watches, the families he's close to and the conversations he has with his friends. He is genuinely puzzled about why a young man would refuse to give in to the demands of a woman who has the power to protect or ruin his life.

The story connects. This boy is close to learning something about God, himself and his world. Close to encountering God.

Story and imagination are comfortable arenas for children. In story, the non-reader can be as active as the reader. The child in a rural area who may have no opportunity to go further than primary school is not at any disadvantage compared with the technologically savvy city child who never reads anything that does not come to him in 30 second 'bytes'. In story, the child who has never before opened a Bible can respond to God in no less vital a way than the child who has experienced the Bible in his home since childhood.

### *Relevance*

By entering the story with their imagination and so making connections with their experiences, children have the opportunity to discover that the Bible is not a cryptic book unrelated to real life, but a book that reflects their own struggles and hopes. Children will ascribe meaning and value to a passage to the extent that it connects with their own present experience. 'Only if the Bible has meaning now will children look forward with expectation to the discovery of Bible meanings in the future.'<sup>4</sup>

Think of the contemporary issues that just one story – the story of Joseph – addresses: it's about families: dysfunctional as well as happy. It's about favouritism, unfairness, bad things happening to good people. It's about trouble that comes when you make a wrong choice, and trouble that comes when you make a good choice. It's about not being noticed or valued. It's about peer pressure: it's about pressure to have sex when you don't want to. It's about power. It's about feeling on top of the world one day and at the bottom of the heap the next. It's about confusion, disaster and celebrations. It's about loose ends and the difference that one person can make.

Joseph lived in a different country in a different era, but his story connects with 21<sup>st</sup> century children. They meet an adolescent who experienced the same emotions, the same struggles, the same despair, the

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<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Jean Furnish, *Experiencing the Bible with Children* (Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1990), 70.

same joy as they experience. And they meet Joseph's God: sometimes silent, often puzzling, always inviting trust.

The Bible comes alive to children when we help them to realise that the people in its pages are people like them. Not heroes. Ordinary people. Authentic people whose bad behaviour is recorded alongside the good. These men and women and children aren't characters in a fairy tale; they lived at a point in history where they met God and made choices about trusting him or not. We adults (and many of the children in our churches) can easily miss the fact that Joseph had no idea how his life would unfold. God gave him no blueprint – yet Joseph chose to trust him.

As children experience God's story in the Bible, they will begin to ask fundamental Big Questions: *What is God like? How can I expect him to act? How does he expect me to act?* They will begin to make connections with other parts of God's story and ponder: *Why does God act in this way? Why is it important for God that we know this story?* And then they will begin to make connections from the story in the Bible to the story of their own life. *Who am I like in this story? How would I have acted in the same circumstances? Does this story remind me of something that has happened to me? Would I like this story to be true for me?* And the story will come alive, just as it did for that boy in the Australian classroom.

As the Bible comes alive, children discover more about God who is the main character in the story of the Bible. They discover that in Jesus, God fought for good and against evil – and won! They discover that God is interested in the details of their lives. They discover that this surprising God wants to accompany them through life and help them win too – though in unexpected ways.

A group of some forty boys live in a street kids' centre in Lima. One day God surprised them. They were street-hardened. They had learned not to trust anyone. To them, God was distant. The stories of Jesus' miracles served only to increase the distance between these insignificant kids and the all-powerful God. One night, as usual, the staff simply read a passage of the Bible to the boys. As usual, they expected no response. But this night was different. As the boys listened to the Bible story, the adults realised that almost every boy was crying. 'This is our story,' they sobbed.

What had they heard? They had heard the story of Jesus' arrest and his silence in the face of the abusive questioning of powerful people: '... Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.'<sup>5</sup> They made the connection. The street boys understood this silence: whenever they were arrested, abused, pressured for information, they had a code of silence. When you own nothing except your thoughts and feelings you protect them with silence. 'Our silence is our truth. This Jesus is one of us,' they said.

The biblical narrative had captured their imagination and struck a deep chord in their own lives. They met the God who understands them, not

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 14:61.

because he is all-knowing, but because he became one of them: vulnerable, abused and marginalised.

### Time and Space to Respond

Children respond out of their own experience – and that is something to be encouraged. Since each child is unique, it follows that we can expect a range of responses. For example, the New Testament account of the man whose demons were cast into the herd of 2000 pigs met with two very different responses in India. One girl was excited that Jesus would think that one person was worth more than 2000 pigs; but a boy was outraged that Jesus would destroy a person's livelihood. One story, one God, two children, two sets of needs, two responses.

To an adult who has pre-determined the outcome of telling a Bible story, these different reactions may be unwelcome – perhaps threatening. But if we remember that in the Bible children are meeting God, then how can we possibly dictate the response? Instead, our task is to create the kind of environment that will encourage and respect their response – whatever that may be. The honest *'Miss I think he's an idiot'* is surely a better response than a silence that hides scepticism or boredom. By encouraging enquiry and respecting a child's response, we are modelling the respect that Jesus showed to those who came to talk with him.

Howard Worsley recounts a conversation between a five-year-old girl and her mother after they read the story of Abraham taking Isaac to be sacrificed:<sup>6</sup>

Daughter: Why did God ask Abraham to do this horrible thing?

Mother: God was testing Abraham to see if he would trust him.

D: But a friend of God would not kill his son.

M: Abraham was a man of great faith.

D: I think this could have been sorted out in a different way...

Compare that with the reactions of teenage boys as they read the same passage with their youth leader:

B (15 year old): It's right to put God before your family...

C (15): I'm not sure about that. I think that Abraham would have felt really guilty if he'd killed Isaac (pause). We know our family better than we know God and I'd rather have my family than God.

A (13): No, your family doesn't matter. If you lost your family, God would look after you. He provides for your needs. God could raise your family from the dead if he wanted.

D (17): Yes it's right to trust God. I love God more than my family

B: So do I

C: I love my family more than God

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Worsley, *A Child Sees God* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 69.

These accounts illustrate the variety of responses that will occur when young people know that it is safe to question and to struggle as they seek to understand and respond to the text. In each response, we can feel their emotion as they reflect on the ‘morality’ of God. Perhaps we recognise how their responses are shaped by their age, experiences and the understanding of God that they already have. Perhaps we recognise how familiarity with the ending of the story has possibly desensitised some to an appreciation of the enormity of what God asked Abraham to do. Do we also wonder how we might have entered into this exploratory conversation without stifling it?

Allowing the Bible to speak into the child’s imagination and encouraging the child to respond to what God is saying are the foundation stones of Godly Play.<sup>7</sup> This approach to story telling, developed by Jerome Berryman, opens up the Bible using simple materials and ‘wondering questions’. As the story of Bartimaeus unfolds, for example, the child will be invited to ‘wonder’ how it feels to be blind, why Jesus would listen to Bartimaeus when others just tell him to be quiet, why the first thing that Bartimaeus does after he can see is to follow Jesus, how Bartimaeus feels as he follows Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, and who they identify with in the story.

Godly Play welcomes the unexpected response. The pace is slow and thoughtful, providing for reflection. The narrative is uncluttered by extra detail. Silence and space allow children to make connections between the story, other parts of Scripture and their own story, and invite them to think not only about what God *did* but who he *is*.

Of course, conversations and questions are only one form of response. Creative multi-sensory alternatives should be explored: art, drama, play, music, prayer, silence, worship, movement, letter writing, drawing and celebration are all avenues to be investigated. So too is the call to action: ‘Go and do likewise,’ was Jesus’ instruction to the enquiring expert in the law after he had told him the story of the Good Samaritan. The Bible is not a book of theory. It is intensely practical and children can appreciate that it urges them to make a difference in their communities.

### **Making a Difference**

Encountering God in Scripture opens the door to transformation – of the mind, the emotions, of our behaviour and the impact we make on people around us. For a child, it is very often in the ‘behaving’, that he learns what it means to follow Jesus. As he engages in the acts of kindness that are identified with Jesus’ followers, so he learns what it means to be a follower. When we provide opportunities to serve, we also help the child to make an abstract concept (e.g. loving others) into a concrete understanding

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.godlyplayfoundation.org>

(loving Tom means to stand up for him against those who are bullying him).

Around the world the Bible inspires action that brings transformation to individuals and communities. A family in Europe, who was reading the Advent story, began to ask: 'How should we celebrate Christmas this year?' They decided on a departure from their usual frenzy of meals and gifts and chose to help, as a family, at a shelter for the homeless. A group of teenagers in Cameroun spent a week planting trees in a rural area as a response to their understanding that the God, who created a 'very good' world, wants his people to be involved in creation care. An unplanned outcome was that because of the relationships formed with the villagers and the needs they could see, they returned shortly after to build a latrine. A group of children in Australia wondered how they could be part of letting 'justice flow like a river'. They joined a campaign against poverty, petitioning members of Parliament and contributing to a food bank in their community. Another Australian boy noticed that his neighbour with an intellectual disability was the sort of person whom Jesus would have befriended. He has done the same and invites his new friend to football games. Children in Latin America whose country boasts high levels of violence are learning approaches to relationships and to resolving conflict through a program that addresses these issues through Bible stories. So positive are its outcomes that the government is requesting it to be offered nationwide.

As children respond to the Bible in Christ-like action, they are learning to live as 'two-culture kids',<sup>8</sup> identifying with the values of God's kingdom while living in the world's culture. Social justice, appreciating diversity, helping others, caring for creation all become part of everyday living. The Bible becomes the lens through which they view and interact with their world.

### **Taking Children Seriously**

The approaches described so far acknowledge that children do not come to the Bible devoid of experience. We take children – and contemporary learning theory – seriously when we respect the experiences that each child brings, and provide for them an interactive learning environment in which to explore the Bible and to act on what God is asking them to do.

They come to God's word with their emotions, able to feel the joy of celebration, the despair of betrayal, the anger at injustice.

They come to it with curiosity, unimpressed by superficial answers.

They come with a sense of expectation that anything might happen.

They come with humility, more likely than adults are to accept its authority.

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<sup>8</sup> Karen Yust, *Real Kids Real Faith* (New York John Wiley & Sons 2004), 28f.

They come with their intellect, ready to discover and ponder new things. They come able to identify with the people they meet – and ready to act in response.

They come with unique family and community backgrounds: we cannot assume their respect for Scripture, or an understanding of Christian basics, or a family where love and trust characterise relationships.

And they will *continue* to come if their experience of the Bible makes a difference to their lives and to the way that they view and relate to others.

### Providing Safe Community

Children thrive in a *community* where they can learn together with others and where the faith community expects to be enriched by their insights and enthusiasm. Faith grows in an environment where children know that their opinions are valued. This echoes the mutual learning that took place in the informal yet intentional mentoring in the community of Israel: ‘These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.’<sup>9</sup>

While it is true that children do read the Bible on their own and that this should be encouraged, it is also far more likely that they will *continue* to read it when they have the opportunity to do so with others. In 1879, a young woman in the north of England wanted to encourage the children in her Sunday school class to read the Bible each day. Every Sunday she wrote out lists of passages for them to read during the week, promising that the next Sunday they would discuss together what they had read. Out of this opportunity to read and explore the Bible both individually and together, was born the Bible emphasis of Scripture Union, an international children’s agency that exists today and continues to encourage children to listen to God together in their different communities – in camps, schools and on the streets.

John Westerhoff, in his work on faith development,<sup>10</sup> uses the metaphor of pilgrimage, emphasising both the relational journey and the value of each step taken on the journey. On this pilgrimage, faith grows as – at different times – family, church, peers and other communities provide the contexts in which the person experiences, identifies with, explores, tests and finally ‘owns’ faith.

The key element of community is safety. Questions, comments and experiences are welcome because God is at work through his word – to the extent that a person becomes secure enough in his or her convictions to challenge the community when conscience dictates. While this is unlikely

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<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 6: 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> ‘A Journey Together in Faith’ in John H. Westerhoff, *Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, Inc., 1980).

to happen in childhood, the foundations that we lay are vital if faith is to keep pace with the child's development.

### **Aim High: The Bible is God's Big Story**

The Bible is one big story – not a series of unconnected stories. If our approach is continually to focus on particular stories without setting those stories in their overall context, children's understanding may be incomplete, superficial or wrong. The children who responded to the story of Abraham and Isaac need the opportunity – over time – to see it in the framework of Abraham's life story, of God's establishment of a nation who would act differently from those around, of a God who acts with grace and compassion in sending Jesus.

We stand in the tradition of a long line of people called to pass on the story of faith to a young generation, to share 'the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done'.<sup>11</sup> Telling the 'big story' helps children to make connections and to explore the overarching issues of the nature of God and the relationship he longs to have with them. It is an approach 'that is rooted in biblical tradition. "What do these stones mean?" ask the children of Israel long after the crossing of the River Jordan. The elders reply with the story of their deliverance from the Egyptians (Joshua 4:6, 7). The telling of the story not only served to consolidate the community, uniting its members in a common history. It also gave opportunity for the younger ones, who had not experienced the original events, to identify with the community, appropriating the story for themselves as it was told and retold by their parents and grandparents. As Christians, this is an aspect of our common life that we should perhaps recover – making the most of our highlight festivals such as Christmas and Easter.'<sup>12</sup>

A 2013 winter camp in Moscow adopted as its theme, 'Not Just Christmas Trees'. As the five days unfolded, children experienced the Big Story through the idea of celebrations. Through 'New Year' (the Jewish Rosh Hashanah), they explored new promises, new expectations and new covenants, recalling the creation of humankind. Next came Sukkoth, the Feast of Tabernacles that reminds us that we are wanderers and exiles. Children talked about their trust in God and their hope in him. Through Purim (in the story of Esther), they meditated on God as our protector and saviour. On the fourth day, Christmas showed how our saving God became one of us. The climax on the last day recalled how at Easter, we celebrate the forgiveness and reconciliation that Jesus' death and resurrection make

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 78:1-4.

<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Cox, *Using the Bible with Children* (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2000), 8, 9.

possible. At the end one boy, Joe, commented, ‘I so liked reading the Bible! I’ve never read such an interesting book before!’

As children build up the framework of the ‘Big Picture’, three things are happening. One is that children are piecing together a picture of the God who creates, promises, judges and rescues – and meets them in their own life. Secondly, children are building up an understanding of the content of Christian faith (of doctrine), not by learning a set of propositions, but by discovering (in small steps and giant leaps) who the God of the Bible is and what it means to live in relationship with him. And as they learn more, each new insight reshapes their understanding. Gradually we help children to develop the tools that they need to become independent Bible explorers. This means that we may need to explain a word or idea that may have lost its meaning. For example in some parts of the world where bread is a luxury a child will not understand in what way Jesus is the Bread of Life unless they appreciate that bread was everyday food for all in Jesus’ time. As children mature, their tools become more sophisticated; older children will discover the difference it makes when they understand the genre of the Bible text. And their understanding of God and of what God expects deepens. And so does their relationship with him. The third thing that is happening is that children are learning how to communicate with a God whose ways are different from theirs, to pray and live by faith in an often puzzling environment.

These are approaches that let children explore the Bible text in ways that that will equip them for living life with God now, but won’t let them down, as they get older.

In his book *Telling God’s Story*, Peter Enns point us to the Bible as a ‘vision-setting book’ that gives us a powerful idea of what a life lived with God can be like. If our children lose this vision, he argues: ‘*they wind up abandoning their faith, blaming it for failing to “connect with” their world.*’<sup>13</sup> He argues that if their faith does not connect to the real world in which they find themselves, then it was misrepresented or mistaught in the first place. If this is true, we need to examine some of the reductionist approaches that are often used with children – usually unintentionally. Often they are approaches that reduce the Bible to bite-sized pieces that we think are palatable to children – or are comfortable for us. We can do it in a number of ways and when we do, we rob children of its intrigue, wonder and practical insights into life. We effectively close the Bible down.

We close the Bible down when **we sanitise it**. When we teach about David with Goliath but omit David and Bathsheba and the death of their child, don’t we miss what *both* parts of the story express to children about God’s character in choosing a man like David? Are we afraid that children will reject God if we reveal all of his character?

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<sup>13</sup> Enns, Peter, *Telling God’s Story* (Virginia: Olive Branch Books, 2010), 27.

We close the Bible down when **we trivialise it** – as if children can only engage with it if it is fun. Even such child-friendly creative approaches as puppetry, drama, visual aids, songs, story-telling and rap can miss the point if children become amused spectators more than participants. A youth worker in Eastern Europe wrote: ‘The main issue for us is how to communicate God’s eternal message to young people in a way that makes sense to them, without “losing the edge” and compromising the message, by making it cheap, reducing Jesus to the level of pop-idols and his message to the level of Agony Aunt messages in teen-magazines. The hardest thing is to find the balance.’ Sometimes in an effort to contextualise the Bible into the child’s world, we forget that balance. We make fun out of pathos. Think of the story of Samson. It is a tragedy. Yet how easy it is to turn his life almost into a comedy. We keep the children entertained but where do they connect with God? Perhaps one reason children get bored with the Bible is because they lose their awe and wonder at the greatness of God.

We close the Bible down when **we sentimentalise it**. What is a ten year old child who is passionate about justice to think about the serious implications of judgement in the story of Noah, if his previous encounters have all been around cute pictures of hippos and unicorns dancing into the ark?

We close the Bible down when **we reduce it to a book of ‘stories with a moral’** as though it is more important to be good than to know God. Lawrence Richards<sup>14</sup> states: ‘You and I are not to use the Bible to club the child, or to impose demands that he or she conform. We are to use Bible stories...as a doorway to hope rather than as a nagging demand for change.’ What is the main point of the story of the boy who offered his lunch to the disciples: to encourage children to share, or to open their eyes to the wonder of what God might do through them?

We close the Bible down when **we treat it as a book of rules** without understanding that those rules only make sense within the context of relationship. What tone of voice do we use when we read the Ten Commandments? Do children hear them as the pleadings of a loving Father or as the threats of a belligerent head teacher? If it’s the latter, we’ve missed the point: no child falls in love with such a God.

We close the Bible down when **we treat it as an owner’s manual** of detailed instructions about how to live and what to do if things go wrong. The Bible does not restrict its scope by giving us a verse that exactly matches each of the circumstances a child may meet. Instead it paints a picture of what it is like to live with God in every circumstance. Joseph’s story does not inform today’s children about how to avoid family conflict;

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<sup>14</sup> Larry Richards, *Talkable Bible Stories* (USA: Fleming H Revell, 1991) quoted in Clutterham op cit, 117.

it demonstrates patterns of behaviour that might contribute to family conflict and invites us to ponder the difference God makes.

We close the Bible down when **we treat it as a textbook of information** to be remembered. Is it more important that children know what kind of tree Zacchaeus climbed or to wonder about how that meeting with Jesus changed his life so radically? And what might happen if *they* met Jesus? Do we give them the chance to reflect, as one eight-year-old girl did, that, ‘Jesus coming to his house is like God entering his soul’.<sup>15</sup>

We close the Bible down when **we treat it as a book of stories about flawless heroes** – as if the most important character is Moses, or Abraham or Paul, when the most important character is God. If we fail to understand this, we will be constantly trying to decide on the ‘personal application’. But the story of Abraham is in the Bible not to show us someone on whom to model our lives; it is a story of a faithful God who responds to our failings as well as our ‘successes’.

The Bible is God’s story and it is far more than information, rules, entertainment and selected – often disconnected – stories. As Ivy Beckwith states: ‘When we use the Bible with children simply to teach doctrinal tenets, moral absolutes, tips for better living, or stories of heroes to be emulated, we...deprive them of the spiritual story of God.’<sup>16</sup>

And in this story of God, children will find more than they expected. They will encounter God himself. They will discover that his story includes theirs and that he will accompany them as they write their own story in the world in which they live.

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<sup>15</sup> Worsely, op cit, 143.

<sup>16</sup> Beckwith, Ivy, *Post-Modern Children’s Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties, Zondervan 2004), 126.

# **THE BIBLE IN MISSION: EVANGELICAL / PENTECOSTAL VIEW**

**Antonia Leonora van der Meer**

I grew up in Brazil in an Evangelical church. As a young adult I got involved with the Pentecostal movement as well. Later I served for 10 years as a missionary in Angola and Mozambique, serving the Evangelical Alliance and a number of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. One of the very strong influences on my spiritual development was my involvement in IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students), in Brazil, Africa and elsewhere. In that context I had the privilege of being influenced by models and teachers like John Stott, René Padilla, Samuel Escobar and others, for which I am very grateful.

Traditionally in Brazil, in Latin America in general, in Angola and Mozambique, mission tended to be understood by evangelicals as the task of preaching to save souls. The goal was for people to make a decision for Christ. The reduction of Christian preaching and teaching to the one message caused people to be churchgoers for many years, in order to be ready for heaven; they knew about personal salvation, but did not know how to apply it to their context. In practice there was compassionate care for suffering members of the church, of the families, and neighbors. This was encouraged by their culture which is one of caring for people and giving value to relationships. But that was not seen as mission.

I remember, as a young person, walking with a Pentecostal friend in São Paulo, and crossing a bridge over the Tietê River. The river smelled very bad. I said to him: 'God must be so sad that we have spoiled his beautiful creation in such a terrible way!' His answer was: 'Oh sister, do you really think that God cares for rivers? God wants us to save sinners!'

In Angola churches stood firm during persecution and restrictions from a Marxist government (from 1975 till 1991, later there was a growing openness) and continued to grow, even though they were not allowed to build new church buildings. Some unregistered churches built simple structures in very poor neighborhoods, others organized up to 5 services on a Sunday to serve their growing number of members. One pastor would be in charge of several churches. Most did not have any theological or biblical formation, due to a lack of training by missions that had served in Angola for decades. Those churches, in spite of little understanding of the Scriptures, led by humble men who trusted the Lord, continued to grow, amidst great poverty and insecurity because of the long war (from 1961 to 2002).

I taught at Bible schools and worked with university students and was always impressed by their desire to learn about the Bible, by their faith and by their questions. Because of the war, the absence of evangelical literature and too little theological education, there was little time and opportunity for theological or missiological thinking. When people were encouraged to discuss the Bible and sought to apply it to their context, their vision broadened and deepened. Since I came back to Brazil to work at the Evangelical Missions Center we have had Angolan leaders come to study with us, and usually their concerns are about how to get their churches involved and committed to mission, based on broad biblical teaching.

Because of my roots in Latin America I will mainly focus in this chapter on the vision for mission of some Latin American theologians, though I also include some references to missiologists from other continents. It is impossible in this paper to write about the whole history of mission so I deal mostly with the more recent missionary commitment of the Global South, as well as the influence of the Lausanne movement.

### **The Vision of some Latin American Theologians<sup>1</sup>**

**René Padilla** (from Ecuador) is a leading theologian who has written about the growing number of Latin American churches actively involved in cross cultural mission. They send missionaries to many places and several institutions are offering courses in mission. But his view is that there has not been enough missiological reflection within Latin America; most books have been translated from English. The Latin American Theological Fraternity is producing more contextual theological and missiological papers.<sup>2</sup>

Padilla is critical of the way the gospel has been brought to Latin America, Africa and Asia. Western missionaries were convinced that they had the right vision of translating and preaching the Bible, but often with little understanding of contextualization. They preached a message that offered eternal salvation, but many had no concern for people's human struggles. So the gospel came as an alien religion and did not present answers to their needs and questions. Mission should be done following the model of Jesus Christ, who lived as a normal human being in his own context and brought the good news in a way that made sense to the people and answered their needs.

Padilla writes that the gospel comes to human beings in relation to the world of creation, a world made through Jesus Christ and that will be recreated through him. The purpose of evangelism is not just to prepare

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<sup>1</sup> Padilla, C. René, *Bases Bíblicas de La Misión: Perspectivas latinoamericanas (Biblical Bases for Mission: Latin-American Perspectives)* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Kairós, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Padilla, 'Preface', in *Bases Bíblicas de La Misión*, ix.

people for the salvation of their souls, but to create a radical re-orientation in their lives, integrating them in the purposes of God to submit all things to the governance of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The church needs to be freed from aspects of its culture that hinder her faithfulness to Christ and her mission. A church has no authority to proclaim reconciliation of man with God, when she denies reconciliation with her fellow men. There is a relationship between the life of the church, her prophetic ministry, and evangelism.<sup>4</sup>

Padilla believes that we need to take the unity of Christ's body seriously, denying ethnocentrism and promoting a theological cross-fertilization between different cultures. Each culture has something precious to contribute to the understanding of the gospel.<sup>5</sup> The gospel needs to answer human needs, but we must be careful not to change its nature, for only a genuine gospel will produce genuine conversion, in repentance and faith. In Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God is manifested, as proclaimed by John the Baptist and by Jesus himself. The content of the gospel is not a new theology but an event: the coming of God's Kingdom, as proclaimed in Isaiah 52.7. People are invited to receive this new life responding through repentance and faith (Is 61:1, 2; Lk 4.20, 21). Jesus' teaching about God's Kingdom is that, in anticipation of the end times, the age of the Kingdom is already present through his person and ministry (Mt 4.23, Mk 1.14, 15; Lk 4.43, 8.1). According to Jesus, the Kingdom would be preached till the end of this age (Mt 24.14, Mk 13.10).<sup>6</sup>

The kingdom of God is a present reality as well as a promise which will be accomplished in the future. The end times have come through Jesus, manifesting themselves through his acts of power and mercy (Lk 4.18-19, Mt 11.5). This kingdom will result in the creation of a new community (Lk 9.57-62, 12.32, 14.25-33; Mt 10:34-38, 26.31). The church is not the equivalent of his Kingdom; the Kingdom is God's reign, the church lives under his reign. The church is called to do good works, which manifest the present reality of the Kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

Padilla sees the Kingdom of God as the hermeneutical key to understand the mission of the church. It is a key concept in the Old and New Testament, proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles, and it brings a new age, a life of reconciliation with God, with fellow human beings and with creation, a life in which righteousness and love abound.

**Samuel Escobar**, from Peru, is another leading Latin American theologian. He writes that during the nineteenth and early twentieth century the Bible played a decisive role in the rise of evangelical churches in Latin

<sup>3</sup> Padilla, *Misión Integral: Ensayos sobre El Reino de Dios y La Iglesia (Integral Mission: Essays about the Kingdom of God and the Church)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2012), 89.

<sup>4</sup> Padilla, *Misión Integral*, 93-95.

<sup>5</sup> Padilla, *Misión Integral*, 100.101.

<sup>6</sup> Padilla, *Misión Integral* 135-141.

<sup>7</sup> Padilla, *Misión Integral* 283-291.

America. Missionaries travelled from place to place, leaving Bibles and New Testaments, and evangelical congregations sprang up, gathering around the Word of God. With new, thriving churches in many countries, there was a need to respond to the pastoral questions that arose in their context and to penetrate their cultures with the gospel. Missionaries gave the Bible to many tribes and nations, but the way of reading the Bible was conditioned by their culture. This retarded the possibility of people gaining new insights, reading the Bible with their own eyes, and developing a proclamation of the gospel and pastoral practices geared to their own cultures and communities.<sup>8</sup> 'The new freedom in the Spirit, which enabled these churches to question theological patterns developed in other cultures, also stimulated an effort to take seriously the missionary challenge posed by their own culture.'<sup>9</sup>

According to 2 Corinthians 5, believers have been made new creatures, the old things have passed, which means that there is 'a totally new way to see the earth and human beings (2 Cor. 5.16). A total revolution, a new way to see Jesus and to see all humanity...'<sup>10</sup> A new attitude to the Gentiles was developed, in contrast to the hostility that previously characterized the relationships between Jews and Gentiles.

In the epistle to the Romans Paul writes that God wanted to bring salvation to every human being... and that he had chosen Paul as his instrument. It was not just a mental certainty but a joyful obedience... the proclamation of the gospel among the Gentiles and in places where it was not known, was his ambition and specific task...<sup>11</sup>

Paul's goal was to plant churches that would be 'reconciled, integrated, mature, joyful, and healing communities... light amidst darkness (Phil. 2.14-16) and signs of the new creation (Rom. 8.18-23).'

Sadly in Latin America the tendency of many churches has been to reduce the gospel to its minimum in order to keep more church members, and as a result the church, instead of transforming society, has become an instrument of society to accommodate its members to its materialistic values.<sup>12</sup>

**Tim Carriker**, from the USA, has taken Brazilian citizenship, identifying himself with his adopted country.<sup>13</sup> According to Carriker the purpose of the Bible is clearly missional: God communicating through Scriptures is proof of his love and concern for humanity. When they receive

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<sup>8</sup> Escobar, Samuel, *A Time for Mission: the Challenge for Global Christianity* (Leicester: IVP & Langham Partnerships), 130-134.

<sup>9</sup> Escobar, S. *A Time for Mission*. 141.

<sup>10</sup> Escobar, 'Pablo y La Misión' in *A Time for Missions* 328.

<sup>11</sup> Escobar, 'Pablo y La Misión' in *A Time for Missions*, 333.

<sup>12</sup> Escobar, 'Pablo y La Misión' in *A Time for Missions*, 336-337.

<sup>13</sup> Carriker, Tim, *O Caminho Missionário de Deus (The Missionary Way of God)* 2nd Ed (São Paulo: Sepal, 2000).

the Bible, people understand God's concern, his love and saving purpose. The Scriptures are a missionary instrument of God.<sup>14</sup>

God gave his people a missionary task and responsibility. When we do not witness, we are separating ourselves from his grace and election. Our role is not to seek power and comfort in our mission, but to follow the footsteps of the Suffering Servant.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus' redemption brings about sincere worship to God and relationships of justice with other human beings and with creation. To be God's people implies reflecting his character and justice. In Brazil evangelicals became suspicious of a social gospel, and were against the doctrine of good works of Spiritists<sup>16</sup> and Roman Catholics, and against a Marxist understanding of social structures. The church needs to recover a broad biblical perspective, worshipping the Lord and seeking patterns of justice in the church and society.<sup>17</sup>

Our mission is to reach people from every tongue, tribe and nation with the gospel of the Kingdom (Mt 24.14). But mission includes stewardship of the whole creation. God's Kingdom is manifested in the proclamation of the gospel for repentance and conversion, but also in the struggle for justice.<sup>18</sup>

### The Vision of Some Key Evangelical Theologians

**John Stott** was a respected evangelical leader who had a balanced view, committed to biblical truth and to the need for contextualization.<sup>19</sup> He was committed to the use of the Bible in mission:

The gospel is thus seen to be one, yet diverse. It is 'given', yet culturally adapted to its audience... This understanding will help us not to make two opposing mistakes: the first is 'total fluidity'... and the opposite mistake is 'total rigidity'... there is a third and better way. It combines commitment to the fact of revelation with commitment to the task of contextualization...<sup>20</sup>

The Bible gives us the *model* for world evangelization. Through the Bible God is... communicating the good news to the world... the same principle is illustrated in both the inspiration of the Scriptures and the incarnation of the Son. ... The divine was communicated through the human. He identified with us, without surrendering his own identity... Some of us refuse to identify

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<sup>14</sup> Carriker, *Caminho Missionário*, 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> Carriker, *Caminho Missionário*, 168.

<sup>16</sup> Spiritists – in Brazil there are many such different groups, from followers of Alan Kardec, to several syncretistic cults like Macumba and Candomblé. They have a growing number of followers.

<sup>17</sup> Carriker, *Caminho Missionário*, 174.

<sup>18</sup> Carriker, *Caminho Missionário*, 175-179.

<sup>19</sup> John Stott, 'The Bible in World Evangelization' in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Stott, 'The Bible in World Evangelization', 23.

with the people we claim to be serving... we do not become like them... others are so determined to identify with the people... that they surrender their Christian standards and values...<sup>21</sup>

Some people reject the gospel not because they perceive it to be false, but because they perceive it to be alien... All of us need to subject our gospel to more critical scrutiny, and in a cross-cultural situation... need to seek the help of local Christians in order to discern the cultural distortions of our message.<sup>22</sup>

So it is possible to be faithful and committed to biblical truth and at the same time open to listen to people from different cultures and ways of understanding. We need to learn to adapt, to incarnate ourselves and our message as followers of Jesus Christ. Some missionaries have created barriers to the gospel by their lack of understanding and adaptability. But as evangelicals we do not want to fall in the trap of creating a different gospel which is more easily acceptable.

**Christopher Wright** is a theologian who has followed in John Stott's footsteps as Director of Langham Partnership, an organization with the goal of developing biblical knowledge, especially among leaders in less affluent contexts. He chairs the Lausanne Theology Working Group.

Wright shows that the early church understood its mission and the need to reach out to all peoples because its members knew their Scriptures and so they found answers at critical moments.

Jesus, after his resurrection, walking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus

...went through the whole canon of the Old Testament to explain how it all led up to him, the Messiah, and how his death and resurrection were in fact the way God had kept his promise to Israel (Lk. 24.13-27)... *in order to make sense of the story so far.*<sup>23</sup>

Later the same evening Jesus met the disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem, and

... he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures...: 'The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead... *and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations...*' (Lk. 24:45-48). Jesus presents the cross and resurrection as the 'central point... of redemption in history... God's answer to every dimension of sin and evil... and all their destructive effects... The cross must be central to every dimension of mission... from personal evangelism... to ecological care for creation.'<sup>24</sup>

In his conclusion Wright writes that he hopes his readers will see the glorious riches of the gospel of God.

<sup>21</sup> Stott, 'The Bible in World Evangelization', 23-24.

<sup>22</sup> Stott, 'The Bible in World Evangelization', 24.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 38.

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*. 43.

The Bible brings us the most amazing good news that speaks to and can transform every area of human life that is touched by sin (which means, every area of human life there is). The trouble is that we have tended to concentrate on one or another aspect of the biblical good news, to the detriment of others. What God has joined together, we have put asunder. Then we struggle to articulate how they are ‘related’ when we should never have separated them in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

The bad news of breaking this “whole” is that Christians who are evangelized by truncated versions of the biblical gospel have little interest in the world, the public square, God’s plan for society and the nations, and even less understanding of God’s intention for creation itself. The scale of our mission efforts, therefore, is in danger of being a lot smaller than the scope of the mission of God.<sup>26</sup>

**N.T. Wright** is a prolific writer and one of today’s most respected biblical scholars. The Kingdom of God his hermeneutical key for understanding how to live our lives, for developing a Christian character and learning to become what God has always intended us to be.

Kingdom is not a late-appearing idea in the Bible; it is present in the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2. What kind of kingdom did God have in mind? Certainly not a human tyranny over nature. Genesis speaks about a garden with a rich variety of life which man has to care for. As God is a God of love, generous and creative, his way of governing is sharing power, acting through those who carry his image, inviting them to cooperate in his project with joy and freedom.<sup>27</sup>

The early Christians rejoiced in the hope of the new Jerusalem, descending from heaven to earth (Rev 21.2) a world flooded with the joy and righteousness of God. To worship and to reign are the double calling of the people of the new city (Rev 3.21, 5.9-10, 20.4, 6). It presents a vision of human beings, able to gather the worship of creation and offer it to the Creator, to exercise sovereignty and wise stewardship over the world as God always had planned for them. They will be priests and kings in the new Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup>

Paul presents the anticipation of our future hope that all who are in Christ, in whom the Spirit lives, will reign in glory over the whole creation. Texts like Matthew 19:28-30 make clear that Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom is related to the future government of God over the world. His followers need to live in the present, anticipating here and now the role they will receive in the future.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*. 273.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*. 274.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, N.T. *Eu Creio, e Agora? Por que o Caráter Cristão é importante (After you Believe)* (Viçosa: Ultimato: 2012), 81-84.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, *Eu Creio, e Agora?* 85-90.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Eu Creio, e Agora?* 100-106.

**David Hesselgrave**<sup>30</sup> has served in Japan and taught mission and cross-cultural ministry in the States. He believes that the Holy Scriptures must occupy a central place in the strategy of churches and their mission. Progress in mission is linked to a complete confidence in and careful examination and utilization of the Word of God, and not reinforcing a simplistic use of the Bible.<sup>31</sup>

Churches and missions have a tendency to choose one method as the overall strategy for world evangelization. The New Testament uses many words like proclaim, testify, evangelize, dialogue, persuade, tell, warn, prove, beseech. Many evangelicals are against the tendency today to promote inter-religious dialogue, fearing that it will remove the central place of redemption in Christ from our message. The emphasis of evangelicals has been proclamation and evangelism.<sup>32</sup> This can imply a limitation of the biblical task. We need to contextualize the proclamation of the biblical message, not compromising its truth but applying it in an appropriate way, being sensitive to the hearers and their cultural context.

The problem with a one-sided emphasis on proclamation is that it overlooks the need to be effective hearers, who will respond to people's understanding and objections. Jesus used a two way communication, addressing questions to his hearers' minds and consciences.

### **The Lausanne Movement**

**The Lausanne conference** of 1974 was influenced by the passionate appeals of Latin American theologians René Padilla and Samuel Escobar for integral mission, which includes care for every aspect of human beings in their context, not only for their spiritual salvation. Padilla and Escobar received support and understanding from John Stott and their message influenced the worldwide evangelical movement, through the Lausanne Covenant. The Lausanne movement resulted in a renewed understanding of the use of the Bible in mission, that it was biblical not only to preach the right message, but to have the right attitudes and actions, following Jesus' example and God's compassionate care for the needy, responding to human suffering, poverty, abuse and violence, and caring for God's creation.

**The Lausanne Covenant** expresses this conviction about the use of Scriptures in Mission:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is

<sup>30</sup>David J. Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy: The Use of the Bible in the Postmodern Church and Mission* Evangelical Missiological Society Series No 1 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1994).

<sup>31</sup>Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy*, 9-11

<sup>32</sup>Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy*, 89.

indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand...

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression...<sup>33</sup>

This covenant presented evangelical churches worldwide with a new understanding and commitment to mission, which included holistic concern for human beings in their context, and the need to respect all cultures.

**The Lausanne Movement** organized a Third International Conference in 2010, with representatives from a wide range of churches and organizations from almost every nation. Here a longer document on the challenge to mission was produced, **The Cape Town Commitment**.<sup>34</sup>

#### **We love the word of God.**

The Bible tells the universal story of creation, fall, redemption in history, and new creation... At the center of this story are the climactic saving events of the cross and resurrection of Christ which constitute the heart of the gospel. This story of God's mission defines our identity, drives *our* mission... We must make the Bible known...

We confess that we easily claim to love the Bible without loving the life it teaches – the life of costly practical obedience to God through Christ. Yet nothing commends the gospel more eloquently than a transformed life, and nothing brings it into disrepute so much as personal inconsistency.<sup>35</sup>

The Lausanne movement brings together Evangelical and Pentecostal churches worldwide, seeking to involve people from all cultures at all levels of leadership. Lausanne is committed to mission and to the use of the Scriptures in mission.

#### **We love the Gospel of God**

As disciples of Jesus, we are gospel people. The core of our identity is our passion for the biblical good news of the saving work of God through Jesus Christ. We are united by our experience of the grace of God in the gospel and by our motivation to make that gospel of grace known to the ends of the earth. ...<sup>36</sup>

#### **We love the Mission of God**

We have been redeemed through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to what God has done in Christ. The Church exists to worship and glorify God... and to participate in the... mission of God... . All our mission must therefore reflect the integration of evangelism and committed engagement in the world, both

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<sup>33</sup> Lausanne Covenant, [www.lausanne.org/en/documents](http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents), visited on 02/02/2013

<sup>34</sup> [www.lausanne.org/en/site](http://www.lausanne.org/en/site) visited on 02/10/2013.

<sup>35</sup> [www.lausanne.org/en/site](http://www.lausanne.org/en/site) visited on 02/10/2013.

<sup>36</sup> [www.lausanne.org/en/site](http://www.lausanne.org/en/site) visited on 02/10/2013.

being ordered and driven by the whole biblical revelation of the gospel of God.<sup>37</sup>

This is a statement of commitment to mission, which is both bringing good news and a commitment to serve, based upon the gospel. The second part of the Cape Town Commitment is a call to action, which seeks to present what it means to serve in mission in response to the needs of the world, global needs as well as more local suffering. We are called to live the truth of the gospel, to proclaim it clearly, to work for reconciliation between peoples, to care for justice, compassion and empowerment of the poor and needy, as well as caring for the suffering creation as part of our missionary responsibility.

### Pentecostals

In Latin America Pentecostal churches have been very active, both in reaching out to communities, especially among the poor, as well as sending missionaries to other countries. But very little has been written by Pentecostal theologians. A number of articles were published under the title 'In the Strength of the Spirit: The Pentecostals in Latin America, a challenge to the historical churches.'<sup>38</sup>

What has caused the poor classes to be attracted to the Pentecostal churches in Brazil? These churches offer community life and values that help the poor to face their daily struggles, help them to survive and to develop a sense of their value as human beings, loved and enabled by God. Pentecostals develop an ascetic lifestyle and dedicate themselves to their family. They help the poor to face and overcome conflicts in their homes.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the prosperity gospel attracts the poor with promises for immediate material blessings, but usually only enriches their leaders. Those promoting a prosperity gospel are considered neo-pentecostals, and do not identify themselves as evangelicals, in contrast to the more traditional Pentecostals in the Latin-American context.

Pentecostal and historical churches in Cuba have developed a similar understand mission in a context of limited religious freedom. They comprehend mission in two main ways: (a) They consider mission and evangelism as being identical. They will share their experience of faith with others and speak to them about God, encouraging people to be saved. (b) They understand evangelism as speaking the Word of God, as well as witnessing through their lifestyle and commitment in society. They attract

<sup>37</sup> [www.lausanne.org/en/site](http://www.lausanne.org/en/site) visited on 02/10/2013.

<sup>38</sup> Gutiérrez, Benjamim F. & Silveira Campos, Leonildo, *Na Força do Espírito: Os Pentecostais na América – Latina: um desafio às igrejas históricas* (São Paulo: Associação Evangélica Literária Pendão Real, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Loreto Mariz, Cecília, 'Pentecostalismo e a Luta contra Pobreza no Brasil' ('Pentecostalism and the struggle against poverty in Brazil') in Gutiérrez, B, *Na Força do Espírito*. 170-186.

people through their lives more than through their words. They see their goal as raising awareness and sowing seeds, so that people start seeking God. They understand their mission as including service and solidarity, acting to promote love and mutual understanding.<sup>40</sup>

**Marcelo Vargas** is a Bolivian theologian, the Executive Secretary of the Latin American Theological Fraternity. He wrote his doctoral thesis on ‘The Aymara identity of Neopentecostals in urban La Paz, Bolivia, with specific reference to the Power of God (PoG) Church.’<sup>41</sup>

PoG members repeat by heart the forms of speech used by their leader, and attempt to imitate his lifestyle and practice of Neopentecostal spirituality. In these congregations, the traditional spiritual disciplines of evangelical Protestants have changed in form and content. Prayer, miracles and evangelism based on their personal experience have replaced the priority given to Bible study in other evangelical churches. They did receive influence from American, Argentinean and Brazilian Neo-Pentecostals, using anointed oil for healings and emphasizing prosperity theology.

Prayer is by far their most common practice of piety. They speak to God to ask for the power of the Holy Spirit or to find a job. Evangelism means sharing their faith with relatives and friends, talking more about their experience than the content of the Gospel. Their evangelism is motivated by a sense of urgency transmitted by the church, because the task has to be completed and each believer must play his or her part.

The PoG believers not only read their Bibles less frequently, but their capacity to study and understand the biblical text is weaker. Communication based on orality is an Aymara value. They are committed to fasting, visiting the sick, speaking in tongues and the use of the PoG mass media. Vargas sees the PoG church as very much adapted to the Aymara culture, and at the same time as similar to other Neo-Pentecostals.

Compared to other Pentecostal churches, there certainly is much less emphasis on the Bible as the Word of God, the need to read it and to share its message.

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<sup>40</sup> Cepeda, Rafael, Carillo, Elizabeth, González, Rhode & Ham, Carlos E, ‘Causas e Desafios do Crescimento das Igrejas Protestantes em Cuba: A Influência do Movimento Pentecostal’ (‘Causes and Challenges Protestant Church Growth in Cuba: The Influence of the Pentecostal Movement’) in Gutiérrez, B, *Na Força do Espírito*. 121-137.

<sup>41</sup> Vargas, Marcelo, *The Aymara identity of Neopentecostals in urban La Paz, Bolivia, with specific reference to the Power of God (PoG) Church*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation presented in November 2010 at the University of Wales, OCMS-Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

They write about the development of Pentecostal Mission and Missiology.<sup>42</sup> A good proportion of Southern Christianity is ‘Pentecostal’ although the term is not used in many churches. The Bible is read with conviction and with the expectation of experiencing the same healings and miracles, and God is expected to ‘speak’ to his people through visions and dreams. The evangelistic and missionary zeal of these emerging churches is a natural consequence of this type of Christianity, often associated with voluntary and involuntary displacement of massive numbers of people.<sup>43</sup>

With a conservative theology they continue to prepare people for heaven while ignoring the church’s missionary call to ‘this life’ matters. More alarming is a strong leaning towards theology of this worldly blessing, often indistinguishable from the self-centered prosperity gospel.<sup>44</sup>

The outward expression of their faith includes vibrant and participatory worship, commitment to prayer for God’s direct intervention to human needs, zealosity for evangelism. This form of Christianity tends to attract the poor in society and has brought empowerment to the masses.<sup>45</sup>

However, there have been signs of a more holistic understanding of mission among Asian pentecostals. The social context of ‘developing’ societies requires Christians to take social issues into their mission thinking, such as poverty, health issues (HIV/AIDS, etc), education, etc. A new breed of Pentecostal churches, particularly in the Global South, has taken social service seriously. Miller and Yamamori call them ‘progressive Pentecostals’.<sup>46</sup> They refer to a new area in Pentecostal mission, a deeper and more strategic level of social engagement. This level of mission engagement often aims at ‘justice’ in social, economic, political, racial and environmental areas.

### Mission in Reverse

Non-Western Christians are attempting to re-evangelize the West. A primary factor making this possible is the migration which is bringing unprecedented numbers of people from the non-Western world to Western countries. Some are worshipping in their mother-tongue. Others are worshipping in English but sustaining the cultural identity of their place of origin.

In 2003 Lucas Njenga from Nigeria founded “Heart for the City”, a project in Glasgow which combines biblical witness with concern for social renewal. After six months dedicated to understanding the culture and the people, Lucas and his wife Helen began their work among vulnerable

<sup>42</sup> Ma, Julie C & Ma, Wonsuk, *Mission in the Spirit – Towards a Pentecostal/charismatic Missiology* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Ma & Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ma & Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ma & Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ma & Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 10.

communities. The project brings together people from different ethnic and socio-economic groups for Christian teaching and worship. There can be little doubt that immigration has dramatically changed the character of Christianity in Europe. In Cologne the largest worshipping congregation is a Korean one. The largest congregation in London is a Nigerian-founded one. The largest congregation in Europe is in Kiev and again it is Nigerian-founded. Migratory movements caused by war, persecution and poverty have brought masses of migrants to Europe who did not come to be missionaries, but who brought their faith with enthusiasm and transmitted it to European peoples.

### **Conclusion**

Evangelical and Pentecostal churches have developed a growing commitment to serve the poor in Brazil, in Latin American, in Africa and Asia. There is a growing number of Christian NGOs and churches serving in many ways. They have learned that in both the Old and the New Testaments God is manifested as a God who cares for the little ones, a God who offers forgiveness and reconciliation with himself, as well as being concerned for justice and service to those who suffer, a God who becomes a humble servant to reach even the most despised human beings. At the same time they continue to trust that knowing Jesus as their personal Saviour and Lord is the key to a new life and mission.

Many understand that we are called to follow Jesus' model in humble and loving service. Some serve in arts, others in sports, many offer training courses to the young, as well as to women, others serve in literacy and in community development. Sadly a growing number of churches are influenced by the self-seeking theology of prosperity and have lost compassion for the needy. And many still follow the traditional view that our only task is to present the gospel and seek to convert people to Christ. But there is hope, even though the dimension of social needs and suffering continues to be much greater than our possibility to respond adequately and seek the empowerment and restoration of the dignity of people living at the margin of society.

# BIBLE HERMENEUTICS IN MISSION – A WESTERN PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

Michael Kisskalt

This essay will not reflect on the question of what kind of mission theology we can elaborate out of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> This question is an important one, but in this chapter we focus on the question of how to use the Bible in mission fundamentally and practically. We also do not present the history of the dissemination of the Bible with its many translations.<sup>2</sup> This history of the Bible shows how essential it has been in Christian mission through the centuries. But there remains the important question of how to use the Bible in mission correctly. How can we avoid using the Bible in a quite selective manner to sustain church and mission practice? What can we do or should we not do when we wish to bring the Bible into a new culture? Especially in the West we may ask whether the Bible still has relevance in a context of secularisation and postmodernity. We do not claim to have all the answers to these questions but we want to offer our contributions to this challenge of the right use of the Bible in mission. Of course the Bible is not merely a tool in mission; it is also the manifesto of the Kingdom of God and the guideline for Christian life and mission. At the same time the Bible is an essential tool for mission. So this essay will deal with the question of the right use of the Bible in mission while keeping in mind that the Bible is much more than a tool.

## 1. The Relevance of the Bible in the Contemporary World

‘The Bible – a spoken symphony!’ This was the title of a project by the German artist Ben Becker.<sup>3</sup> Produced in 2007, it has become quite a success, if you look at the high interest in the CDs and DVDs and at the huge number of people enjoying Becker’s live presentations in different theatres in Germany. At the heart of this dramatic performance was the reading of key passages from the Bible, both Old and New Testament. Maybe public interest was due not only to the content of the Bible verses

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<sup>1</sup> C. Wright, *The Mission of God. Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP 2006).

<sup>2</sup> P. Beyerhaus, *Er sandte sein Wort. Theologie der christlichen Mission. Band 1: Die Bibel in der Mission Heilsgeschichtliche Missionstheologie 1* (Wuppertal/Bad Liebenzell: Brockhaus-Verlag/Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bibel2010.com/index02.html> (18.2.2013)

but also to the artistically excellent reading of the texts, reinforced by sensitive music composed for this purpose, but the fact is that people in Germany go to the theatre to listen to the words of the Bible!

This experience demonstrates that the Church does not have to hide the words and messages of the Bible in its testimony to the world. In the midst of varied religious attitudes in modern societies, the Bible, as Holy Scripture, has its place. Even today the Bible remains the world's bestseller. Its words, mostly transmitted in the form of stories, touch people in a special way. This might seem surprising because these stories are ancient and appear far removed from the reality of modern women and men.

It is not because of the Bible that traditional churches in the Northern world are losing their members, or that people are looking for God outside of the churches. There are other reasons for these changes, perhaps linked to the churches themselves and to certain current tendencies such as extreme individualism and the prevailing general distrust of moral or religious organisations. The missional challenge for churches is that people are often unfamiliar with them, are not interested in them or their message. Churches try to overcome this indifference to their message and ministry by offering more accessible, popular meetings and services. It is understandable that churches must do something in order to signal to people that churches and their message are relevant to them. Through these more secular or social strategies, churches try to make contact with the surrounding population. They hope that after this low-threshold contact people may remember their experience of the church as positive and come to the services or to other spiritual events – for example at Christmas or when they have problems and are seeking existential answers. It is only gradually that unchurched people may be ready to come to Sunday services, Bible classes and house groups in order to listen to the words of the Bible.

Despite this widespread indifference to church, people are interested in religion, and also in the Bible as a deeply religious book. The special missional power of the Bible relates to its character as a book of stories. All these stories testify to experiences with the almighty and living God, no matter whether people call him El-Shaddai, God of the Fathers, Father of Jesus or 'our Father in heaven'. God enters into the life of men and women, people discover the presence of God, tell their experiences to their friends and family members, and those first groups begin to write down these stories. These experiences all relate to the same God. This criterion of commonality of spiritual experiences and doctrines was essential for the Fathers of the Church in the second century as they collected the books and letters that would become the New Testament. They built on the collection of books that formed the Old Testament. This collection was made according to the use and decisions of the rabbis of the Hellenistic world who edited the Greek edition of the Hebrew Scriptures, the *Septuagint*,

which was Holy Scripture among the churches of the first centuries. The criteria for the biblical canon were, first, its theological content guaranteed by its prophetic and apostolic origin, and secondly, its practical acceptance in most of the churches.<sup>4</sup> In the past and in the present, people have discovered the Bible as a Holy Book, because in reading its words and listening to them, believers feel that their own life stories, their needs and hopes are revealed. If they follow the way of faith to which the biblical stories invite them, they experience the presence of the almighty God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ as a God full of righteousness, love and grace.

This does not mean that we have to *read* the words of the Bible in order to experience their missional power. Even artists use certain hermeneutical criteria in choosing biblical texts to illustrate. When we look at the biblical texts they depict we have to ask why they have chosen certain texts and ignored others. Artists and actors will illustrate their understanding of the texts by the way they read and by their choice of background music or the decoration of the stage.

## 2. Hermeneutical Criteria for the Right Use of the Bible in Mission

The Bible develops its missional impetus as we use it in the right way. There are principles that we have to respect if we are not to misuse the Bible for our own purposes and preconceptions. We cannot avoid our preconceptions. Every experience, feeling and thought influences our understanding of the biblical texts. This is not wrong, it is part of the hermeneutical circle of the communication between the Bible and human beings. In view of the multiple voices in the Bible, everyone can find something to justify his theory or action. Many sectarian groups or dictatorial 'Christian' regimes have referred to biblical verses, tearing them out of their context. Even Christians fall into this hermeneutical trap.<sup>5</sup> For example, if you choose certain texts and omit others, you have made a theological decision that you must be aware of. You should allow others to

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<sup>4</sup> For the Canon history of the Bible see: U. Swarat, Die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons, in W. Heinz-Neudorfer and E. Schnabel, eds, *Das Studium des Neuen Testaments. Band 2* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus-Verlag, 2000), 267-289; H.v. Lips, *Der neutestamentliche Kanon. Seine Geschichte und Bedeutung* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2004), 114-116.

<sup>5</sup> The Dutch-American missiologist Charles van Engen ('The relation of Bible and Mission in Mission Theology' in C. v. Engen, D. S. Gilliland and P. Pierson, eds, *The Good News of the Kingdom* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1993), 27-36)) distinguishes between hermeneutical approaches "from below" (anthropological) and "from above" (dogmatic), pleading finally for the dialogical "critical hermeneutics" of D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* American Society of Missiology Series 16 (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 20-25.

challenge your choice, and you need to find arguments to justify your selection. These arguments may refer to the particular weight of certain biblical texts and stories within the Bible or they may touch the particular situation of yourself or your addressees. Whether we use the Bible within the church or outside the church in missional outreach, we should respect firstly the historical contexts of the Bible and secondly the context of the whole of the Bible. A third aspect of understanding biblical texts correctly is to look at their impact in the history of Christendom and in Christian systematic theology. ('Wirkungsgeschichte' in German). In a third section we will consider the fourth context of Bible use in mission: the context of the missionary church and of the addressees of the biblical message today.

If we, as Protestants, want to interpret the Bible in the right way, we must avoid the temptation of those rather sentimental enthusiasts ('Schwärmer') to neglect the characters and historical context of the biblical books, and speak only of the Spirit who leads into all truth. Following the way of the great Reformers we should instead engage in interpreting the Bible as a book written by human beings, so that we can freely use historical critical methods. But we must always be aware that in these naked human words God reveals his love and righteousness. An additional element typical of the Protestant approach is the determination to locate engagement with Scripture positively in current society. The environment in which the Church exists is not simply hostile; it is the situation in which God has placed his Church to witness to the gospel by word and deed.

### *2.1. The historical context*

If we want to interpret the Bible in the right way in mission, we should pay attention to the historical context of the biblical texts. The Bible is not simply a book full of dogmatic assertions. We do find dogmatic statements in the Bible, but they are always born and expressed in their time and context, enveloped in stories which have their origin in a certain historical period and situation.

All believers, past and present, rely on the fact that the biblical traditions go back to the authority of the prophets and the apostles who have experienced these words as divine and inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16), filled with liberating, judicial and healing power. The biblical texts testify to the love of God and his justice as a reality in the sinful world, through Jesus, the Christ. This message has become 'flesh' in the human characters of the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is the word of God in the mouth of men and women. We cannot regard some biblical verses as 'divine' and disregard other words of the Bible as human. Martin Luther rightly says that the saving revelation of God is expressed through the 'skeleton' and 'bones' of

the human words.<sup>6</sup> The Bible has not fallen directly from heaven; its words and stories have been passed on and written down by specific persons in specific historical situations. If we want to understand these words clearly, we have to understand their historical background as clearly as possible.

To enter the Bible's historical context helps modern interpreters to step away from their own preconceptions. Historical methodology rationalises and objectifies our Bible reading. Using this method, we do not read the Bible simply for ourselves in our present situation; rather we are looking for the truth of the biblical texts in their original situation and in many situations throughout the history of the church and its mission. It may be seeking to understand the biblical texts as strange 'former' words, outside our own pious self-understanding, may be painful for some people. But this methodological step of locating the biblical words in their own context is necessary if we are to understand the different ways they have been understood in church history and finally to contextualise them in our contemporary context as readers and recipients. The missional task of contextualising the biblical message has therefore as its first step the understanding of the Bible texts in their respective historical contexts. The specific questions of the historical critical method reflect this methodical step because they urge the exegetes to understand the text fully in its own context.

In fact, every reconstruction, however conscientious, of the historical context of a biblical text remains hypothetical. It may be that the exegetes come to very different conclusions in their historical research: some may question the authorship of a biblical book, others will argue for the contrary. Some will deny the historicity of some events in the Old Testament; others will argue that events happened as the Bible describes them. The results of scientific Bible research should therefore not be made absolute. In spite of this reservation, there is no real alternative to historical methodology, used with humility. Every method should serve the goal of making the word of God as clear as possible. The clearer the biblical words shine, the more the theologian can recognise his own preconceptions. At the scientific theological level, every method which seeks to detect the original meaning of historical documents like the Bible should also be critically examined for its own preconceptions. All these approaches by theologians and historians working scientifically serve the higher goal of understanding the biblical texts in their historical context in order to grasp their message 'outside of us' as precisely as possible. If we understand the

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<sup>6</sup> Against the background of the incarnation of God in Jesus, the German theologian Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) speaks of the Bible as an act of the "Condescendence of God" and as "an act of the utmost humility". Since the Bible is fully divine and fully human, every exegete has to interpret it with humility – Hempelmann, H., *Gott ein Schriftsteller. Johann Georg Hamann über die End-Äußerung Gottes ins Wort der Heiligen Schrift und ihre hermeneutischen Konsequenzen* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus-Verlag, 1988).

message of the text, we can translate it better and in a more appropriate way into other contexts. Both the historical-critical method and missiology ask questions of the context: the first to examine the context of the Bible and the second to understand the current context of the Bible reader. This is the missional relevance of the historical-critical method of biblical research.

## 2.2. The biblical context

If we want to understand the message of certain biblical passages we have to understand them

- a. in the mirror of their textual context and
- b. in the mirror of the whole of the Bible.

We have to recognise the *narrative context* of the text we are interested in. We cannot use the Bible like a quarry where we dig for single stones. If we pick out single passages of the Bible which correspond to our preferred convictions, it may be that we miss the message of the text which we can only understand clearly if we read it in the context of its biblical narrative. To evaluate biblical texts in their textual context means to renounce any subjective misappropriation by the reader or interpreter. To examine a biblical passage in its narrow context of the surrounding texts and in the wider context of, for example, the biblical book in question throws light on the main topics of the passage. But the textual context is even wider.

Every single biblical narrative is part of the *big biblical narrative*. The stories of the conquering tribal God of the people of Israel in the first historical parts of the Old Testament continue step by step to the revelation of the universal God as the creator of the universe and the Lord of all of history. His appeal to righteousness becomes balanced with his desire to offer pardon and grace to his sinful people, finally offering redemption to his creation. In Jesus of Nazareth, Christians discover finally the God of Israel as the God of justice and of love for the whole world. According to the Reformation, the whole Bible has its centre in the salvation work of Jesus Christ: in Jesus Christ God reveals his loving and righteous intention to save women and men from evil. Even in the Old Testament, we discover this character and mission of God: for example, the blessing of Abraham in whom all nations shall be blessed (Gen 12:3, 4) should be read in relation to the second book of Isaiah (Is 40-55) with its promise that the last word of God is not judgement but salvation. The prophet interprets the catastrophe of the exile of the Israelites as a result of the disobedience of the people of God, announcing the grace of God in forgiving their sins and leading them back to their home country.

We certainly find Old Testament passages that are strange, even cruel, to modern ears. But the Old Testament also contains words and stories that reflect the essential message of love and justice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because the God of Jesus is the same God of the people of Israel. The prophets express their hope for the coming Messiah and the psalmists

hopefully pray that all nations will bow their knees before the God of Israel as God of the whole earth. But in its understanding of mission, there are differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Most passages in the Old Testament about God and the nations demonstrate the hope and faith of Israel that God will influence the nations while Israel itself stays passive. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find an indication of an *active cross-cultural mission* of the people of Israel to the non-Israelites. The Old Testament talks about Israel being a priest to the nations and about God's message going out to the distant coasts and people, but the movement is *from* the nations *to* Zion (Mic 4:1-5; Is 2:1-5) and less from Israel to the nations. The prophet Jonah had to be forced by God himself to preach among the Gentiles. This prophetic book demonstrates the 'anti-missionary' attitude of Israel over against the missionary intention of God. The book of Jonah already marks a turning point in the history of Israel which will be brought to completion in the sending of the disciples of Jesus to the nations. In the New Testament, the apostles and the emerging church receive this call of Jesus to become active in calling people to faith, people of all nations.<sup>7</sup> This new drive is possible because the authors of the books of the New Testament testify to Jesus the crucified as resurrected into the new world of God. In Jesus, the saving presence of God and relationship to God are no longer limited to the Israelites; now people of all nations profit from God's love and the justice. Strongly driven by this experience and conviction, Christians open up and move towards other people to share their faith and life. The Story of Jesus completes the Story of Israel as the Old Testament testifies to it. The God of Israel is also the 'Father' of Jesus Christ. The New Testament with its testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ throws new light on the Story of Israel. So to read and interpret the Bible adequately involves taking seriously both Testaments and discovering their grand narratives, instead of selecting isolated biblical sentences as guides to the truth. The Bible's grand narratives deal with mission since they contain the basic guidelines for mission and for mission theology.<sup>8</sup> [I have cut this last sentence heavily, not really understanding what the author wants to say.]

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<sup>7</sup> Mission scholars speak of a "passive, centripetal mission" in the Old Testament and an "active, centrifugal mission" in the New Testament (Blauw, Johannes, *The Missionary Nature of the Church. A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2003 [1962]); Wright, *The Mission of God*).

<sup>8</sup> T. Wright, *The Bible and Tomorrow's World* (London: Church Missionary Society, 2008), 4-7 (<http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=334> (18 February 2013)); C. Wright, *The Mission of God* (especially Part I: Bible and Mission, 29-70).

### 2.3. 'Impact history'

The impact of biblical texts in the history and theology of the church is a new field in biblical hermeneutics. The 'impact question' involves becoming aware of different contextual receptions and interpretations of the biblical text in the history of church and mission. Impact history may reveal the roots of one's own preconceptions about a text. We develop a healthy 'suspicion' of ideological interpretations of the biblical texts. But impact history not only fulfils the function of manifesting 'suspicious' attitudes towards these preconceptions. It also sensitises us to the contextual questions that are so crucial in mission. At what time, in what situation, did people understand the text, and in which way and why? The spiritual impact of the biblical text does not end with its textual and historical understanding. There is still the history of the Holy Spirit who interprets the biblical texts anew in many different times in various situations.

If we want to use the Bible in mission in the right way, we have to interpret the biblical message with the help of historical and textual methods, discovering the historical and the textual context of the biblical texts. Reading the Bible with these methods, mission does not fall into the temptation of emphasising biblical passages that may be more marginal or historically limited. In order to understand the impact of a particular biblical text, one should also examine its impact history, how Christians and theologians in different times and situations made use of the texts in their thinking and doing. They read the texts, interpreted the texts and tried to live according to their reading and interpretation. All these exegetical methods are strongly concentrated on the meaning of the text in a certain context. Going through these reflections, one is well prepared for the central missiological question: how to contextualise the biblical text in the present situation. Using the Bible in mission also means to translate it correctly into the contemporary context.

## 3. The Present Context of Mission and its Importance for Understanding and Using the Bible

### 3.1. Contextual preconceptions

The narrative of the Bible does not end with the Revelation of John and the history of its interpretation. Scripture is a coherent and on-going narrative or drama in which we participate as those who read the biblical texts and try to live them. It is not only understanding the Bible itself which plays a major role in mission but also understanding the current context of people who approach the Bible. In the mission situation two groups of persons play a major role in relation to the Bible: the missionary and the addressees of his message. The missionary presents the Bible through the mind-set of his pre-understanding of the Bible according to his personality, history and

context. His culture, experiences and personal situation make him sensitive to certain passages in the Bible whereas other passages are like closed doors to him. Every person has his/her special spectacles through which he/she reads and understands the Bible. Nobody reads or listens to the Bible without preconceptions. This is not something negative. The words of the Bible must be rooted in culture. But the missionary must be alert to the fact that he does not possess the whole truth of the Bible. He might come close to it if he interprets the Bible using a self-reflecting and critical method (see above); but even with the best method no one can claim to have grasped the whole truth of the Bible.

### 3.2. Process of inculturation

When missionaries seek to bring the message of the Bible to people, they will do so in a particular way with certain preconceptions. They may do their best to communicate it in a culturally sensitive way. Especially at the beginning of the task of communication, they may even select parts of the Bible which are more likely to be comprehensible for their audience. But in the final analysis it is not the missionary who inculturates the Bible into the concrete world of people but the receiving people themselves. It is the receivers of the message who truly inculturate the gospel. They listen to the words of the Bible, spoken by the missionary, with their own particular ear. They might understand certain words in a completely different way from the missionary because they are hearing a message that originates in another culture and history and another personality. Inculturation is a complex process with three agents: the missionary, the addressees and the gospel itself.<sup>9</sup> [In the previous paragraph the author states that *two* agents are present in this process. Maybe these paragraphs, which are very repetitive, can be combined and corrected.] Whether the message of the Bible bears fruit in its new context depends on the grace of God. By his Spirit God enables the contextual understanding of the receiver. It is the Spirit of God who enlivens the words of the Bible.

It is a big challenge for the missionary to bring the message of the Bible to people as sensitively as possible, and simultaneously to be ready to lose control when he has delivered the message. In communicating the message of the Bible he should leave aside personal ambition. His role is that of an adviser, or of a spiritual *companion* to people, helping them to understand and to live out the gospel. Furthermore, the missionary, relying on the work of the Holy Spirit as the best interpreter of the gospel, is open to the new theological and spiritual insights of the addressees as they understand the Bible in their way. In this process of inculturation, the missionary plays

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<sup>9</sup> H. Wrogemann, 'Wer betreibt Inkulturation? Evangelium und Kulturen im Spannungsfeld von Machtkonstellationen, Anerkennung und kritischem Dialog', *Zeitschrift für Mission* 32 (2006), 234-252.

more than a minor role; the new believers need the understandings and knowledge of the missionary. In this situation the missionary represents the church in its ecumenical dimensions on her way toward the kingdom of God. Both the biblical understanding of the missionary and the reception of the Bible by the addressees may have their shortcomings. No inculturation process is free of human misunderstandings. The task of the church and its mission is a brotherly dialogue about different understandings. Only by entering into a broad and open conversation may we overcome some of the shortcomings of our biblical comprehension and our missional use of the Bible.

## 4. Bible Dialogue in Mission

### 4.1. Importance of dialogue

To find the right way to interpret biblical texts in the current situation, one should, in a figurative sense, work at a big 'round table'. Many voices contribute their knowledge and experiences with the biblical texts: the historical exegetes, the church historians who describe the history of the reception of the texts and the systematic theologians who explain the text in the context of church doctrine. Indeed, studying books or articles about the biblical text by authors of different generations is already part of the dialogue. In the mission situation, the primary dialogue partner is the people we seek to reach. The theologian and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin<sup>10</sup> speaks of several partners in the missional conversation: the Bible, the missionary, the (ecumenical) churches, and the addressees. This hermeneutical model<sup>11</sup> for reading the Bible in the right way in mission produces great energy which can benefit all parts of the mission process.

### 4.2. Not a hierarchical approach

As we emphasise the importance of dialogue in interpreting the Bible, we would challenge another approach to biblical hermeneutics in the mission situation: the hierarchical approach. In the history of mission, it was, for example, the Vatican that had the right to define the proper interpretation of the Bible in the Roman Catholic Church. When Chinese Christians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century wanted to develop their own church rites in accordance with their culture, the voice of Rome forbade this. But we also find this

<sup>10</sup> L. Newbigin, 'Christ and Cultures', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31 (1978), 1-22.

<sup>11</sup> Building on the critical hermeneutics of D. Bosch (22-25) C. v. Engen (*Relation of Bible and Mission*, 31) – with his "tapestry approach" working on common motifs of the biblical and the current world of today – pleads finally for many levels of dialogue between the biblical text, its interpretations in history and in the present situation.

monopoly thinking about Bible interpretation in evangelical churches when certain theologians or theological directions claim to represent the only objective and true interpretation of the Bible. They may dialogue with certain exegetical, historical and theological systematic representatives who share their denominational conviction, but they avoid the conversation with both the ecumenical body of Christ and the culture they want to reach with the gospel. In this model, the correct interpretation of the Bible is strictly defined by church hierarchy or certain theological schools, and mission simply means to convey this truth into the new missionary context, allowing for cultural compromises only in marginal questions. In this way, one may adhere to one's own preconceptions and thus reduce faith in God to a small human philosophy.

#### *4.3. Ecumenical dialogue*

Mission should always be open to ecumenical dialogue, especially when interpreting biblical texts in mission situations. In most situations, several churches are engaged in mission. All churches claim to be based on the biblical message. Their goal is to transmit it according to their denominational reading. Human congregations as cultural entities are generally denominational so to some extent denominational mission and confessional Bible reading are necessary and acceptable. But most denominational mission work takes place in cultures where other missions also are active. It would not only strengthen the visible appearance of the unity of church to enter into an ecumenical dialogue, but all missions concerned could benefit by sharing their experiences with one another in the common mission context. At the same time, during this process all sides would become sensitive to the value of dialogue in Bible reading and preaching and would discover that God is always greater than their denominational Bible understanding and faith. A further step would be to include in the conversation how the mission addressees are understanding the Bible because God also is present among those who do not yet belong to the people of God (see Acts 10).

#### *4.4. Missional dialogue*

The dialogue about understanding and using the Bible in mission is only complete when the receivers of the message also read the Bible in their way and bring their understandings into the conversation. It is not only through direct teaching of the Bible that people open up their hearts to the gospel. The really deep acceptance of the biblical message takes place when they themselves understand the biblical texts at a deep and active level. The church should be courageous and have confidence in the Spirit of God so that it refrains from controlling people's understanding of the Bible. To read the Bible together with people who are not used to dealing with

Scripture is always a fresh experience. In the missional dialogue, Christians can contribute their understanding of the Bible and bear witness to their experiences with biblical texts. In this dialogical space, the addressees of mission can also articulate their understanding and non-understanding of biblical texts.

This kind of Bible dialogue is especially fruitful when all participants in the encounter have learnt to share their lives, as in the German model of 'convivence missiology'.<sup>12</sup> 'Convivence', from the Spanish word *convivencia*, describes a certain way of organising Christian grassroots communities in the slums of Latin America, and simply means 'living together'. Mission takes place when all partners in the mission process share their lives, start to take care of one another, learn from one another and experience new forms of encounter in celebrating common festivals. The existing Church is important in the transmission of the Bible in mission, but this process only reaches its goal when people in the church and people outside the church meet face-to-face and genuinely communicate with one another. The use of biblical texts by modern artists shows that the Christian Holy Scriptures have not lost their fascination for people. The Spirit of God may lead everyone concerned in the dialogical mission process into a new understanding of his love and justice. This mission process will provide new energy as long as it goes beyond theoretical discussion to provides opportunity for praxis.

### 5. Bible Practice in Mission

In his book *Models of Contextual Theology*,<sup>13</sup> the Catholic theologian Stephan Bevans mentions a contextual approach that he calls the 'Praxis Model': Bible and context come together in a reciprocal movement. We mirror our life praxis in the Bible. This will lead us to new understanding but also to a renewed praxis. We live out this new praxis, and mirror it again in the light of our biblical understanding and so on. Bevans illustrates this movement as a spiral.<sup>14</sup> If it works well, the whole process of re-reading scripture and re-finding a new praxis will move the church forward in its mission to communicate the love of God and his justice in this world. We find this model of contextualisation particularly in the theologies of liberation where the praxis of faith comes prior to the theory of faith.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Kisskalt, 'Mission as Convivence. Life sharing and mutual learning in Mission. Inspirations from Germany Missiology', *Journal of European Baptist Theological Studies* 11 (2011), 6-14; T. Sundermeier, 'Theology of Mission' in K. Mueller, T. Sundermeier, S.B.Bevans (eds), *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives* (Eugene/Oregon, 2006), 429-450.

<sup>13</sup> S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* Revised and Extended Edition, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Bevans, *Models* 76.

If we apply this model to our question of the role of the Bible in mission, we discover the importance of practice in our understanding of the Bible. People in church and society do not understand the biblical message simply through theoretical reflection, but by practising what they think they have understood from the Bible. A missional church should provide opportunities for people to live out their Bible understanding. There are successful courses about the Christian faith that close every meeting with the challenge to live consciously with the biblical text that has been read in the group during the week, and to write down one's experiences. At the beginning of the next meeting, people talk about their experiences with the Bible text. When people have experiences with their faith, big or small, they want to read the Bible again and again; they experience this book as a truly Holy Book, full of life-relevant content. This practical approach to the Bible in mission must always be completed by the dialogue described earlier; if not, people will remain stuck in their own assumptions and practice. On the other hand, a merely theoretical dialogue will hinder the biblical message from entering the inner heart of people.

## 6. Conclusion

Those churches and Christians who want to live in a missional way, open to people outside the Christian communities, will use the Bible well if they learn to open up their understanding of the Bible. The Spirit of God who is the Spirit of the Bible is able to inspire new life in the biblical words when we enter into this broad dialogue with as many participants as possible. The biblical word, which Christians believe and experience as the Word of God, will be inculturated into new contextual situations and it will form old and new expressions of Christian faith. If the church enters the public arena with the Bible, she must respect the rules of dialogue in this arena and give witness to the Word of God in a 'constructive and interactive mode'.<sup>15</sup> If the church is able to communicate the gospel humbly and self-critically in this form of dialogue, she will experience that 'the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart' (Heb 4:12).<sup>16</sup> When Christians in mission are ready to share their lives with people, they will be surprised that the word of God will indeed not return empty but will accomplish what God desires and achieve the purpose for which God sent it (Is 55:11).

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<sup>15</sup> Lategan, B.: 'The Function of Biblical Texts in a Modern Situational Context' in T. Fornberg, D. Hellholm (eds), *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts. Essays in Honor of Lars Hartmann* (Oslo/Copenhagen/Stockholm/Boston: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 955-957.

<sup>16</sup> New International Version, 2011.

# ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVES ON BIBLE AND MISSION

Simon Crisp

## Introduction

In the area of Bible and Mission it has to be admitted that the Orthodox churches have a rather negative reputation. These churches have often been considered to be inward-looking and ethnocentric with little appetite for missionary outreach, more interested in the arcane interpretations of the Church Fathers than in the plain meaning of Scripture, and more committed to the preservation of ancient traditions than to encouraging the faithful either to read the Bible for themselves or to reach out to those outside the Church.

One need only look at the contributions of Orthodox participants at the Edinburgh 2010 conference however to see how far this caricature is from the truth. As Viorel Ionita puts it, mission is central to the Orthodox understanding of the Church as ‘the instrument and the purpose of mission’. The Orthodox understanding of mission may be summed up succinctly under the four headings of *Kerygma* or proclamation of the Gospel, *Leitourgia* as public worship of God, *Martyria* or witness to the faith, and *Diakonia* as service to one’s neighbour and to the world. In fact Orthodoxy has a noble tradition of mission and outreach lasting many centuries.<sup>1</sup>

In recent times, it is true, most of the Orthodox churches have been hampered by their situation – the Greek church in the Ottoman Empire and the Russian and Eastern European churches behind the Iron Curtain – the process of finding their place in modern liberal pluralist societies has been far from easy. The traditional identity of ethnic and religious affiliation (‘to be Greek/Russian is to be Orthodox’ has led to a degree of inward looking exclusivity, while the understandable desire to recover ground lost during Ottoman or Communist rule has resulted in a kind of defensiveness that has sometimes militated against an outward looking approach to mission.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Viorel Ionita, ‘Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity: An Orthodox Perspective’, in David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross (eds), *Edinburgh 2010. Mission Then and Now* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 263-275.

<sup>2</sup> For the challenges faced by the Orthodox churches in responding to the modern world of liberal democracy and cultural pluralism, see Emmanuel Clapsis (ed), *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*. (Geneva: WCC Publications / Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004).

## 2. Historical Perspective

### 2.1 Cyril and Methodius

The tone for Orthodox mission, it may be said, was set by the brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius, the ‘enlighteners of the Slavs’ and probably the most famous of all Byzantine missionaries. Although Greeks by nationality, their command of the Slavonic language, acquired as they grew up in Thessalonica, made them ideally suited to a mission reaching out to the Slavs of Moravia. In the year 862 they were assigned to just such a mission.<sup>3</sup>

Byzantine Christianity was soon replaced in Moravia itself with a more Western tradition, partly because of unease in Rome about the brothers’ emphasis on use of the vernacular Slavonic language. Nevertheless the work of Cyril and Methodius led ultimately to the conversion of the Slavs from Bulgaria to Russia and was thus highly influential in the spread of Christianity in that part of Europe.

In the light of this it is interesting to look at some of the key features of the missionary work of Cyril and Methodius. First there is an emphasis on use of the local language. Even before setting out on their mission St Cyril created an alphabet for the Slavonic language and began work on translation of the Scriptures and of the key liturgical texts. Secondly, the brothers’ mission emphasised the importance of local clergy; suitable candidates were to be ordained as soon as possible, so that the young church could worship in its mother-tongue. And thirdly, the goal of their mission was the establishment of a self-governing local church as permitted by canon law. It was precisely this commitment to localisation that gave rise to opposition to the brothers’ mission, and eventually led to a proscription by the authorities in Rome of their use of the vernacular language.

This emphasis on use of the local language that is of most significance for our purposes, since it runs like a thread through the subsequent history of Russian missions in particular. But before looking at some of the key figures in this history it is worth noting that the early translation of the Scriptures as a key element of missionary work is also attested for languages as diverse as Armenian and Gothic.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For details on the mission of Cyril and Methodius see Francis Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs: SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> See James J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life, 1986), 23.

## 2.2 St Stefan of Perm

Commitment to use of the vernacular language, and to Bible translation, is notable in the work of St Stefan (Stephen) of Perm (1340-1396), surely the most outstanding of the medieval Russian missionary monks.<sup>5</sup> A great deal of information on Stephen's life is found in the biography written by Epiphanius the Wise, who knew the saint personally. Stephen was a Russian monk at the Monastery of St Gregory the Theologian in Rostov in southern Russia. Because of the Greek links of this monastery, he was one of a small number of people in medieval Russia who could read and speak Greek.<sup>6</sup> Stephen was ordained a priest in 1379 or 1380, and shortly after embarked on a mission to the Zyrians, a Finno-Ugric people living in the northern forests of Russia and now better known as Komi.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast with many of the other missionary monks of the period for whom mission and colonisation went explicitly hand in hand,<sup>8</sup> Stephen stressed the importance of the vernacular as a deliberate means of avoiding russification. In this Stephen may be said to have followed closely the example of Cyril and Methodius: he created an alphabet for the language of the Zyrians (based on the shapes of ancient runes) and devoted much time and effort to translation of parts of the Scriptures and of the liturgical books. For Epiphanius Stephen's creation of an alphabet and a written form of the language allowed the Zyrian people to occupy their place among the nations of the world as 'blessed latecomers to the Christian fold', much as Cyril and Methodius had done for the Slavs. In any event Stephen's mission appears to have met with success; the Zyrians were especially charmed by the beauty of the liturgy and its surroundings and received baptism in large numbers. This important role of liturgy, and especially vernacular liturgy, is also found elsewhere, most notably in the story of the conversion of Russia.

Subsequently however a process of russification took place. Although Stephen's alphabet survives in a few fragmentary texts,<sup>9</sup> the Zyrian/Permian liturgy was replaced by Church Slavonic in the 16th century and Bible translation began again only four centuries later. Nonetheless St Stephen of Perm's mission remains a striking example for

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<sup>5</sup> A good general account of the life and work of St Stefan of Perm is given in G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946/1966), vol 2, 230-245.

<sup>6</sup> Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 232.

<sup>7</sup> It is not entirely clear whether St Stephen's mission was to the Komi-Zyrians, or to the closely related people nowadays known as Komi-Permyak. See Marina Buck, 'Einige Aspekten des Wirken von Stefan von Perm: das zyrjanische Volk und die Erfindung eines Alphabets als Missionsmethode', *Ostkirchliche Studien* 57/1 (2007), 112-121.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Smirnoff, *A Short Account of the Historical Development and Present Position of Russian Orthodox Missions* (London: Rivingtons, 1903), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Buck, 'Einige Aspekten des Wirken...', 127.

its time of an enlightened approach to missionary work and to the central role of vernacular Bible translation.

### 2.3. *St Makarii Altaisky*

With the spread of Russian colonisation came a significant expansion of missionary work by the Russian Orthodox Church, especially in the 19th century.<sup>10</sup> One of the most attractive figures from this period is Makarii (Macarius) Glukharev (1792-1849), the founder of the mission to the Altai people of southern Siberia.<sup>11</sup> Macarius was a brilliant monk-scholar who seemed destined for an illustrious career in the Church. Following a life-changing encounter with hesychasm (a movement in the Eastern churches stressing the cultivation of inner silence and contemplative prayer) he withdrew to a desert hermitage for a number of years of study and contemplation. During this period he devoted much time to what Struve characterises as his 'favourite task, translation',<sup>12</sup> translating into Russian not only Eastern Church Fathers but also a number of Western mystical writings. This experience was to stand Macarius in good stead after his return from Siberia, when he became an important figure in the movement to translate the Bible into vernacular Russian.<sup>13</sup>

Macarius' life was to change again when in 1828 he responded to a call from the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church for missionaries to go out to the far-flung regions of the Russian Empire. Macarius volunteered to serve in the remote Altai region in the south of Siberia. Despite inauspicious beginnings, the Altai Mission was to become one of the most successful examples of outreach by the Russian Church, such that by the turn of the century some 25,000 Altai out of a total population of 45,000 had been baptised and lived in 188 Christian villages. There were 67 churches with services entirely in the local language, and 48 schools with

<sup>10</sup> The most extensive general account of Russian Orthodox Church missions in this period is found in Igor Smolitsch, *Geschichte der russischen Kirche* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990), vol 2, 246-346.

<sup>11</sup> A good general account of Macarius is Josef Glazik, *Die Russisch-Orthodoxe Heidenmission seit Peter dem Grossen* (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung.), 118-128. This may now be supplemented with the 'Interpretive Essay' by James Lawton Haney in Konstantin Vasil'evich Kharlampovich, *Archimandrite Makarii Glukharev – Founder of the Altai Mission* (Lewiston / Queenston / Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 1-68.

<sup>12</sup> Nikita Struve, 'Macaire Gloukharev, a Prophet of Orthodox Mission', *International Review of Missions* 54 (1965), 310.

<sup>13</sup> For details of Macarius' activity as a translator of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Russian see Stephen K. Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars: Modern Scriptural Translation and Cultural Authority* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 112-124.

instruction in the vernacular.<sup>14</sup> Much of this success was evidently due to the selfless dedication and humility of Macarius himself, who was by all accounts a model of practical servanthood as well as of saintly asceticism. As David Collins points out however,

Deeply rooted in the concept of mission proposed by Makarii was the need to conduct evangelism, teaching and church services in the native language. This was extensively developed. Altayan catechists, deacons and priests were trained at the Biisk school; all the necessary liturgies were translated into Altayan and widely used; scriptures, saints' lives and morally edifying pamphlets were translated into Altayan; new works were written in the language.<sup>15</sup>

Although Macarius himself left the Altai region in 1844 the work of the Mission continued to grow, with the twin emphases on localisation and practical philanthropy providing a solid foundation. To this day St Macarius is commemorated as the 'Apostle to the Altai',<sup>16</sup> and this is in no small part due to the part vernacular Bible translation played in his missionary work.

#### 2.4. Nikolai Ilminsky

The most thoroughgoing enterprise of language study and Bible translation in the history of Russian Orthodox missions, however, was undoubtedly the work of Nikolai Ilminsky (1822-1891) and the school of translation that he established in Kazan.<sup>17</sup> Ilminsky elaborated a methodology of translation which in its emphasis on vernacular spoken forms of the language and the active participation of mother-tongue speakers bears comparison with the approach of Bible translators in our own time; and the most substantial fruit of his work, the translation of the New Testament into the language of the so-called 'baptised Tatars', is still used today in Tatar speaking Orthodox parishes – indeed it has recently received a new lease of life by appearing in a revised version.

Nikolai Ivanovich Ilminsky was born on 23 April 1822 in the central Russian town of Penza. The son of an Orthodox priest, Ilminsky showed early signs of intellectual promise. His first university studies were in mathematics and physics, but it soon became clear that he had a natural gift for languages, and already in his early twenties he was appointed Reader in

<sup>14</sup> Smirnoff, *A Short Account...*, 20f.

<sup>15</sup> David Collins, 'Colonialism and Siberian Development: A Case-Study of the Orthodox Mission to the Altay' in Alan Wood and R.A. French (eds), *The Development of Siberia: People and Resources* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 60; Struve, 'Macaire Gloukharev...', 313.

<sup>16</sup> His feast day is on 18 May.

<sup>17</sup> Ilminsky's life and work are comparatively well studied. In addition to the specific works cited in this section, a good general account may be found in Glazik, *Die Russisch-Orthodoxe Heidenmission...*, 133-143.

Turkish-Tatar and Arabic at the newly established Kazan Spiritual Academy. Ilminsky spent most of the rest of his life in Kazan, the major centre of Muslim religion and culture in the Russian Empire, developing a methodology for mother-tongue education which became known as 'Ilminsky's System' and establishing a training school for teachers and missionaries. He undertook a three-year study tour of the Middle East in the 1850s to improve his knowledge of Arabic and his understanding of Islam, and also spent some considerable time in the Kirghiz Steppe studying the local languages.

Ilminsky is well known in the world of scholarship as an eminent orientalist. His work on vernacular languages has also attracted the attention of modern sociolinguists,<sup>18</sup> but we will concentrate here on his activities in the area of mission and translation. Ilminsky was clearly a person of deep spiritual convictions<sup>19</sup> and his emphasis on dialogue rather than confrontation certainly broke new ground in Christian-Muslim relations in Russia. At a time of cultural ferment amongst the Muslims of the Russian Empire and a widespread return to Islam among Muslims formerly converted to Christianity, Ilminsky understood that hostile attacks were of little value and unlikely to bear fruit. Basil Cousins comments:

He had little confidence in polemics and apologetics. He had discovered that active measures to convert were counterproductive, creating resistance and awakening fanaticism. He renounced any attack on Islam ... Instead, he set out to influence the Muslims indirectly by educating the baptised Tatars and by promoting the development of personal contacts between the baptised and the unbaptised.<sup>20</sup>

Ilminsky's approach ran counter to the prevailing wisdom in Orthodox Church circles and at one point cost him his job — he was suspected of 'Islamic inclinations' — but his lasting legacy is in the institutions he founded: the Translation Commission, the Central Baptised Tatar School, and the St Gurii Brotherhood to support these activities. The Translation Commission grew out of Ilminsky's experience that the heavily Arabised, archaic literary form of the Tatar language was so poorly understood among the people that it could not serve as an effective vehicle for communication of the message of the Christian Scriptures. Ilminsky turned instead (as had Luther before him) to the more popular spoken form of the

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<sup>18</sup> See Isabelle Kreindler, 'Nikolai Il'minskii and Language Planning in Nineteenth-Century Russia', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 22 (1979), 5-26 for details.

<sup>19</sup> See George Robinson, 'The Mission of Nikolai Il'minskii, Lay Missionary of the Russian Orthodox Church', *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 7.3 (1990), 75-83. Robinson's attempt to present Ilminsky as a kind of pseudo-Protestant is less than convincing, though in other respects he gives an excellent account of his work.

<sup>20</sup> Basil Cousins, 'Spreading the Gospel to the Frontiers of Empire; Nikolai Il'minsky, the Russian Orthodox Church and Islam in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 63.1-2 (2011), 195.

language, and developed an alphabet based on Russian characters to replace the Arabic script. The results were dramatic. When Ilminsky tested his first translations he found that they were quickly understood by young and old, indeed as Smirnoff reports,

A white-haired old man amongst the baptized Tartars, hearing the prayers in his native tongue, fell on his knees before the icon, and with tears in his eyes thanked God for having vouchsafed to him at least once in his life to pray as he should.<sup>21</sup>

From these modest but encouraging beginnings the work of Ilminsky's translation group expanded steadily over the next five decades, so that by the beginning of the twentieth century translations of parts of the Bible and of liturgical works had appeared in twenty indigenous languages of the Russian Empire – from the Far North to the Caspian Sea, and from the Volga region to the eastern reaches of Siberia. The publication statistics were impressive, reaching no less than 1,599,385 copies for 1899.<sup>22</sup> For Ilminsky this activity was a key element of mission as is seen in his own theological understanding of his work:

We believe that the evangelical word of our Saviour Jesus Christ, having become incarnate, so to speak in the living language of the Tatars and through it having associated itself most sincerely with their deepest thoughts and religious consciousness, would produce the Christian revival of this tribe.<sup>23</sup>

For Ilminsky missionary work was certainly related to the Russian colonial enterprise, however in his methods he looked both backwards to the principles developed by Cyril and Methodius, and forwards to the missionary values of a postcolonial age. In sum it is hard to disagree with the conclusion reached by David M. Johnstone in a survey of missionary work in Tsarist Central Asia: 'As a theorist, linguist, orientalist, and layman committed to and supported by the established church, [Ilminsky] outlined principles for cross-cultural evangelism that appear to be amazingly relevant to the modern period.'<sup>24</sup>

### 2.5. Other Russian missionaries

St Stephen, St Macarius and Nikolai Ilminsky were not by any means the only significant figures in the mission history of the Russian Orthodox Church. Among the 'great cloud of witnesses' mention should also be made

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<sup>21</sup> Smirnoff, *A Short account...*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> *A Short account...*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson, 'The Mission of Nikolai Il'minskii...', 77 cited from Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works, Volume 4: Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Co., 1975), 154.

<sup>24</sup> David M. Johnstone, 'Czarist Missionary Contact with Central Asia: Models of Contextualization?' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31.2 (2007), 68.

of St Nicholas (Kasatkin) of Japan who learned from the example of Ilminsky and who played an important role in the translation of the Bible into Japanese.<sup>25</sup> Another notable individual is St Innocent (Veniaminov) who was fluent in several languages of Siberia and eventually became the first bishop of the Alaskan islands and Metropolitan of Moscow. St Innocent is commemorated as 'Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to America'.<sup>26</sup> There is also a host of lesser known figures like the priest-monk Nestor (Anisimov) who worked for many years among the Koryak people of the Far North and translated the Gospel and liturgical texts into their language. Archimandrite Nestor later occupied several senior positions in the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>27</sup> Russian missions also extended beyond the borders of the Empire. In addition to Japan, Russian missionaries were active in China, Korea, Persia and America.<sup>28</sup> Finally, it is worth noting that missionary work in the Russian Orthodox Church was given institutional form and support through the formation of an Orthodox Missionary Society in 1870, largely through the initiative of St Innocent when he became Metropolitan of Moscow.<sup>29</sup>

It would be wrong to idealise the work of the Russian missionaries. In many ways they were men (indeed it appears almost exclusively men) of their time. Despite their commitment to local languages and local churches, they were only to varying degrees free of Russian nationalist sentiment and involved, perhaps unwittingly, in the colonial policies of the secular authorities. And yet, as we have seen, they worked hard to learn the mother-tongues of the people they were serving; they gave priority to the training of local clergy in the hope that truly national churches would arise; and through their work as Bible translators in particular they were instrumental in bringing the message of the Scriptures to many in their own language. Together with a commitment to celebrating the liturgy in the vernacular, itself a key element in the role of the Bible in Orthodox

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<sup>25</sup> Most of the literature about St Nicholas, not surprisingly, is in Russian or Japanese. A convenient summary in English is given by Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission...*, 35-40; for a personal (but now very dated) reminiscence about meetings with the saint see Charles F. Sweet, 'Archbishop Nicolai and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to Japan', *International Review of Missions* 2 (1913), 126-147.

<sup>26</sup> A very brief summary is given by Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission...*, 33-34; Paul Garrett has written a full biography: *St. Innocent: Apostle to America*. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979).

<sup>27</sup> Archimandrite (later Metropolitan) Nestor is little known outside Russia. Some basic information about his life and work may be found at: [http://www.orthodox.cn/localchurch/metnestor/index\\_en.html](http://www.orthodox.cn/localchurch/metnestor/index_en.html).

<sup>28</sup> See the summary in Serge Bolshakoff, *The Foreign Missions of the Russian Orthodox Church* (London: SPCK, 1943) and 'Orthodox Missions Today', *International Review of Missions* 42 (1953), 275-284.

<sup>29</sup> Garrett, *St Innocent...*, 306-311.

tradition, their work in translating and preaching the Scriptures testifies to the important part played by the Bible in their mission.

### 2.6 Foreign Missions of the Church of Greece

Although this chapter has concentrated almost exclusively on the history of Russian Orthodox missions, the picture would not be complete without some words about the missionary activities of the Greek Church. After the end of Ottoman rule it is possible to speak of a missionary awakening in the Church of Greece. Following some individual missionary efforts in Africa, in 1959 an Orthodox diocese of East Africa was created under the auspices of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and including Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Although the history of the diocese has been somewhat chequered, the focus on localisation which we noted in our discussion of Russian missions has been a feature also of the Greek missions in Africa, with an emphasis on the training and ordination of native clergy for a genuinely indigenous African church. Today there are ten missionary dioceses under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, together covering a large part of sub-Saharan Africa, and a number of theological schools and seminaries have been established. There has also been lively interest and involvement in vernacular language Bible and liturgical translation.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time there has been an expansion of missionary studies in Greece (most notably an Inter-Orthodox Missionary Centre in Athens which throughout the 1960s published a magazine giving information about the Orthodox approach to mission and news about current Orthodox missionary work), and information about missions has appeared in numerous other Greek language church and academic periodicals.<sup>31</sup>

## 3. Present Day Issues

We said at the beginning that the Orthodox Churches are not particularly well known for their use of the Bible and their commitment to mission; however they are certainly famous for the beauty and splendour of their services. The Divine Liturgy (the Orthodox equivalent of the Eucharist or Holy Communion) is the most important of these, and although of course it is a key component of internal church life, it is also understood to play a

<sup>30</sup> In addition to the references gathered in Athanasios Papatthasiou, 'Missionary Experience and Academic Quest. The Research Situation in Greece', in Frieder Ludwig and Afe Adogame (eds), *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 301-311, much information may be found in the bi-monthly missions magazine of the Apostoliki Diakonia of the Church of Greece *Panta ta Ethni* (available at [http://www.apostolikidiakonia.gr/gr\\_main/mission/ierapostolh.asp?main=PantaEthnoi\\_old.htm](http://www.apostolikidiakonia.gr/gr_main/mission/ierapostolh.asp?main=PantaEthnoi_old.htm)).

<sup>31</sup> Papatthasiou, 'Missionary experience...', 307 n. 34.

role in mission. At one level this may be seen in the structure of the service itself, whose first part under the name Liturgy of the Catechumens is open and addressed to all (thus arguably performing a missionary function), while the second part (Liturgy of the Faithful) reserves the mysteries of the Holy Eucharist for the baptised.<sup>32</sup> More significantly however, in its beauty and mystery the Liturgy is understood in Orthodox theology as a reflection on earth of the ceaseless worship of heaven. As Stamoolis points out, 'Perhaps this insight into heaven provides the most compelling reason why the liturgy is an obvious evangelistic method. In the liturgy is demonstrated the beginnings of the new order, the Kingdom of God.'<sup>33</sup>

It is not hard to find contemporary personal testimonies to this evangelistic impact of the Liturgy, and such can also be discovered throughout history. The most compelling of these is perhaps the story of the conversion of St Vladimir in the ancient Russian Chronicle. According to the chronicler, Vladimir, dissatisfied with the paganism of his ancestors, launched a kind of commission of inquiry into what he considered to be the four main religious options open to him: Judaism, Islam, Latin Christianity and Orthodox Christianity. Close questioning of the representatives of these different confessions brought some clarity (Islam, for example, was virtually ruled out of court because its prohibition on alcohol was considered incompatible with the Russian soul), but in order to reach a decision Vladimir sent emissaries to observe the practices of each faith on its own territory. Unimpressed with the services of the Jews, Muslims and Latins, the envoys were overwhelmed by their experience of the Divine Liturgy in the Church of St Sophia in Constantinople: 'The Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor and no such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty. Every man, after tasting something sweet, is afterward unwilling to accept that which is bitter, and therefore we cannot dwell longer here.'<sup>34</sup>

In the context of our theme we should note here how the Divine Liturgy, and the many other services of the Orthodox Church, are permeated throughout with the words of Scripture. From the three Antiphons at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Catechumens when the choir sings texts from the Psalms and the Beatitudes, through the Little Entrance when the clergy process into the body of the church carrying the book of the Gospel, followed by solemnly chanted readings from the Epistle and Gospel, to the

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<sup>32</sup> Originally the catechumens left the church before the celebration of the Eucharist, but today this is no longer the case.

<sup>33</sup> Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission...*, 99.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Hazzard Cross and O.P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (translators), *The Russian Primary Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 111.

Liturgy of the Faithful with its quotation of the Cherubic hymn (Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth...), the words of Institution taken directly from the Gospel account, and the chanting of the Lord's Prayer by the congregation, the Divine Liturgy is replete from beginning to end with scriptural references and allusions.<sup>35</sup> It is above all in the services of the Church, then, that Orthodox Christians encounter the Bible. Indeed as one Orthodox scholar has recently observed, 'worship is Scripture's natural habitat'.<sup>36</sup> If the Liturgy testifies to both believers and unbelievers about the eternal reality of the Kingdom of God, then this testimony is expressed very substantially in the words of Scripture.

In this respect the role of the Bible in mission is analogous to the role of the Bible in Orthodoxy in general: important, highly valued, but understood primarily within the context of the Church and its communal liturgical celebration. There is little or no emphasis in Orthodoxy on private Bible reading, neither does this practice feature in Orthodox missions.

In the memorable phrase of the Romanian theologian Ion Bria, the mission of the Church may be described as 'the Liturgy after the Liturgy'.<sup>37</sup> Given that the Divine Liturgy is so thoroughly infused with the words of Scripture, we may expect that the Scriptures will play a central role also in the Liturgy after the Liturgy. The history of Orthodox missions will lead us to expect this role to be fulfilled by vernacular translations of the Bible, preached in word and through example by trained and dedicated members of local communities.

It is fitting to end this chapter with the words of one such committed missionary to his own people, the Russian priest Fr Alexander Men, who exercised a wide and influential ministry in the last years of the Soviet Union and was brutally murdered in 1990.<sup>38</sup> Commenting in a sermon for Palm Sunday on Jesus' poignant lament for Jerusalem, 'You did not know the time of your visitation' and referring to God's call on our own lives, Fr Alexander said: 'Let us respond to His call. What is this call like, you may ask, where is it? For us, it rings out always from the Word of God. If we

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<sup>35</sup> For a fuller account see Simon Crisp, 'Sacrality, Authority and Communitality as Essential Criteria for an Orthodox Bible Translation', *The Messenger* 6 (2008), 3-12; detailed information and statistics on the use of Scripture in the Divine Liturgy and some other services are presented by Demetrios J. Constantelos, 'The Holy Scriptures in Greek Orthodox Worship: A Comparative and Statistical Study', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12.1 (1966), 7-83.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, 'Praying the Scriptures in Orthodox Worship' in S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. (ed), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 73.

<sup>37</sup> Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy. Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1966).

<sup>38</sup> For Fr Alexander's life and writings see Elizabeth Roberts and Ann Shukman (eds), *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century: The Life and Work of Alexander Men* (London: SCM Press, 1996).

delve into it, then the living voice of the living Christ will ring out from that Book, from the pages of Scripture.<sup>39</sup>



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<sup>39</sup> Fr Alexander Men, *Awake to Life! The Easter Cycle* (London: Bowerdean Press, 1992), 50.

**‘IGNORANTIA SCRIPTURAE IGNORANTIA  
CHRISTI EST’ (ST JEROME) –  
REFLECTIONS ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE  
AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION<sup>1</sup>**

Thomas P Osborne

In his discourse to the Latin American Bishops’ Conference (CELAM) in 1983, Pope John Paul II called for ‘new evangelization’, ‘new in its ardour, methods and expression’, and not simply a ‘re-evangelization’.<sup>2</sup> The preparatory *Instrumentum laboris* of the Bishops’ Synod held last October provided insight into the global lines of the consultation on ‘the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith’. In a world marked by an extreme diversification of cultures, on the one hand, and by globalization and the spread of secularization on the other, the Church is called to ‘look at the way she lives and transmits the faith’, ‘with renewed energy, determination, resourcefulness and newness’.<sup>3</sup> In this undertaking, she may not rely solely on the heritage of the past; she must ‘find the energy and means to ground [Christian communities] solidly in the presence of the Risen Christ, who animates them from within’.<sup>4</sup> The recent Bishops’ Synod identified several priority sectors that the New Evangelization should engage: cultures, society, economics, civic life and religion.<sup>5</sup> In his message to the CELAM meeting in Aparecida in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the profound knowledge of the Word of God that is an indispensable pre-condition for the New Evangelization. The Catholic Biblical Federation elaborated a message to the Bishops’ Synod in this regard.<sup>6</sup> Proposition 11, which the Bishops elaborated and approved during the synod points to the essential importance of the study and prayerful reading of the Scriptures for all evangelization. The present contribution recalls St. Jerome’s adage that, in fact, we cannot know the

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<sup>1</sup> The present article was first published in *BDVdigital* 2012, 2-3, 25-28.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Discourse to the XIX Assembly of CELAM (Port au Prince, 9 March 1983, 3: AAS 75 (1983) 778 (cited in the *Instrumentum laboris* in Preparation of the Bishops’ Synod on ‘The New Evangelization and the Transmission of Christian Faith’, n. 45 (Vatican City, 2012), 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Instrumentum laboris* 49.

<sup>4</sup> *Instrumentum laboris* 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Instrumentum laboris* 51.

<sup>6</sup> See *BDVdigital* 2012, 4, 8-17.

Christ without knowing the Scriptures. The Catholic Biblical Federation is convinced that our own manner of understanding the Scriptures must be subjected to self-critique and indeed to conversion, in line with the very Scriptures that we read and engage.

I interpret as I should, following the command of Christ: *Search the Scriptures, and Seek and you shall find*. Christ will not say to me what he said to the Jews: *You erred, not knowing the Scriptures and not knowing the power of God*. For if, as Paul says, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and if the man who does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of Gods, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. Therefore, I will imitate the head of a household who brings out of his storehouse things both new and old, and says to his spouse in the Song of Songs: *I have kept for you things new and old, my beloved*. In this way permit me to explain Isaiah, showing that he was not only a prophet, but an evangelist and an apostle as well. For he says about himself and the other evangelists: *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news, of those who announce peace*. And God speaks to him as if he were an apostle: *Whom shall I send, who will go to my people?* And he answers: *Here I am; send me*' (St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*).

St. Jerome's affirmation, '*Ignorantia Scripturae ignorantia Christi est*' may be formulated positively as follows: the personal encounter with Christ, which is in fact the ultimate goal of all evangelization,<sup>7</sup> whether old or new, requires the encounter with the Sacred Scriptures; even more strongly, an in-depth knowledge of Jesus Christ can only occur through an in-depth knowledge of the Scriptures. It is indeed Jesus who announced the Good News (the gospel) of the coming of God's Kingdom to the men and women whom he met in first century Palestine, who spoke a word of liberation and of healing to them; it is the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, which is then announced as 'Good News' in the Scriptures. And the basic way of knowing Jesus and his ministry is by means of the Gospel narratives and, more largely, of the Scriptures, both New and Old Testaments.

Reflection on 'the new evangelization' cannot neglect to devote considerable efforts to the question of the ignorance or the knowledge of the Scriptures, determining ignorance or knowledge of Jesus. It must also subject our traditional way of reading the Scriptures to a sometimes scathing critique. Certainly, the Catholic Church has come a long way since it forbade Catholics direct access to the Scriptures. Vatican II's constitution *Dei Verbum* has opened access to the Scriptures broadly to all the faithful. And *Verbum Domini* has charted a sort of road map for the biblical pastoral ministry.

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<sup>7</sup> "The centre of proclamation is Jesus Christ, who is believed and to whom a person bears witness. Transmitting the faith essentially means to transmit the Scriptures, primarily the Gospel, which give a person the opportunity of knowing Jesus, the Lord." (*Lineamenta* 2).

The Catholic Biblical Federation devoted a significant section of its 'final statement' at the end of its 'plenary assembly' in Lebanon in 2002 to this question, some 37 years after the promulgation of the *Dei Verbum* and some 9 years after the publication of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 'The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church'. Here is a quotation of this text in extenso:

### 1. The power of the Word

**1.1** In designing our response to the reality as ministers and servants of the Word, we turn to the Word of God as the source not only of our vision, but above all, as **the source of divine power** (cf. Gen 1:3ff; Jn 1:3; Rom 1:16). The Spirit and the Word can overtake us as in the case of the Apostles and empower us provided we allow the Word to have a claim on our lives and on the life of the Church. The energizing power of the Word is felt only in an obedient surrender like that of Abraham and of the Apostles whose ministry we have contemplated as we read and prayed the Word in the Acts of the Apostles.

**1.2** The question Pope Paul VI posed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, '... what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on man's conscience?' (n. 4), continues to challenge us. God's Word is creative: it is the Word of power for renewal and transformation. Our task therefore is to **seek ways of making the Word of God the source of energy in the heart of the Church and world**. Bringing about a change of consciousness, a change of behaviour and a change of structures is all part of the one mission of the Church. All activities of the Church are in one way or another ministry of the Word. Therefore the Church has the Word of God in the centre of all her life and mission. Without it, we would miss the lifeline of power and blessings.

**1.3** How can we experience the Word as the source of life? Without the light and grace of the Spirit, the Word will not generate the energy needed for transformation of life and society. Prayer accompanied by docility to the Spirit should become the hallmark of the ministry of the Word (cf. Acts 13:2). At this moment of history, we should listen to the pressing invitation of the Word of God for a **deeper conversion** of our vision, our attitudes and behaviour towards the 'other' – religions, cultures and ethnic groups, and especially the poor, women and all those who are victims of exclusion and discrimination in our societies. A re-reading of the Word in such life-threatening contexts is an imperative that we cannot set aside. For the Word of God comes to us with its power to impel us to live in solidarity. It is only when we feel the irresistible power of the Spirit that we can become effective instruments of transformation.

**1.4** We reiterate our commitment to **self-critique of our way of reading Scripture** in the Church – individually and collectively. Do we allow the power of the Word to have its impact on the contexts of society? Have we used texts of Scripture to legitimize attitudes of superiority, discrimination and violence towards others? Fundamentalist and purely spiritualistic interpretations of the Scripture are an ever-growing phenomenon in almost all Churches. Biblical pastoral ministry has an urgent task in this field in countering a sectarian and fundamentalist reading of the Word that builds walls of separation and discrimination. Along with this, we need to highlight

the plurality that is a characteristic feature of the Bible: plurality of world-views, of interpretations of sacred texts, of theologies, of ecclesial structures.

**1.5** In order to achieve this, **contextual hermeneutics** will have to be developed in every area of our involvement. Biblical formation of laity and clergy should have such a thrust. In the light of our reflections during this Plenary Assembly it is important, wherever possible, to undertake a dialogic reading of the Word of God, letting the echoes and resonance of the various religious traditions, scriptural or otherwise, enrich our experience of the Word, mysteriously present in our world. This will enlarge our vision of God and promote a depth-level dialogue among religions. Such a reading might help us to see the multifaceted face of God the Father and Mother of all and the face of Jesus the Word incarnate.

## **2. The Word of God itself determines our options for reading the Bible**

The Word of God in Sacred Scripture releases its power if read appropriately. In fact the Bible itself teaches us the options for reading it properly and for living the Word. In this way, we are faithful both to the original message and to the people to whom it is proclaimed as Good News (cf. EN 4).

**2.1** We are committed to **an attentive and respectful reading** of the biblical text. Being a book of a different time and culture, it must first of all be respected in its otherness. It is to be read in its original – historical and cultural – as well as in its literary context. ‘Our reading of the Bible should enable the people to discover the true content. All efforts to interpret the Bible in order to justify political and ideological positions should be considered as a betrayal to the message’ (Bogotá 7,3). Even people who are not able to handle scientific and scholarly methods can be guided in an attentive reading of the Bible, and this in order to avoid the pitfalls of a fundamentalist reading which refuses to take into consideration a historical and pluralistic character of the Bible (Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* [IBC], I.F).

**2.2** The Bible, in its canon as well as individual books, is a pluralistic phenomenon, an outstanding example of unity in diversity, a symphony of many voices. Convinced that ‘all the different ways of reading the Bible are not equally apt’ (Bogotá 7) but also that no one method captures the richness of the meaning of the Scriptures, the Federation advocates a **plurality of methods and approaches** which ‘contribute effectively to the task of making more available the riches contained in the biblical text’ (IBC Introduction).

**2.3** Reading the Bible and celebrating the Word **in community**: The Bible is the book of the community, an expression of its faith experience, and meant for building it. It has an important place in the liturgy and in catechesis. ‘The Scriptures, as given to the Church, are the communal treasure of the entire body of believers’. ‘All the members of the Church have a role in the interpretation of Scripture’. Even those who, ‘in their powerlessness and lack of human resources find themselves forced to put their trust in God alone and in his justice, have a capacity for hearing and interpreting the Word of God which should be taken into account by the whole Church’ (IBC, III.B.3).

**2.4** Reading Scripture in the **life context**: The Bible is the book of life in as much as it deals with life in all its manifestations. God has given us two sacred books: that of creation and history, and that of the Bible. God’s Word enshrined in the latter is to throw light on and help us decipher the first. The Bible has ‘to be re-read in the light of new circumstances and applied to the

contemporary situation of the people of God' (IBC, IV.A). Exegetes 'arrive at the true goal of their work only, when they have explained the meaning of the biblical texts as God's Word for today' (IBC, III.C.1). We are committed to this life-related reading of the Bible, as formulated in several of the Final Statements of the Catholic Biblical Federation. 'We should start with the reality in which we actually find ourselves today, and we should allow the Word of God to throw light on this reality' (Bogotá 7,1).

**2.5** Mindful of the different contexts and cultures in which we live and having reflected on how the Word of God has been received in different cultures, we are convinced that we not only have to pay attention to the Word itself, but also to the different soils in which it is to be sown. The conviction that the Word is capable of being spread in other cultures 'springs from the Bible itself ... in the blessing promised to all peoples through Abraham and his offspring' (Gen 12:3; 18:18) and extending it to all nations (cf. IBC, IV.B). An '**inculturated**' reading presupposes a respectful and in-depth encounter with a people and its culture and starts with the translation of the Bible into the language of the people, to be followed by interpretation which then leads to the formation of a 'local Christian culture, extending to all aspects of life' (IBC, IV.B).

**2.6** The poor are the first addressees of the Good News (Lk 4:18-19; Mt 5:3). What God has hidden from the wise and learned, He has revealed to the little ones, to those of little or no significance (Mt 11:25). This fact demands that Christian communities read **the Bible from the perspective of the poor**. 'There is reason to rejoice in seeing the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition and of the poor; they can bring to its interpretation and to its actualization a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone' (IBC, IV.C.3). Reading the Bible in such a way will lead us necessarily to taking an option for the poor.

**2.7** The Bible as Word of God can only be welcomed if we approach it also as the Church's basic source of prayer and if we cultivate the **prayerful reading of Scripture** (cf. Bogotá 7.2; Hong Kong 1.2). *Lectio divina*, formerly cultivated mainly in monasteries and religious communities, is more and more appreciated by all the Christian faithful (cf. DV 25). The Pontifical Biblical Commission has devoted an entire section to *lectio divina*; in numerous apostolic and post-synodal exhortations; notably in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (no. 39) and in his Letter to the Church in Lebanon (no. 39), John Paul II has insistently invited us to make use of this ancient and still valid method of reading the Word of God. This form of prayer challenges, gives orientation to and forms our existence.

The self-critique of our way of reading the Scriptures should lead fundamentally to the biblical inspiration or 'animation' of all areas of pastoral life and commitment of the Church and its mission, the '*biblica animatio totius actionis pastoralis*', as Pope Benedict XVI put it in *Verbum Domini* 73, taking up an expression which has been dear to the CBF since at least 1993. This reflection will certainly lead to proposals for new ways of formation concerning the reading of the Scriptures, to new forms of catechesis and homiletics.

The 'evangelizers' themselves must gain a profound knowledge of Jesus' own familiarity with, and commitment to, the people of his time, as these are presented in the Gospels. His ministry of healing and teaching should provide the model for the fundamental options of evangelization. In this regard, it is essential to note that Jesus' teaching is based upon his experience both of the mercy of his Father and of the concrete life of the people of his day, in all of its complexity. The language which characterizes Jesus' parables is based both in the concrete life of the people whose experiences he shared deeply in the thirty or so years before he began his public ministry and in the Jewish Scriptures which he had come to know deeply within the multi-form Jewish community and culture in which he lived. His language is evocative, inviting people to enter actively into the story of the coming kingdom, to adopt positions and to commit themselves to personal conversion.

This knowledge of Jesus can only be gained in an approach to the Bible which does not exploit Scripture for one's own purposes by the use (or misuse) of isolated fragments taken out of their context in moralizing, spiritualizing or fundamentalist manners. What is needed is an approach that opens the reader progressively to individual texts, to the narratives or other rhetorical developments which prolong themselves throughout entire biblical writings and which allow the development of the symbolic and multilevel language inherent to the Scriptures, and finally to the so-called canonical reading of Scripture allowing inter-textual resonance of the Scriptures.<sup>8</sup> We should favour the preparation of translations which strive, as far as possible, to translate 'concordantly' key biblical words and expressions in order to nourish and support the reader's memory, recalling the use of the same expression in unfolding contexts.

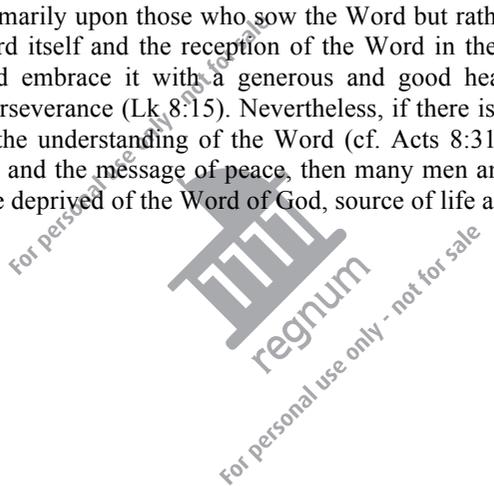
The repeated reading of the Scriptures, in particular of the canonical books in their entirety allows the progressive integration not only of isolated pericopes, but also of the narratives etc. themselves into the memory of the reader. This slowly begins to mark the language of the reader, his way of thinking and reasoning, especially if these texts and narratives are brought into dialogue with human life, in all its complexity. Indeed, the Gospels, for example, are themselves interactive paths of catechetical formation, which allow the reader to participate actively, with all of his interrogations and possible discoveries, disappointments and joys, on the road that leads him to discover Jesus as the Gospel of Peace and of Life that God offers to his people. It is clear that an in depth familiarity with the Scriptures that may be gained in groups of Scripture sharing will greatly increase the resonance of the liturgical pericopes.

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<sup>8</sup> Inter-textual resonance of the Scriptures means succinctly that when one reads a particular text that other texts across the biblical canon come into mind, revealing the depth and the breadth of the Scriptural movement and development.

From this perspective, it might be strongly recommended that pastoral initiatives should propose, over a period of several years, the complete reading of the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and selected Old Testament texts (the Books of Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy, of 1 and 2 Samuel and of 1 and 2 Kings, of several prophetic books, including extracts of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, of the Book of the Psalms as prayerful meditation of the Scriptures in general, as well as several of the Wisdom Books), before returning to the essential letters of Saint Paul (1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians and Romans) and concluding with the Book of Revelation. Planned Bible sharing and study of this kind, over several years and with the support of trained group leaders, can contribute to a solid basis for the process of a truly new evangelization.

It is, of course, true that the productivity of the Word of God does not depend primarily upon those who sow the Word but rather upon the power of the Word itself and the reception of the Word in the various soils that hear it and embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance (Lk 8:15). Nevertheless, if there is no one to instruct people in the understanding of the Word (cf. Acts 8:31) and to bring the good news and the message of peace, then many men and women of good will will be deprived of the Word of God, source of life and joy.



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# SECTION TWO

## CASE STUDIES



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# BAKA BIBLE TRANSLATION AND ORAL BIBLICAL NARRATIVE PERFORMANCE

Dan Fitzgerald

## Introduction

The purpose of including case studies in this section of *Bible in Mission* is to bring to public attention a broad overview of best practices and examples of how people may 'open the Bible' and make its contents the core of their discipleship. This essay describes one such model of missional engagement as it is practised in Cameroon, Africa. Ironically, the thesis of this model argues that the Bible does not, necessarily, need to be 'opened' to access its contents effectively. There are other ways. For the majority of the world's people, for example, it need only be *heard*. Thus, the *oral* communication of the gospel is increasingly becoming one of the 'best practices' in Christian missions.

The following case study is only one of many contemporary applications of 'oral strategies' in Africa and in mission worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Such missional practices, however, are far from normative. In 2005, it was estimated that '90% of the world's Christian workers work among oral peoples *using literate communication styles*'.<sup>2</sup> And the extent of worldwide functional illiteracy only underscores the phenomenon for 'over 80% of the world's adults, teens, and children have low enough reading comprehension that they are highly likely to be [primarily] *oral* communicators'.<sup>3</sup>

Still, to propose the adoption of oral strategies in Christian mission as simply a pragmatic response to the challenge of functional illiteracy is only to propose the model negatively. There is good reason to adopt it. According to contemporary biblical research, the most expansive and convincing theoretical argument for the adoption of this model is articulated in the emerging discipline known as 'biblical performance

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<sup>1</sup> See Samuel Chiang and Avery T. Willis (eds), *Orality Breakouts: Using Heart Language to Transform Hearts* (ION/LCWE, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis, mine; Grant Lovejoy (ed), 'Making Disciples of Oral Learners', *Lausanne Occasional Paper, no. 54* (Bangalore: LCWE/ION, 2005).

<http://oralbible.com/workspace/resources/docs/>.

<sup>3</sup> Brackets and emphasis, mine; see Grant Lovejoy, 'The Extent of Orality: 2012 Update', *Orality Journal*, 1:1 (Samuel E. Chiang, ed), (ION, 2012), 30-31.

<http://www.oralbible.com/workspace/resources/docs/>. However debatable these statistics might be, what is not debatable is the plethora of mission's publications substantiating the likely reality of the problem. See, for example, bibliographic resources in Chiang and Willis, *Orality Breakouts*, 147-152; and Lovejoy, 'Making Oral Disciples', 40-57.

criticism'.<sup>4</sup> The theoretical development of 'performance criticism', 'biblical' or otherwise, is founded on the longstanding interdisciplinary research of *oral traditions*. In performance criticism, an 'oral verbal performance', such as storytelling, song, oral poetry, and oratory, has come to be understood as merely one of many expressive performance types including theatre, dance, ritual, and festival. As an emerging application of performance criticism, biblical performance criticism

...seeks to understand the performance of Christian traditions in the oral cultures of the early church, aspects of which include the performer, audience, context, and text. ... [It] analyzes a biblical text through the translation, preparation, and performance of a text for group discussion of the performance event. Such a methodology seeks to foster the appreciation of performance for the appropriation of the Bible in the modern world.<sup>5</sup>

In contemporary Christian mission among oral cultures, as with the oral cultures of the early church, the oral performance of biblical *narratives* is a particularly noteworthy model of an effective 'appropriation of the Bible'. The following case study describes how Christian mission among the Baka people of Cameroon has come to adopt this seemingly innovative – though actually quite ancient – model of missional engagement.

### Baka Mission and the Bible

The Baka are one of several semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer people groups in Equatorial Africa.<sup>6</sup> Since the early 1960s Christian missions among the Baka have invested significant amounts of resources into Baka language research, literacy development, and Bible translation. The earliest efforts in this regard were undertaken by Roman Catholic missions. Eventually other Christian missions engaged in similar language initiatives. The most sustained Baka language project began in 1979 when SIL assigned its first linguistic research personnel to work among the Baka.<sup>7</sup> SIL literacy

<sup>4</sup> See David Rhoads, 'Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies – Part I', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 36:4 (2006); also see other books and articles at <http://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org>.

<sup>5</sup> James Maxey, 'Performance Criticism and Its Implications for Bible Translation' (Paper presented in the group Bible in Ancient and Modern Media, SBL San Diego – November, 2007), 1-36, cited in Ernst Wendland, 'Performance Criticism: Assumptions, Applications, and Assessment', *Tic Talk, the Newsletter of the United Bible Societies* 65 (UBS, 2008) [http://www.ubs-translations.org/tt/past\\_issues/tic\\_talk\\_65\\_2008/#Maxey](http://www.ubs-translations.org/tt/past_issues/tic_talk_65_2008/#Maxey).

<sup>6</sup> The Baka people, ethnically referred to as 'pygmies', are traditionally hunter-gatherers, but they are learning to farm. They populate the expansive south-eastern rainforest of Cameroon.

<sup>7</sup> SIL is an international faith-based language development NGO. Historically, the acronym 'SIL' signified the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Today, the full name

training and Bible translation personnel were gradually assigned over the next thirty years.

### Literacy

All language development efforts among the Baka people, whether faith-based or other, initially assumed that literacy, especially mother-tongue literacy, would quite naturally provide the Baka with effective access to the particular good that each organization proposed. Christian missions, for example, held biblical literacy as an indispensable means to access adequately the good news that they had come to proclaim. Indeed, most modern Christian missions worldwide have considered literacy as the default missional means of discipleship. From antiquity, however, Baka culture has been – and still is – a primarily oral culture. And primarily oral cultures do not easily transform into literate cultures, as most missions among the Baka have gradually come to realize.

There have been numerous hindrances to the acceptance of ‘the technology of literacy’ among the Baka. As with most primarily oral cultures, the Baka have up to now found little practical social or economic motivation for adding the demands of literacy to their already demanding daily round.<sup>8</sup> African rural economies do not depend on literacy to operate. Baka parents, as a result, do not yet regularly encourage their children to attend government and mission schools. And even in those areas where Baka children are gradually attending school more regularly, the curriculum is generally in French, not in Baka. A viable literacy program in Baka has yet to be developed.

### Bible Translation

In tandem with the challenges of literacy is the challenge of translation; for there can be no biblical literacy, if there is no Bible to read. One Roman Catholic mission among the Baka initiated their first Bible translation project in the 1970s. The actual use of their rather literal translation proved to be very limited. Subsequently, another Catholic mission thought it necessary to produce a more ‘oral style’ translation, one that employed more of the natural linguistic structures of daily Baka speech. To this end, a rather simple, but innovative translation method was applied to a new translation of the Gospel of Mark.<sup>9</sup> The resulting oral style texts more

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has been dropped and only the initials SIL serve as the ‘name of recognition’. (See <http://www.silcam.org>.)

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, mastery of the ‘technologies of reading and writing’, as any literate society knows, is a long and laborious cultural endeavor. See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> SIL Bible translation consultant, Karl Grebe, briefly described that ‘oral style’ translation method in this way, ‘As a source text they used a French version of [the

readily lent themselves to oral applications. Scripture-based song texts, for example, were more naturally set to traditional Baka song forms. Similarly, Scripture-based public liturgical responses were more easily memorized for public recitation and proclamation.

SIL recognized the virtues of this ‘oral style’ approach and in 1994 made plans to build on them by translating the entire New Testament. Initially, their aim was only to produce a *written* source text, though one whose literary style reflected and emphasized the distinctive *oral* features of ordinary Baka speech. For SIL, the missional application of that text – whether evangelistic, catechetical, or liturgical – was seen as the prerogative of other Christian missions.

### Narrative Biblical Texts

The recording, transcription, and analysis of natural Baka discourse served as the basis for SIL’s oral style translation. For Bible translators, the recording of a people’s traditional *narrative* texts typically provides a foundational resource for building a vernacular lexicon and for discovering a language’s distinctive linguistic features. Since the 1960s, various Christian missionaries and academic researchers have documented over one hundred traditional Baka stories. Eventually, the analysis of these texts provided the discourse model on which the oral style translation would be based, especially the translation of *biblical narratives*.

At the same time that SIL was undertaking the research of traditional Baka narratives, a number of Christian missions worldwide were increasingly exploring the potential of oral narrative discourse in the communication of the gospel. In particular the pioneering work of Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) caught the attention of SIL’s translation team. Shockingly, or so it seemed to a mission so historically committed to print media, CBS proposed that biblical narratives need not be confined to print media but could be effectively communicated through live oral performance. Such a proposal intrigued SIL. After three years of their translation project, having recognized the dismal results of decades of halting literacy initiatives, SIL deemed it likely that Baka culture was still a generation away from functional literacy. In light of such a possibility, SIL began to question the assumption that a written approach to the biblical text – even one that was rendered in a highly ‘oral style’ – was now the best

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Gospel of] Mark... They did use the “translator’s handbook” on Mark and found it useful... One method [they] used to arrive at an oral style is to have the [Baka] “translators” do a free retelling of a portion of text after internalizing the content. The recorded retelling then serves as the basis of the discourse structure before they filled in the details by translating verse by verse... I just wish more of our [SIL] people would use it. Katy Barnwell recommends it in her book’. In Karl Grebe, ‘Baka Survey Report’ (an unpublished SIL Language Program’s Survey Report, 1994), 12.

strategy. The work of CBS seemed to suggest otherwise, as did SIL's ongoing research of the communicative potential of traditional Baka narrative art. And so progressively an oral strategy no longer seemed somehow 'second best', but rather the preferred strategy, one well rooted in the local context.

### Translating Biblical Narratives to Be Told

So in 1996, SIL developed a new strategic plan. In overall scope it resembled the goals of a CBS mission project: the content of the Bible would be communicated and accessed through oral performance, not through literacy. The initial biblical content would consist of a carefully selected set of foundational narratives from both the Old and New Testaments. Unlike most 'storying' approaches, SIL's did not employ a 'language of wider communication' (LWC), such as French or English. The Baka language would tell the biblical story. SIL's analysis of traditional Baka narrative discourse had revealed a most apt vehicle of communication – an artful, convincing, and highly participatory means of communicating the gospel.

In 2003 SIL translator Yves Léonard completed the final analysis of traditional Baka narratives.<sup>10</sup> A description of a few of his findings merits some detail here. Most 'storying' approaches practised in Christian mission have not paid adequate attention to the discovery of a people's traditional narrative arts. As a result, those missions fail to draw on the power of genuine oral narrative performance.

Of first importance in Léonard's analysis was the discovery of the distinctive Baka verb form that typically encodes the main storyline of Baka narrative discourse. This 'narrative' verb form formally resembles the present tense, even though the narrative at hand recounts an event in the past. The Baka understand that the narrative action is in the past, but the communicative effect of the traditional 'narrative present tense' lends an authenticating immediacy to the story, especially when it is orally recounted. Thus, for example, while the English narrative of Mark 4:39 reads, 'Jesus awoke...and said to the sea, "Be still!'", the Baka biblical narrative is rendered, 'Jesus awakes...and says to the sea, "Be still!'"<sup>11</sup> To the Baka, a grammatical device like the narrative tense is the natural, albeit subconscious, mark of a 'believable' story.

Another distinctive feature of Baka narrative discourse is their culture-specific use of repetition: repeated actions, repeated words, repeated

<sup>10</sup> Yves Léonard, 'Pragmatic Features of Baka Narrative Discourse' (SIL research report for Cameroon's Ministère de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 2005). <http://www.silcam.org/languages/languagepage.php?languageid=43>.

<sup>11</sup> NAB; English back-translation of Baka text, mine, from *Yesù à weé lùngu* (Yaoundé, Cameroon: CABTAL, 2011), 9.

phrases and repeated sounds. Repetition in Baka narratives can function in several ways. Ongoing climactic action, for example, is commonly signified through repetition. Thus, while the English narrative of Mark 4:37 reads, ‘...waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up’, the translated Baka narrative is rendered, ‘...waves begin splashing into the boat...splashing, splashing, splashing in...’<sup>12</sup> Thus the sense of the passage is preserved, the ongoing action of the waves is more typically and vividly portrayed, and the narrative is made more memorable, especially when it is orally recounted.

There are many other distinctive linguistic devices that constitute and develop a ‘real’ Baka narrative, too many to present here. Readers interested in learning more about Baka narrative art should consult Léonard’s ‘Pragmatic Features of Baka Narrative Discourse’.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to numerous grammatical devices, *prosodic* devices abound as well. A Baka storyteller artfully manipulates his or her verbal intonation, rhythm, and voice quality not only for expressive effect, but also to ‘foreground’ a story’s most important elements, or ‘background’ supporting elements. Such performance devices, whether utilized in a traditional Baka narrative or in a translated biblical narrative, can profoundly inform (or when misused, deform) the salient points of a biblical narrative. The implications of this phenomenon are critical for the competent interpretation of a biblical discourse.

There are other important oral narrative features that go beyond mere speaking. One of the most affective performance features of traditional Baka narratives is song. Most Baka stories include group singing. Such story songs perform extremely significant functions in Baka narrative performance: they develop a narrative’s climax, express the most salient attitudes and feelings of narrative characters, and give prominence to important themes. Further, songs create a sense of social and personal participation in, and identity with, a narrative that is unlike any other form of verbal communication.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the inclusion of sung passages of orally performed biblical narratives in SIL’s translation strategy has proved to be a great boon to the socio-cultural credibility and acceptance of the sacred Scriptures in Baka culture.

The identification of the complex inner workings of a people’s narrative verbal art is a prerequisite of the actual process of translating and ‘oralizing’ a particular passage of Scripture. A brief sketch of that process, as carried out in the Baka project, is in order here, and is outlined as

<sup>12</sup> NAB; English back-translation, mine, *Yesù à weé lùngu*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> See Léonard, ‘Pragmatic Features’; also see Robert Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, ‘Analyzing Discourse: a Basic Manual of Concepts’ (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> See Daniel Fitzgerald, ‘Why *Kùnda* Sings: Narrative Discourse and the Multifunctionality of Baka Song in Baka Story’ (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, April 2011).

follows: (1) an initial set of fifty or so biblical narratives from both Old and New Testaments was selected to be translated – the narratives were chosen in order to provide a broad overview of the history of salvation, as well as to address some of the more critical socio-cultural needs of the Baka; (2) one biblical narrative at a time was selected and prepared for translation; (3) that narrative was exegeted; (4) a written, paraphrased translation of the narrative was drafted, one that bore many of the typical features of traditional oral narrative;<sup>15</sup> (5) the written draft was read aloud multiple times to native Baka-speaking co-translators who could not read or write; simultaneously, the setting, characters and plot of the narrative were discussed at length by translator and co-translators to clarify its content and revise those parts that needed revision;<sup>16</sup> (6) the co-translators re-told the narrative, in its entirety, or section by section, in Baka; (they did so only after they had satisfactorily completed their revisions, and had adequately internalized the narrative); (7) the revisions of their orally re-drafted narrative were then noted in a newly revised written draft; (8) with a computer's audio recorder in 'record mode', large sections of the revised written draft were read aloud by the translator, and the Baka co-translator repeated each section; (9) once the entire narrative had been retold and recorded, the voice of the translator was edited out of the recorded audio file, leaving only the naturally inflected voice of the Baka co-translator; (10) this digital recording of the Baka co-translator's retelling was re-edited to reflect the natural pace of a typical Baka monologue narrative discourse; (11) numerous local Baka speakers listened to this edited recording and were invited to comment; written revisions were made accordingly; (12) the revised written version was then 'back-translated' (in writing) in French (the 'language of wider communication'); (13) an experienced Bible translation consultant 'checked' the French back-translation for exegetical accuracy and clarity (doing so only in bilingual consultation with the translator, a Baka co-translator, and at least one other Baka speaker); (14) the translation consultation team then revised the written vernacular text;

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<sup>15</sup> This step, of course, assumed that (a) the translator was fluent in the Baka language, (b) an orthography existed for that language, and (c) an analysis of traditional Baka monologue narrative discourse had been completed and internalized.

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<sup>16</sup> The nature of those discussions deserves extended description, but the scope of this essay does not permit. Léonard, however, recounts a few important parameters to those discussions: first, the initial paraphrased narration emphasized the main outline of the story; details of the story were left to be 'filled in' during the discussions; second, care was taken not to 'put words into the mouths of the co-translators' in order to allow them to discover the most natural way to understand and express a particular phrase or passage; third, due to the fact that the Baka do not make verbal abstractions about the distinctive features of their narrative art, it may be necessary from time to time to suggest certain traditional formalizations of a phrase in order to 'remind them of how they typically say such things'; Léonard: personal communication, January 2013.

and (15) the final written revision was again ‘re-oralized’, following much the same procedure as described in steps 8-10 above.

### **Translating Biblical Narratives to Be Sung**

The inclusion of sung portions of Baka biblical narratives involved many of the same methodological steps as those of the spoken discourse, though with a few significant additions. The basic process generally proceeded as follows: (1) a careful analysis of traditional Baka story-songs was undertaken; the distinctive poetic, musical, and performance features of Baka story-songs were identified and highlighted;<sup>17</sup> (2) a biblical narrative was chosen from among the previously completed translations; (3) the translator determined which segments of that biblical narrative would most likely be suitable for singing, preferably choosing a prominent segment of dialogue, monologue, or narration that, if sung, would aptly enhance or develop a significant narrative theme, sentiment, or episodic climax; (4) the translator then reformatized in written form several optional ‘versifications’ of the selected narrative segment; these optional ‘verses’ were formalized to reflect the typical poetic features of a traditional Baka story-song text; (5) the translator recited (aloud) the optional verses to the Baka co-translators, who then chose, memorized, recited, and recorded the one verse formulation that they thought would be most apt for singing in a Baka oral narrative performance; (6) a group of respected Baka composers, singers, and instrumental musicians were invited to listen to an audio recording of the previously translated and recorded biblical narrative; the oral narrative was listened to and critically discussed multiple times; (7) after thoroughly familiarizing themselves with the narrative plot, characters, and theme, the musicians listened to the audio recording of the co-translator’s oral recitation of the previously recorded narrative verse; (8) with a clear idea of the role that that verse played in the narrative, the composers, singers and musicians were commissioned to set that ‘pre-versified’ text to its corresponding traditional narrative song form;<sup>18</sup> (9) the composers orally composed a new song with the chosen lyric text, and taught that song to the other invited singers and musicians; (10) the newly composed and learned song was then digitally recorded; (11) the audio recording of the sung narrative text was digitally edited and inserted into the original audio recording of the biblical narrative (respecting the typical distribution and performance practices of traditional Baka narrative singing). The inclusion of song took place in a majority of translated biblical narratives, and generally followed the basic procedure outlined above.

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<sup>17</sup> See Fitzgerald, ‘Why *Kūnda* Sings’.

<sup>18</sup> If necessary, audio examples of previously recorded traditional Baka narrative songs were played for the Baka composers and musicians, so as to remind them of the particular song genre they were commissioned to imitate.

### Hearing Biblical Narratives

The entire collection of translated, performed, and digitally recorded biblical narratives was completed in 2011. The Baka mostly listen to the audio recordings on special hand-wound and rechargeable mp3 audio players, called ‘Sabers’.<sup>19</sup> Baka missionaries have travelled and distributed the audio players to well over one hundred (of some 400+) Baka villages throughout the southeast region of Cameroon. The response among the Baka has been very favourable.<sup>20</sup> The Baka missionaries have also formed small listening groups that typically spend many hours listening to the biblical narratives and singing the Scripture songs.

### Telling Biblical Narratives

Two Christian missions among the Baka, World Team (WT) and Communauté Missionnaire Chrétienne Internationale (CMCI), have also adopted oral mission strategies among the Baka. CMCI missionaries have reported that Baka children are spontaneously memorizing the recorded biblical stories and recounting them to each other.<sup>21</sup> There has even been some talk of organizing Baka Bible ‘storytelling competitions’.<sup>22</sup> In October of 2012, World Team missionaries began a series of ‘Oral Bible Storytelling Workshops’.<sup>23</sup> In these workshops the Baka learn to listen carefully to the biblical narratives on the ‘Sabers’, internalize the content, and retell the stories from memory to live audiences.<sup>24</sup> World Team further augments the live Bible storytelling with story-specific Bible studies. Current enthusiasm for the Oral Bible Storytelling (OBS) workshops is growing, and the World Team mission among the Baka is planning many more OBS workshops.

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<sup>19</sup> See the Saber audio players at Global Recordings Network (GRN) website <http://globalrecordings.net/en/saber>.

<sup>20</sup> Anecdotal reports are archived in the missionary newsletters of Yves and Christine Léonard (SIL), and Barry and Desma Abbott (World Team).

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Paul Goufo (CMCI; personal communication, August 2012).

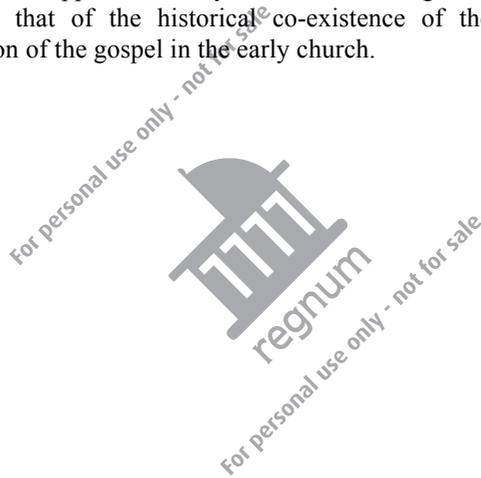
<sup>22</sup> Goufo, October.

<sup>23</sup> Barry Abbott (WT; personal communication, October 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Live Baka narrative performances, as opposed to audio recordings of them, exploit more than simply *aural* channels of communication. They engage and integrate *visual* channels as well, such as hand gestures, facial gestures, and body movement of all kinds, not the least of which is dance. And as with prosodic devices, visual ‘signs’ competently performed do not simply make a narrative performance more expressive, they can clarify, nuance, or even obscure semantic content as well.

### Reading Biblical Narratives

The future of other innovative oral strategies among the Baka should prove to be very instructive. Ironically, the current oral strategies seem to be laying the groundwork for interest in *literacy* among the Baka. As a result, SIL has produced a practical orthography for the Baka language and has also had a series of illustrated Baka Bible story booklets published to accompany the mp3 audio recordings.<sup>25</sup> The biblical texts for the booklets are transcriptions of the original audio ‘texts’. These texts, in turn, will now serve as the literary foundation for the development of a rather ambitious literacy program among the Baka currently being developed by Plan International and SIL Cameroon. It seems, then, that the emerging orality-literacy continuum may now be coming round full circle. For what was once thought of as an ‘either-or’ missional approach – that is, a written versus an oral approach – may now be becoming a ‘both-and’ approach, much like that of the historical co-existence of the written and oral transmission of the gospel in the early church.



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<sup>25</sup> 37 illustrated booklets were published in Yaoundé, Cameroon by the Cameroon Association of Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL) in 2011.

# THE UBS HIV GOOD SAMARITAN PROGRAM: A BIBLE SOCIETY INITIATIVE

David Hammond and Immanuel Kofi Agamah

The United Bible Societies (UBS) are a fellowship of 145 individual Bible Societies working in over 200 countries and territories. Wherever and however they operate, the Bible Societies all share the mission of placing the Word of God in the hearts and minds of the people they serve. Bible engagement in the public space is the heartbeat of the UBS.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible Societies work to serve all Christian churches and develop products and services appropriate to local needs. This work includes Scripture distribution to churchgoers, literacy programs for those who cannot read, audio products for those with visual disability and Bible-based HIV and AIDS resources for churches to engage with the fight against HIV and support people living with HIV. This work has often been conducted through partnerships with others. The urgency of the situation is seen in the fact that those infected and affected comprise the working populations of African nations. With life expectancy reduced, the future looks bleak.

The HIV service using Scripture was set up in 2004 to coordinate HIV work in national Bible Societies in Africa. This strategy was branded *The Good Samaritan Program*. The vision is to establish an efficient response to HIV through Scripture-based material and training. Its mission is to contribute towards zero new HIV infections and the full acceptance of infected people.

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<sup>1</sup> The Identity and Ethos document of the United Bible Societies (World Assembly, Midrand, South Africa, 2000) defines the task of Bible Societies in the following way: The world fellowship of national Bible Societies joins together, as the United Bible Societies (UBS), for consultation, mutual support and action in their common task of achieving the widest possible, effective and meaningful distribution of the Holy Scriptures

- in languages and media which meet the needs of people worldwide,
- in translations that are faithful to the Scripture texts in their original languages, and which communicate the biblical message
- at prices people can afford, and
- and of helping people interact with the Word of God.

The Bible Societies seek to carry out their task in partnership with Christian Churches and other partners to make the Holy Scriptures more relevant to daily living and current issues e.g. literacy and HIV.

### Specific Engagement in HIV Work

HIV has had consequences for individuals, families, churches and societies, consequences that national Bible Societies cannot ignore. They have responded to the challenges of governments, health and AIDS Commissions, UNAIDS, churches and religious networks. For example, Peter Piot of UNAIDS urged the Bible Societies:

I challenge you to come up with a plan to maximize the involvement of all religions and faith-based organizations in the global AIDS response, not for a few years but for decades and generations. And make sure – as people in the corporate sector would say – that this is part of your core business. Because that’s where it belongs: at the heart, at the core of what you do.

Churches in Africa have been concerned about HIV and AIDS, but it is no secret that many of them have wondered how to handle the epidemic. Some started campaigns focusing on healing, implying in effect that, ‘If you believe strongly enough, you’ll be healed.’ Others have regarded the epidemic as God’s punishment for sin, and therefore focused more on condemning ‘sinners’ than on promoting love and forgiveness as Scripture encourages us to.

Some leaders have also objected to the approach of some large-scale HIV campaigns. These have largely ignored behavioural change with discussions about HIV and AIDS mostly reduced to debates for or against the use of condoms. Some church leaders, stung by the feeling that the campaigns were not taking their Christian concerns seriously, therefore restricted their involvement in HIV and AIDS work.

These challenges have been the key entry point for the UBS to use Scripture to engage church and society on an issue that has the potential to destroy humanity.

### Bible Societies’ Contribution in the Sector of Information, Education and Communication

Traditionally, churches and other organisations approach the Bible Societies when they need Bibles and biblical resources for their work. It is the responsibility of the Bible Societies to meet their needs.

The UBS discovered that the lack of value-based (Bible-based) resources to address HIV and its underlying causes was an obstacle to churches getting involved in the fight against this fast-spreading pandemic. There was no doubt that a new mission frontier was opening for the Bible Societies and the churches to engage with in partnership. When he launched the Bible Society’s HIV campaign in 2004 the chairman of the Uganda HIV and AIDS Commission, the Rev Barnabas R. Halemimana, declared, ‘The churches need to be equipped in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The Bible Society has the weapons.’

The UBS discovered the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) sector as their area of strength in engaging with the fight against

HIV. This implied the UBS were limited in their ability to respond to needs in the areas of medical treatment, care, food supply, income-generating projects, support to orphans etc. The logical solution for the Bible Societies in implementing the Good Samaritan program has been to seek partnerships through a multi-sector approach to fill the gaps in project countries. Partners and national AIDS commissions have appreciated this strategy. In Gabon, for example, the program was launched as part of the new strategic plan against HIV and AIDS for 2008-2012. Vice President Divungi di Ndinge said at the launch ceremony, 'The *Where is the Good Samaritan Today?* project is a call to all to get involved in a really conscious way. The project gives value to pedagogical methods that help populations to feel more responsible. It brings communities together without distinction of race or religion. It builds solidarity towards people living with HIV and AIDS. It shows that the Almighty always finds the right time to set the captives free. In joining efforts with all other actions currently in place, the Good Samaritan program will help even more in the fight against this terrible disease.' Similarly, the Minister responsible for the fight against AIDS in Burundi said, 'We hope you will cover the whole country with your IEC program.'

The United Nations Millennium Goals call for population-wide campaigns (69) and massive political and social mobilization (72). The UBS fellowship with its unique structure is one of the organisations best fitted to reach the whole population, especially in the African context, where religious beliefs permeate the lives of individuals and entire societies. The Good Samaritan Program brings communities together without regard to ethnic background or religion. National Bible Societies are ecumenical in nature. They therefore involve all Christian churches and denominations in their activities and penetrate African society in ways no other organization can.

### **Methodological Approach**

The methodological approach of the program is awareness creation through open discussions and sharing. The materials used are designed as tools to start a process that leads to behavioural change. Information, education and communication are used to encourage rational decisions and responsible behaviour. Presentations in workshops make use of sketches, facts and case studies combined with interactive drama and stories from the Holy Scripture. The aim is not to present the solution, but to empower participants to tackle more effectively the enormous challenge of HIV and AIDS, both in their churches and in society as a whole.

The program consciously builds on traditional African oral culture. African identity is still rooted in a mixture of facts, songs, myths and legends. Storytelling and recitation are still important aspects of daily life.

Recognizing this, the Good Samaritan Program combines religious storytelling with practical information based on Luke 10:25-37.

### **The Good Samaritan Material Outreach Package**

The 'Good Samaritan Outreach Package' contains basic information about HIV and AIDS combined with appropriate biblical passages. The material includes case studies, role-plays, drama, sharing and open discussion. The goal is to start a process that leads to behavioural change and responsible decision-making. It encourages infected and non-infected to act as Good Samaritans in a society that suffers the consequences of AIDS. This is the diaconal spirit that the program promotes.

*The Good Samaritan Outreach Package* is made up of:

- A booklet entitled 'Where is the Good Samaritan today?'
- Illustrated flipcharts made up of 12 posters to accompany the booklet.
- The DVD 'Where is the Good Samaritan today?' based closely on the booklet.
- The DVD 'Who is Responsible?' based on a case study in the booklet. It specially targets young people.
- The DVD 'Why do you bother us?' It tells the story of Betty and the troubles she faces after testing HIV positive.
- Resource Manual for trainers. It gives guidance on how to use the Good Samaritan Outreach Package.
- An audiocassette based on the soundtrack of the DVD, 'Where is the Good Samaritan today?'
- Promotional music DVD with 2 tracks in English and French:  
Where is the Good Samaritan today?  
It's not me.

Add-on Modules

Good Samaritan Children's Program

- Training Manual
- Flipcharts
- Children's workbook
- Handbook for parents/caretakers
- 'Take Charge!' A Bible study for youth facing the challenge of HIV and AIDS
- Booklet
- DVD

Family DVD/film series: 'Love, sex and marriage'

- African traditions favour men, not women.
- Why marry?
- Communication in families
- Finances

## The Strategy

The intervention strategy follows a pattern of workshops:

- Sensitization of church leaders and mobilisation
- Training of trainers
- Decentralized workshops
- Follow-up workshops and evaluation

In these workshops, the Good Samaritan Outreach Package is used interactively. The program is dynamic and innovative, responding closely to feedback from the field. New elements and materials are added in response to established needs.

## Results

The Good Samaritan Program has grown rapidly since the first pilot projects in Cameroon and Uganda in 2004 and Togo in 2005 with funding from Swedish Bible Society/Swedish Mission Council. The program has expanded in content and outreach. In 2011, nearly 20 countries were involved in varying degrees. They were Burundi, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia.

Countries such as Madagascar and Nigeria have only distributed elements of the package.

In 2008, the UBS printed 694,000 copies of the Gospel of Luke with introductory material on HIV for distribution to youth in 29 countries in Africa. In their evaluation of the HIV Service in 2008, the external evaluators wrote, 'UBS is coming out of a regime of quantitative results to that of qualitative outcomes.'<sup>2</sup>

The Good Samaritan Program can also report the following testimonies from Cameroon.

### *1. Sister Clementine Ngong*

Talking to the UBS HIV Consultant for Africa, Konstanse Raen, who devised the Good Samaritan program,<sup>1</sup> Sister Clementine Ngong, a nun living in Bangang, northwest Cameroon, described the life-changing impact of the UBS HIV- and AIDS-awareness program:

This booklet, 'Where Is the Good Samaritan Today?' has been such a great blessing to my people that I call it 'The Fifth Gospel'! It has renewed the life of my people: individuals, families, different religious groups – including Muslims – and social groups; it has transformed work in my area. I cannot

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. William Ogara, Rev. Oliver Konje, and Calle Almedal, *HIV Service Evaluation Report* (December 2008), 7.

thank the Bible Society of Cameroon enough for this noble work of the Good Samaritan program.

No matter who they are or what problems they may be facing with regard to HIV and AIDS, people are all able to find help and support for positive living in this booklet. It is the best document I have found of this kind because it gives healing in so many ways, morally, physically and spiritually. It enables people who are infected to accept their status, change the values they live by and live at peace with the virus, recognising that they must not spread it; and by adopting the moral viewpoint conveyed in the book, parents can accept their infected children.

God is a loving Father and we do not have the right to blame or condemn anybody. It is better to do what the Good Samaritan program enables us to do: create support groups to help those in need. I think now that HIV should be treated like any other infection or disease: the people carrying it should not keep it secret. They should not be stigmatised, they should be respected and given dignity like any other human beings. Discouragement and shame are the great obstacles that we must defeat.

I recently talked to a woman who was newly infected; she felt very discouraged and just wanted to give up and die. I gave her the booklet and when I saw her again some time later, she had completely changed: she was happy and ready to live positively and keep working to earn money. Another family I know were in a very difficult situation. The grandmother asked me to go and see them because both the father and the mother of the children had run away to town. Their five children were all infected! What could I do? I gave them counselling and support and I read parts of the booklet to the grandmother to give her guidance. Then we rang the mother and tried asking her to come back – and she came! With the help of a little money that I had, we were able to register the children in a health insurance scheme so that they could get treatment. I do that with a lot of the orphans and vulnerable children I meet.

There are 1800 orphans in my area and I and my team have been able to give support to 700 of them. There were two boys who were completely abandoned and had nowhere to sleep and nothing to eat; I took them to my house to stay with us. Now they are having medical treatment, they are strong and they are back at school.

I have also been able to reach out to the nomad communities in my area like the Mbororo. With the help of the Bible Society's Assistant HIV Coordinator, we ran a three-day HIV workshop for 70 participants. Most of them could not read, and some didn't know about AIDS. We had to translate everything into three languages – sometimes four – so that people could understand it. But, by the grace of God, we made it! The people were so happy with the knowledge and guidance they had been given. As a rule, people are afraid and reluctant to get tested for HIV, but on the last day they all agreed to be tested so that they would know their status.

## 2. A Phone call from Fouban

One day, the Bible Society of Cameroon received a phone call from an Imam in a city called Fouban (in Bamoun Kingdom). This Imam had read the Good Samaritan booklet and had heard that we train people on how to use it in communities. He called and asked if he could attend one of our training workshops. Perplexed, we told him that the programme is based on the Bible. We were surprised to hear that he did not see any problem with participating in the workshop. He was invited to attend one of the training workshops held in Yaounde. After the workshop, he went back, reported to the Sultan and started sharing his experiences of the Good Samaritan in mosques and Islamic schools where he uses Good Samaritan materials.

In December 2006, the Bible Society received a representative from the Sultan of Bamoun with a message: 'The Sultan is wondering how he can meet you. You can call him on this number.' The Bible Society HIV Coordinator called the Sultan whose first reaction was to say, 'Thank you for what you have been doing in the fight against HIV and AIDS. I would like your team to come and train my people in the different areas under my authority.' When he was told that the training and the material were based on the Bible, the Sultan responded, 'There is no problem with that because our two belief systems are widely accepted in my kingdom. I will follow your instructions.'

In January 2007, the workshop was organised with a good mix of people of other faiths and Christians working together. Today those who were trained are sensitizing others in the different schools and zones in Fouban.

### **GSP and Missions: Replicating the Results**

'Where is the Good Samaritan Today' is a holistic program whose vision and mission relate to fighting HIV and AIDS through Scripture-based material and training. It is rooted in the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. Jesus told this story in response to a test put to him by a legal expert in the Bible. In an article for the UBS HIV Service, Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, former translations consultant, writes, 'The Good Samaritan provides an exemplary link with someone of high ethical standards, who for the sake of his own conscience and dignity knows and does what is appropriate in promoting life. He is the model of a person in charge whose actions are guided by cardinal virtues. This implies that any human being, Christian or non-Christian, believer or non-believer, is capable of good, for a Christian or believer who has both human and religious motivation for doing good, being kind to people. In brief, he emulates the Good Samaritan of all time, Jesus Christ.'

Dr Loba Mkole goes on, 'How does the Good Samaritan program participate in the overall UBS mission that consists in "the widest possible, effective and meaningful distribution of the Holy Scriptures?" Knowing

that UBS works in close partnership with churches, the UBS mission statement has probably been phrased to emphasise the Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20). The UBS, as well as the Good Samaritan Programme or any other Christian undertaking relates in one or another way to the Great Commission. In fact, “three terms in the Great Commission summarize the essence of mission for Matthew: making disciples, baptizing and teaching... Consequently, the UBS or the Good Samaritan Program cannot carry out this mission if it does not cooperate with the churches, since making the disciples, baptizing and teaching are exclusively church prerogatives. In other words, the UBS and the Good Samaritan mission are to be understood as participating in the evangelizing mission of the Church.’

### **Conclusion**

The Good Samaritan Program has undoubtedly succeeded in building a wide-reaching Scripture engagement platform that supports the church’s mission across Africa through the national Bible Societies. The program has been able to align Scripture and supporting resources with human needs on a continent that is deeply spiritual.

Lessons learned from implementing this Scripture engagement can be applied in other thematic areas that enhance mission in a relevant and need-centred way. The values demonstrated by the Samaritan man in the parable are as relevant today as when Jesus told the story – maybe even more so. The challenge of meeting human needs with the values of the Bible in our times is a continuing challenge in our suffering world. Jesus said, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away’ (Mat 24:35).

# THE BIBLE AND THE POOR

Gerald West

## Introduction

A relationship between 'the word of God' and 'the poor' is constituted in the very earliest narratives of the Bible. 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them,' says God (Exod 3:7,8, NRSV). The word of God is clear here; God has a preferential concern for the poor and oppressed. This trajectory within the Bible, traced across every biblical period and genre, has been the focus of liberation theology for more than half a century. Significantly, liberation theology has not remained merely an exegetical enterprise, but has allowed the shape of Scripture to lead it into mission.

While there are significant areas of disagreement and difference within biblical liberation hermeneutics,<sup>1</sup> a fundamental commitment of this methodology is the primacy of the poor as dialogue partners.<sup>2</sup> This commitment is driven by the shape of Scripture itself, beginning with the God who sees the struggles and hears the cries of the poor, continuing with the prophets who stand in resistance against the oppressive policies and economic practices of monarchy and empire, and finding its fullness in the Son of God who proclaims 'good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18). Indeed, the praxis of Jesus has become a model for understanding and practising biblical interpretation in the context of mission and the poor in many parts of the world.

## On the Road to Emmaus

For example, the work of the Bible movement in Brazil, coordinated and facilitated by the Centro de Estudos Bíblicos (CEBI), draws directly on the participatory and dialogical story of the two disciples in Luke 24:13-35 who are making their way after the death of Jesus from Jerusalem to the

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald O. West, 'Liberation Hermeneutics', in Steven L. McKenzie (ed), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988), 6; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973), 241.

village of Emmaus. CEBI uses this story as an example of ‘popular education’ in their programmatic booklet *The Walk to Emmaus*.<sup>3</sup>

Carlos Dreher discerns a seven step process in CEBI’s contextual Bible study method,<sup>4</sup> each of which is echoed in the story of the walk to Emmaus.<sup>5</sup> The method begins with a recognition of ‘the culture of silence’ that seems to surround these disciples and so many of the poor,<sup>6</sup> then shifts to the role of Jesus or the contemporary facilitator who draws near, walks together with the poor, listens to their perspective, asks questions, establishes trust, equalises power relations, and enters into a dialogical process of ‘speaking with’.<sup>7</sup> The third step in the methodology emphasises the disciples’ knowledge, their own analysis of reality, taking the knowledge of the poor as the starting point and ‘ground’ of conversation.<sup>8</sup> The fourth step is the recognition of the role of Jesus as a ‘popular educator’, who engages in a re-reading of Scripture together with the disciples, adopting a ‘pedagogical posture’ that interrogates both the received scriptural tradition and local understandings of the reality of the poor.<sup>9</sup> The fifth step acknowledges the importance of both dialogue and collaborative action in opening the eyes of the disciples and the poor. Re-reading Scripture is an element in this practice, but so is shared activity, including both liturgical activity like ‘the breaking of bread’ (Luke 24:30, 35) and actual work together.

The sixth step involves ‘the courage to disappear’, as Jesus does in the story (Luke 24:31) and as the CEBI-trained facilitator must, for we must believe that the disciples and the poor ‘are capable of taking their history into their own hands’.<sup>10</sup> ‘Anything else,’ argues Dreher, ‘would be to educate for dependence.’<sup>11</sup> The CEBI-trained pedagogue is not in control; it is the Holy Spirit who is.<sup>12</sup> The seventh and final step is for the disciples to return to Jerusalem and to continue the work of Jesus. The contextual Bible reading process always ends with ‘the poor taking up the work of God’s project, immersing themselves in ‘sharing, solidarity and fellowship, linked to prayer and witness’.<sup>13</sup> Contextual Bible reading brings about change,

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<sup>3</sup> Carlos A. Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus* (São Leopoldo: Centro de Estudos Bíblicos, 2004), 7.

<sup>4</sup> For further reflection on this method see Gerald O. West, ‘Do Two Walk Together? Walking with the Other through Contextual Bible Study’, *Anglican Theological Review*, 93:3 (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 9-13.

<sup>7</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 13-16.

<sup>8</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 16-21.

<sup>9</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 21-52.

<sup>10</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 60-68, 64.

<sup>11</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 69-86, 73.

enabling us to turn around, as the disciples do, and face the established powers that afflict the poor and oppressed.<sup>14</sup>

These seven steps are familiar to those of us who participate in the contextual Bible reading movement in South Africa. Not only have we learned directly from the work of CEBI,<sup>15</sup> we have also learned from our own context which shares many similarities with that of Brazil. Within the more general realities of the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, the specific contextual features that gave a particular impetus to contextual Bible reading in South Africa were the 1985 State of Emergency and the state-sponsored violence in KwaZulu-Natal. Within this social cauldron socially engaged biblical scholars and ordinary Christians began to re-read the Bible together, yearning to hear a prophetic word from God.<sup>16</sup>

### Reading with the Poor Widow

'Contextual Bible Study' is the particular form of the contextual Bible reading process that has developed in South Africa since the mid-1980s within the praxis of the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, located within the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Our method is framed by the See-Judge-Act process, which begins with an analysis of the context of the poor, from their perspective. As our South African context has shifted so has this analysis; what remains constant is that social analysis is done 'from below'. The first moment, 'See', leads into the second moment, in which the Bible is used 'to judge' social reality. Does this reality conform to God's good news for the poor, is the leading question. And finally, the third moment leads into specific action, when a community or congregation decides how to work towards God's will being done 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt 6:10).

Within this overall See-Judge-Act process, Contextual Bible Study moves between two sets of participatory questions and exercises that bring biblical text and local context into dialogue. 'Community consciousness' questions and exercises begin and end the Contextual Bible Study process, drawing directly on the readings, experiences and resources of a particular local community of the poor. Between these sets of community consciousness questions that bookend the Contextual Bible Study process are 'critical consciousness' questions and exercises, requiring a slow and

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<sup>14</sup> Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*, 76.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Second Edition (Maryknoll, NY and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications, 1995), 216-38.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald O. West, 'Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa', in Alejandro F. Botta and P.R. Andiñach (eds), *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation*, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

careful re-reading of the detail of a particular biblical text.<sup>17</sup> The following outline of a Contextual Bible Study on economic exploitation offers a good example of these elements:

Question 1: Listen to Mark 12:41-44 being read aloud. What is this text about?

Question 2: Now read Mark 12:38-40, the text that immediately precedes Mark 12:41-44. Are there connections between 12:41-44 and 12:38-40? If so, what are they?

Question 3: Now read Mark 13:1,2, the text that immediately follows Mark 12:41-44. Are there connections between 13:1,2 and 12:38-44? If so, what are they?

Question 4: Jesus comes into the temple at 11:27 and leaves the temple at 13:1. In this literary unit who are the main characters or groups of characters, what do we know about them, and what are the relationships between them? Draw a picture of the relationships between the characters in the temple. What does your picture say about the literary unit as a whole?

Question 5: How did the Jerusalem temple function in first century Palestine, in the time of Jesus?

Question 6: Summarise your key understandings of how Mark 11:27-13:1 'frames' the text we began with (Mark 12:41-44).

Question 7: How does this text speak to our own context of economic exploitation?

Question 8: What actions will you plan in response to this Bible study?

Questions 1, 7, and 8 bookend the Contextual Bible Study, embedding it within a particular local community of the poor. Questions 2 to 6 offer 'critical' resources from biblical studies, requiring a return to the text, again and again, giving Scripture a 'voice' within the group. We have given much thought to how we use the resources of biblical scholarship, and what we have learned from more than twenty years of work with poor and marginalised communities is that we should offer literary resources first (as in Questions 2, 3, and 4). Literary 'critical' resources (focusing on character, plot, and setting) offer an egalitarian starting point for a collaborative (re-reading of scripture; both scholar and non-scholar gather round and are responsible to explore the detail of the text. Even partially literate participants can engage with the Bible as oral 'text'. But we also offer opportunities, as in Question 5, to delve 'behind' the biblical text to the world that produced the text and which the text addresses. In most cases, literary questions and exercises raise socio-historical questions for the participants, so there is an organic flow between these forms of 'scholarly' interpretive resources.

The format of the Contextual Bible Study outlined above requires considerable time, at least three to four hours. Duration is itself a key component, we have discerned, of the Contextual Bible Study process, for it takes time for the participants to trust each other and so for the

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<sup>17</sup> John Riches et al., *What Is Contextual Bible Study? A Practical Guide with Group Studies for Advent and Lent* (London: SPCK, 2010), 41.

‘incipient’<sup>18</sup> interpretations and theologies amongst them to be articulated. Where there are time constraints, the format can be adjusted, though the consequence is that the process becomes more directive. The following format of this same Contextual Bible Study requires less time, and can be done in about an hour and a half. It is important to note that this ‘shorter’ version is derived from the ‘longer’ version; we have incorporated what we have learned from doing the first version into the second version.

1. Listen to a reading of Mark 11:15-19. Re-read this portion of scripture in at least one other translation. In buzz-groups of two or three, share your initial understandings of this text.

2. Jesus visits the temple on three occasions in Mark’s gospel, in 11:11, in 11:15, and then in 11:27. Each visit is for a longer duration, and with each visit the tension and conflict between Jesus and the temple leadership increases. Jesus is deeply indignant about how the Jerusalem temple, like so many other temples in other parts of the ancient world, has corrupted the true worship of God and exploited the ordinary people who come to worship God.

On his second visit to the temple, Mark 11:15-19, Jesus quotes from two Old Testament texts, the scriptures of the temple leadership. The first quotation is from Isaiah 56:6-8, and the second is from Malachi 3:1-12. The focus of the first is on the inclusive nature of God’s temple, including especially foreigners and the outcasts of Israel. The focus of the second is on economic corruption within the temple. (Read these Old Testament texts at home.)

While economic activity was a normal part of the temple’s role in the ancient world, the temple’s economic ‘system’ easily became corrupt, with religion being used to justify the exploitation of ordinary people who came to make offerings to God.

What particular economic activities does Jesus target in Mark 11:15-19?

3. ‘The money-changers’ were those who changed the Greek or Roman money of the ordinary people, many of whom came from afar to worship in the temple, into temple coinage/money. This Jewish (or Tyrian) coinage was the only currency that the temple would accept, and so ‘ordinary/unclean’ money had to be changed into ‘temple/clean’ money. And, of course, every transaction cost the ordinary person something. Like moneychangers today, ‘moneychangers’ then charged to change currency.

Once changed, temple money was used to buy animals for sacrifice. And doves were the staple commodity of the temple system, as doves were the only animals that most ordinary worshippers could afford. Yet the cost of doves was fixed at a very high mark-up price, ensuring that ‘those who sold doves’ made a substantial profit.

Some scholars have argued that while the prophets Isaiah and Malachi were arguing for a *reformation* of the temple, the language of Mark 11:15-19 and Mark 13:1-2 indicate that Jesus has a more radical message for the temple. Re-read these texts. What message do you think they convey?

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<sup>18</sup> James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 21-39.

4. The climax of the third and final visit to the temple is Mark 12:41-44. Listen to this well-known scripture. How is this text usually 'preached'?

5. Now read the paragraph that immediately precedes this paragraph, Mark 12:38-40. Listen to this less well-known scripture. What are the connections between these two paragraphs?

6. There is a direct link between the scribes 'who devour widows' houses' and the 'poor widow'. Jesus is still in the temple when he sits to watch the widow. He has been in conflict with various sectors of the temple leadership ever since he entered (11:27). Having silenced the leadership (12:34), he then turns to teach the crowd who have been 'listening to him with delight' (12:37). He teaches against what the scribes 'say' (12:35-37), and against what they 'do' (12:38-40). He then sits down and watches one of the results of what they say and do (12:41-44), namely, the exploitation of ordinary worshippers like the widow. She is a faithful worshipper who has been exploited by the very institution that she supports with her giving. While it is not clear exactly how the temple leadership 'devoured widows' houses', scholars refer to the tradition of 'Corban' (see Mark 7:9-13), whereby pious Jews bequeathed their property to the temple, declaring it 'Corban', an offering to God. The effect of this, Jesus argues, is that the temple leadership then decides how this property is used, and in many cases this resulted in the impoverishment of the elderly. Instead of using family resources to care for the elderly, these resources went to the temple.

Who does this poor widow remind you of in your context? Are there similar economic practices in your community?

7. Having watched the widow, Jesus leaves the temple, uttering his final verdict (13:1-2). Jesus commends the poor widow for her faithful and sacrificial giving. But he condemns the system that exploits her, focusing specifically on the way in which religion is used to justify economic exploitation.

What can we do to make sure our Christian faith is not used to justify economic exploitation?

While we have had far more experience with the first version, both versions offer opportunities to engage deeply with the detail of Scripture and to bring this detail into dialogue with particular dimensions of the context of the poor.

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### **Why Are You Standing Here Idle All Day?**

The economic dimension is central to the reality of the poor and so it is central to liberation hermeneutics. But economic struggle manifests itself in different ways in different historical and contextual moments. One of the signs of our contemporary post-apartheid times is the increase in casual work. Fewer and fewer South Africans can find full-time permanent employment. All of our urban areas now have recognisable street-corners where the poor gather each morning, waiting in hope of work for that day. The Ujamaa Centre has worked with these casual workers, 'employing'

them for a day in order to understand their reality. We have drawn on their experience to construct a Contextual Bible Study on casual work, re-reading the well-known parable of the labourers who are hired at regular intervals to work in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16).

Initially this text was used to explore a 'socialist' vision of society. In this early form of the Contextual Bible Study we would focus on the recognition the parable gives to the reality of day-labourers and the equitable payment 'to each according to their need'. However, our longing for such a socialist vision was not enough to silence the features of the biblical text that stood over against such a reading. In this case we were regularly troubled in our readings by the 'class' identity of the 'landowner', and his autocratic manner in hiring, paying, and dealing with the complaints of the day-labourers. We also worried about his payment of the minimum wage and his delegation of the task of payment to 'his manager'. Most of all we were disturbed by the landowner's 'capitalist' sounding rhetorical question, 'Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?' The detail of this text aroused our hermeneutic of suspicion, and we wondered if this parable *should* be read in a liberative manner. Clearly it *could* be read as supporting aspects of 'socialism', but only if we ignored some of its detail. When we located this text within the realities of the antagonistic interface between 'agrarian societies and traditional aristocratic empires',<sup>19</sup> the contours of the parable took on a different form.

The owner of the vineyard is likely an absentee landowner,<sup>20</sup> a member of the economic urban elite, employing a manager to handle the daily affairs of the vineyard, and engaged in a form of agriculture that produced a crop that can be converted into a luxury item (wine), monetized and exported. Unable to calculate how many labourers he will need, such is the extent of his land-holdings, the owner must make a number of trips to the street-corners of his time to hire workers. Regular assessment of the number of workers he needs also enables the landowner to keep his workers to the minimum necessary to harvest the crop within the designated time period. Furthermore, by hiring small numbers of labourers during the day the landowner exercises his unilateral power, negotiating only with those hired at the beginning of the day for the minimum daily wage, but leaving the wage for those hired later in the day indeterminate (vs 4, 7). In a context of chronic systemic unemployment and underemployment the day-labourer is in no position to insist on a just wage. Far from being generous, then, the householder is taking advantage of a vast pool of casual workers to meet his harvesting needs by offering them work without a wage agreement.

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<sup>19</sup> William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 85.

<sup>20</sup> See Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*.

The arbitrary power of the landowner is evident in the payment process. His power is signalled in the delegation of his manager to make the payments, but is fully manifest in his deliberate flaunting of protocol by refusing to pay the first-hired labourers first; by making the first-hired wait until last he flaunts his power and shames them. The dignity of those who have worked all day demands a response, and so they risk a protest (vs 11,12), challenging power, invoking the principle of equal pay for equal work. Singling out their spokesperson (v 13a), the landowner condescendingly reminds the resisting workers of their contractual agreement, knowing fully well that the day-labourers were never in a position to negotiate anything other than the minimum wage, and then goes on to dismiss their complaints, reiterating his right to do what he pleases with his power (v 14), and concluding by blasphemously asserting that the land which has been systemically wrested from the very peasant farmers who are now day-labourers, belongs to him (v 15). Read from this perspective the systemic violence beneath this text becomes palpable.

The more recent Contextual Bible Study we have constructed to explore this text divides the participants into two groups, with one group reading the parable as a 'socialist project' and the other group reading the parable as a 'capitalist project'. Most participants are unfamiliar with multiple ways of reading the same text, so this particular Contextual Bible Study format initially generated some anxiety but then considerable excitement, as the two groups then came together to share and contrast their 'readings'. Having done this Contextual Bible Study a number of times, we have noted that there is a general tendency among most groups to move towards an interpretation of this parable that is critical of the power of the landowner. Though we long for the reading in which Jesus and/or Matthew offer us an inclusive and communitarian economic vision, we cannot ignore the detail of the text and our own experiences of the exploitative dimensions of casual work in our contexts.

But the transformative potential of this Contextual Bible Study does not reside in settling for one reading over against another. It lies in exploring the tensions between them, for each reading offers us ways of imagining transformation and resources for planning it.

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### **So that God's Works Might Be Revealed**

A key characteristic of the poor is that their realities contain multiple forms of marginalisation. So while our work among the poor has a strong economic focus, we serve them with an array of Contextual Bible Studies on a range of intersecting issues, such as HIV and AIDS,<sup>21</sup> gender

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<sup>21</sup> Gerald O. West, 'The Poetry of Job as a Resource for the Articulation of Embodied Lament in the Context of HIV and Aids in South Africa', in Nancy C.

violence,<sup>22</sup> and environmental degradation.<sup>23</sup> Contextual Bible Study does not 'solve' these complex struggles, but it does provide a safe and sacred space within which Scripture adds its voice to our engagement with God's call to mission.



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Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (eds), *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Gerald O. West, 'The Contribution of Tamar's Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities', in Tamar Kamionkowski and Kim Wonil (eds), *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Gerald O. West, 'First Sunday in Creation: Earth Sunday', in Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads, and Paul H. Santmire (eds), *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

# THE BIBLE AND CARE OF CREATION

Allison Howell

## Introduction

In the long history of gold mining in Ghana, Ghanaians refer to one type of mining as 'galamsey'. This term seems to come from a time when small particles of gold remained after large-scale miners had completed mining an area. The miners would tell the people of the area to 'gather them and sell'. Repetition of the phrase over time condensed it to 'galamsey'.<sup>1</sup> What began as a means for rural Ghanaians in gold-mining areas to gain a little income has now also attracted many non-Ghanaians and is causing significant damage to the environment. Deforestation and subsequent soil erosion, as well as mercury and cyanide pollution, have not only turned once potable and clean river water into a lethal substance, but have also killed other forms of life that once thrived in it.

This issue is symptomatic of larger problems related to globalised industry that extends to parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa. Large areas of land there are being sold for various agro-industries: flori-culture and other forms of commercial farming often result in dislocating people from their land or affect water sources through the use of chemicals on crops.

Two other environmental problems have arisen. One that is most noticeable in cities, but which also affects rural areas, is the intrusive and destructive pollution from plastic products. Polythene bags are scattered everywhere, while broken bits of plastic chairs, bottles, shoes and synthetic waste are strewn on every vacant piece of earth. Drains are often clogged with this litter. Plastic waste in the sea goes beyond the shores of Ghana and has a destructive impact on birds and fish in the Pacific Ocean. Researchers have found microplastic waste originating from washing machines contaminating the shorelines on six continents at eighteen different sites from the equator to the poles.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, Christopher Affum-Nyarko, MTh candidate, Akrofi-Christaller Institute, October 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Anthony Browne, Phillip Crump, Stewart J. Niven, Emma Teuten, Andrew Tonkin, Tamara Galloway and Richard Thompson, 'Accumulation of Microplastic on Shorelines Worldwide: Sources and Sinks,' *Environmental Science & Technology*, 45 (2011), 9175–9179, dx.doi.org/10.1021/es201811s. Domestic washing machines produce more than 1900 fibers per wash from a single synthetic garment. If more synthetic textiles are used as the human population grows this will probably increase contamination of multiple habitats and animals. This has

A second problem relates to the e-waste or 'techno trash' imported into several African countries from Western nations whose governments do not allow these materials to be dumped in their own landfill sites because of their toxic content. In one area of Ghana's capital city, Accra, where much of this e-waste ends up, young mostly unemployed men dispose of it by burning.<sup>3</sup> The high toxicity of e-waste not only pollutes the ground and atmosphere, but also endangers the lives of these largely disadvantaged youth.

The manufacture of charcoal, logging, deforestation, uncontrolled pollution emissions from industry, rapid urbanisation and people's lifestyles all contribute to the degradation of the environment and to climate change, producing warmer temperatures and more extreme rainfall. This situation has implications for increasing interpersonal violence and more frequent inter-group conflict.<sup>4</sup> Every country has its particular problems, each related to the lack of care of creation.

Many articles and books discuss Christian theology in relation to the care of creation, but unfortunately many Christians still think that the care of creation is the prerogative of those linked with environmental movements. They do not realise that the Bible, as the story of God's relationship with humanity, relates not only to our human story today, but also to creation and the way we care for it.

In this chapter, I will discuss two African Christian mission case studies where there have been attempts to engage with the Bible as an integral part of the care of creation. I will examine some emerging insights for adapting and replicating these case studies elsewhere while focusing on the Bible's perspective on the care of creation as an integral part of God's mission in the world, especially through the church.

### Care of Creation: the case of the African Earthkeepers

One remarkable story of caring for creation is that of a group of African Initiated Churches (AIC) in Zimbabwe between 1988 and 2003. The story of 'African Earthkeeping' has been well documented by Marthinus Daneel.<sup>5</sup> His thorough research before, during and from hindsight provides us with an understanding of possible issues in mission and in the care of creation, and provides insights for valuable learning.

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implications not only for the health of humans and other organisms, but also for those designing and making clothes and washing machines!

<sup>3</sup> Jim Puckett, 'A Place Called Away', in Pieter Hugo, *Permanent Error* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2011), 97-98. I have also personally observed this situation.

<sup>4</sup> Solomon M. Hsiang, Marshall Burke and Edward Miguel, 'Quantifying the Influence of Climate on Human Conflict', *Science*, 2013, DOI: 10.1126/science.1235367, published online, August 1, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> M. L. Daneel, 'Christian Mission and Earth-Care: An African Case Study', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 35:3 (July 2011), 130-6, 130.

Daneel's significant role in working with both AIC and traditionalist leaders helped to launch a movement to respond to deforestation, soil erosion and other related problems of environmental destruction which arose after the struggle for independence. Daneel found in his research and discussions with AIC and traditionalist leaders that although 'lost lands' had been recaptured politically, they 'were still being lost ecologically at an accelerated and alarming rate'.<sup>6</sup> A 'war of the trees' was declared to plant trees and the 'green fighter' movement was launched with the three aims of afforestation, protection of water sources and wildlife conservation.

In 1984, the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCON) was launched. It soon evolved into two affiliated organisations developed from ZIRRCON, the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC) and the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC). From 1988 to 2003, the AAEC 'developed a remarkable ministry of earthkeeping',<sup>7</sup> with the movement comprising about 180 AICs, mostly from Apostolic and prophetic Zionist churches.

ZIRRCON's accomplishments included the establishment of fifteen to eighteen nurseries and a host of small-scale satellite nurseries that cultivated tree seedlings. AZTREC and AAEC communities, including women and school children, planted 12 to 15 million trees of a large variety. Through 80 women's clubs the 'Women's Desk' facilitated income-generating projects which produced vegetables, fruits, sunflower oil and soap, manufactured cloth, and developed bakeries. They also sought to restore eroded areas by filling gullies with stones and planting grass to protect the soil. Youth clubs were started at rural schools as well, to teach students to appreciate creation through fieldtrips. Eco-theology courses were also taught through Theological Education by Extension (TEE) programs.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, traditional spirit mediums, elders and chiefs cooperated to restore customary laws related to the protection of trees and wildlife in the holy groves of the ancestors. Offenders were sanctioned through fines or mandatory tree planting in areas where trees had been removed. When planting trees, the traditionalists used rituals similar to those used to request rain.

Daneel gives insight into the way the AAEC leaders interpreted the Bible with respect to earthkeeping. The name of the traditional high-God, Mwari, is the name for God in the Shona Bible. The biblical *Mwari* was proclaimed 'as truly present and totally involved in all creation'.<sup>9</sup> His

<sup>6</sup> Daneel, 'Christian Mission and Earth-Care', 130.

<sup>7</sup> Daneel, 'Christian Mission and Earth-Care', 130.

<sup>8</sup> Martinus L. Daneel, 'EFZIM Report 2008', in *cgcm News*, Winter 2008-2009, No. 5, 5. Accessed from <http://www.bu.edu/cgcm/files/2010/08/CGCM-special-edition-winter-2008-2009-newsletter.pdf>, 16 March 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 182.

presence was ritually enacted in tree planting ceremonies as the ever-present God who initiated the 'war of the trees'. Women leaders in the movement also identified *Mwari's* role in the care of creation and affirmed their God-ordained responsibility to care for creation. Raviro Mutonga of the Women's Desk declared:

People confuse each other by saying; 'ZIRRCOON orders the planting of trees!' *I tell you: this is the work which Mwari commands us to do!*<sup>10</sup>

She saw it as a fulfilment of Isaiah 41:19 and 20. Ms Mangombe, a leader in the Doroguru club, responded in this manner:

We as women are the first to return to this task of tending Mwari's garden. We women are chosen by Mwari for this important task and will be honoured for it. When planting Mwari's trees as a woman, ordained by Mwari to do so, I have to do it dressed in my church uniform. These are not in the first place my trees, or ours. It is God who waters or kills. He causes the trees to wither and die, he provides life through rain.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the Creator God, *Mwari*, is seen as the sovereign owner to whom humans are accountable for the tasks given to them. It is as if Mangombe sees herself planting the trees in the presence of God and to show God respect and honour she wears her church uniform. *Mwari* is also perceived as the accessible rain giver, as well as provider of crops and human fertility. He is the God of trees who will bring judgment as a result of deforestation and destruction of the environment.

Christians in the AICs also saw Christ as the victor, 'elder brother', paternal aunt and suffering earthkeeper with whom they identified. He is the healer of both humans and the soil. As humans, they were to rule with Christ in keeping the earth for he is the lord of heaven and earth.<sup>12</sup> The Holy Spirit was seen as the 'indwelling Spirit of God'<sup>13</sup> who inspired the tree-planting activities, thus bringing new life as well as healing to the land. The AAEC also developed a tree-planting Eucharist in which the Holy Communion was part of an earthkeeping ministry.

It is clear from reading *African Earthkeepers* that the Bible was not used for the production of proof-texts, but presented as God's story of interaction with humanity and the whole created world. The speaker could thus identify with Scripture as God's story.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 190. My emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 191. The women appear to relate this activity back to the Garden of Eden referred to in Genesis 2.

<sup>12</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 203-204, 217-230.

<sup>13</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 233.

<sup>14</sup> Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 191-195, 204-207. See also Kwame Bediako, 'Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 4:1 (June 2001), 2-11.

Daneel describes the churches as ‘Green mission churches’,<sup>15</sup> first, because of their expanded healing ministry that incorporated the ‘environmental hospitals’ through which the denuded or damaged land could be treated both spiritually and physically. Second, a new generation of church leaders emerged who became ‘environmental missionaries’ since their message incorporated Christ’s Good News for all creation. Therefore, they sought ‘an ecological economy that, under the reign of Christ, consciously strikes a balance between exploitative agricultural progress and altruistic earth-restoration.’<sup>16</sup> Third, new ethical codes related to the environment and church discipline were developed to combat destructive environmental practices. Fourth, Christians developed a new sense of common responsibility with traditionalist earthkeepers.<sup>17</sup>

The process was not without challenges and constraints. ZIRRCON’s organizational structures had been set up with a legally drafted constitution and defined parameters of power. There was an Executive Board with representation from the various departments and from AZTREC and AAEC. Trust was established between ZIRRCON and the donor agencies, and accounts were audited annually.

In spite of the structures set in place, difficulties arose, and the ‘Green warriors’ entered ‘the Valley of the Shadows’.<sup>18</sup> From 2001 the projects began to decline, leading to the collapse of ZIRRCON, and, eventually, to the termination of the TEE program. Some factors that contributed to this included deteriorating political and economic conditions; devaluation of the local currency; scarcity of foreign funds; discontent among the staff; corruption; slackening of moral standards in the finance department; collapse of an independent judicial system; external interference; introduction of projects that were not part of the original organisational mandate; unreal expectations related to fund-raising; and lack of participant planning and non-communication of the decision-making process to donors. Thus, mismanagement of funds, property, vehicles and assets led to conflict and staff dissent, ‘eroded commitment to transparency and accountability, and dimmed the cherished value of a greening Earth.’<sup>19</sup>

When it became apparent that ZIRRCON was about to collapse, Daneel introduced the Ecumenical Foundation of Zimbabwe (EFZIM) in 2000, a key ministry of this foundation being the Theological Education by

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<sup>15</sup> Daneel, ‘Christian Mission and Earth-Care’, 113-134.

<sup>16</sup> Daneel, ‘Christian Mission and Earth-Care’, 133.

<sup>17</sup> Daneel, ‘Christian Mission and Earth-Care’, 134.

<sup>18</sup> Marthinus L. Daneel, ‘Zimbabwe’s Earthkeepers: When Green Warriors Enter the Valley of Shadows,’ in Catherine M. Tucker, *Nature, Science and Religion: Intersections Shaping Society and the Environment* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2012), 191-212. See also Daneel, ‘EFZIM Report’, 5-6.

<sup>19</sup> Daneel, ‘Zimbabwe’s Earthkeepers’, 204, 205.

Extension (TEE) program that had begun previously.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that all the materials developed for the TEE program were in the Shona language. They covered a wide range of Old and New Testament studies, African Church History, Homiletics and Practical Theology, particularly related to HIV-AIDS and Eco-theology. The Eco-theology courses were revised and combined with the introduction of field projects at the TEE Centres. Surveys conducted to assess the impact of this theological education showed an increase in the number of Christ-centred sermons; an improved understanding of the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit; intensified structured Bible study; and, students and leaders were helped to identify the problem of schisms within churches through the African Church History course. Daneel sums up the benefits of this theological education thus:

...improved leadership, ecclesiological progress in terms of self-interpretation and biblical groundedness of church groups, theological development in relation to African religion and culture, advanced Bible knowledge and spiritual growth of thousands of office-bearers, the advancement of women's leadership and their emancipated reflection on important issues, e.g., the AIDS pandemic, environmental responsibilities in Christian and traditional perspectives, and so forth.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that in the context of humanity's continued struggle in a world of fractured relationships that are not yet fully reconciled with the environment, the circumstances of life, personal desires and the constant threat of poverty can disrupt and even destroy the source of health and reconciliation with creation. Although Daneel initially withdrew from the 'green debate', he realised that the story of what happened has continued to inspire others.<sup>22</sup>

Daneel notes in hindsight that faith has to factor in the possibility of failure, even though there is still hope through Christ.<sup>23</sup> He recognises the positive features of the 'daring and open-ended faith' that he shared with traditionalist spirit mediums at the start of their movement. They listened to him reading from the Old Testament 'about Israel's God promising afforestation and new waterways in the desert', and he listened to them address their ancestors and observed the rituals that expressed their desire for a renewed earth. Daneel came to realise that a bonding occurred between the different faiths, traditionalists and AICs through their support of a common cause. Yet the Christian faith was not compromised; rather, the barriers of prejudice and partition were broken down. In addition, he found that 'faith holds no guarantees for future solutions, at least not those

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<sup>20</sup> Daneel, 'EFZIM Report 2008', 2, 5, 13. TEE was introduced under Fambidzano (Cooperative of African Churches) along with community development centers.

<sup>21</sup> Daneel, 'EFZIM Report 2008', 11, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Daneel, 'Zimbabwe's Earthkeepers', 191-192.

<sup>23</sup> Daneel, 'Zimbabwe's Earthkeepers', 209.

of our own designs.<sup>24</sup> He realised that there were thousands of rural farmer ‘earthkeepers’ with new understanding gained by their experience of seeing the benefits of the care of creation.

The Zimbabwean case study illustrates the process of missional engagement that takes the local context into account. A study of the materials written by Daneel indicates a wealth of information that leads me to conclude that when Scripture informs creation care, when there is active mutual listening and learning, and when potential is discovered within people and communities, there can be powerfully transformative responses which bring healing to individuals, communities and creation itself. There are also risks involved, for every process is susceptible to the distortions of human frailty and sin. The distortion and response to it, too, can be a transformative process that extends the Good News of the Kingdom of God as part of God’s mission through the church.

### Care of Creation and Farming God’s Way

A second example to emerge on the African continent of the care of creation in Christian mission is ‘Care of Creation Kenya’ (CCK). Craig Sorley, its founder and director, describes it as ‘a mission organization dedicated to awakening the church to its responsibility in environmental stewardship’.<sup>25</sup> Their mission ‘is to pursue a God-centred response to the environmental crisis in Africa which brings glory to the Creator, advances the cause of Christ, and leads to a transformation of the people and the land that sustains them’. Its activities seek to promote a God-centred vision and action that entail ‘Planting God’s trees’, ‘Harvesting God’s water’ and ‘Farming God’s way’. Sorley suggests that two essential concepts of a biblical basis for ‘Creation Stewardship’ are, first, ‘*We care for creation because Christ our Savior is Christ the Creator*’ (Colossians 1:15-16) and, second, ‘*We care for creation because it is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*’<sup>26</sup> In a separate book he outlines fourteen biblical principles ‘to firmly establish the biblical and moral rationale of why we should be doing so’,<sup>27</sup> and uses a variety of Bible verses and passages to support them.

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<sup>24</sup> Daneel, ‘Zimbabwe’s Earthkeepers’, 210.

<sup>25</sup> Care of Creation Kenya (CCK), accessed from: <http://kenya.careofcreation.net/>, on 1 April 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Craig Sorley, ‘Christ, Creation Stewardship, and Missions: How Discipleship into a Biblical Worldview on Environmental Stewardship Can Transform People and Their Land’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 35:3 (July 2011), 137-143 (139). The author’s emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> Craig Sorley, *Christ and Creation: Our Biblical Calling to Environmental Stewardship* (Care of Creation Kenya, 2009), 33.

Sorley has also developed ‘a set of biblical principles to transform the practice of agriculture’.<sup>28</sup> The sixteen principles are summed up in the following two points:

- How we do agriculture can glorify God and reflect our commitment to Christ (1 Cor 10:31).
- Farming is a noble way of life because God was the first farmer (Gen 2:8, 15).<sup>29</sup>

In CCK, the focus is more on discipleship than evangelism. The goal is to influence church and community leaders, as well as Christians from all denominations, through training conferences and workshops on God and creation. Comments from some participants have indicated evidence of a ‘transformation of worldview’ and changed behaviour in people.<sup>30</sup> The aim in the ‘Farming God’s Way program’ is to promote ‘a biblical vision for agricultural stewardship’ combined with practical training in conservation agriculture to reverse the effects of land degradation. Sorley provides evidence of positive results of the ‘Farming God’s Way program’ through testimonials from participants and from data on crop productivity.<sup>31</sup> Evidence is unavailable at this point to show how Kenyans themselves have appropriated the content of CCK’s training programmes and how they are using it to teach others. In spite of scarce public information on CCK, in contrast to the ‘African Earthkeepers’, Sorley’s own background in Uganda has been significant in defining the engagement of Christian mission with the care of creation. He has clearly attempted to use Scripture to inform the vision and mission of the organization. CCK continues in its efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of caring for creation in the context of God’s mission.

### **Adaptation and Replication:**

#### **The Bible and Care of Creation as Part of God’s Mission**

Although the two case studies are examples of specific organisations formed with the aim of engaging with churches in their local contexts on environmental issues, they offer profound implications for mission in general and for the church. In both cases, the Christian faith as reflected in the Bible provided the basis for integrating faith and action. The Zimbabwean case study, because of its longer history, extensive documentation and the shared experience of failure, provides a number of

<sup>28</sup> Craig Sorley, *Farming that brings glory to God and hope to the hungry world: A set of Biblical principles to transform the practice of agriculture* (Care of Creation Kenya, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Sorley, ‘Christ, Creation Stewardship, and Missions’, 139-142. The author’s emphasis.

<sup>30</sup> Sorley, ‘Christ, Creation Stewardship, and Missions’, 142.

<sup>31</sup> Sorley, Christ, ‘Creation Stewardship, and Missions’, 142-143’.

key features applicable to a wide range of situations, both rural and urban, related to the care of creation.

First, a thorough understanding of every dimension of the context is critically important. This requires consultation and mutual listening and observation. The care of creation calls for a corporate engagement and response in which those within the local context are not merely 'invited learners' or 'uninformed stakeholders', but participants whose potential must be discovered and for whom opportunities must be provided for active contribution in word, action and leadership.

Second, the care of creation is a process that requires informed engagement with the Bible through reading, listening, study and discussion of the stories that illustrate care or lack of care of creation. This is not a matter of a 20-minute devotion on a proof-text at the beginning of the day with spiritual matters then being disregarded while the project goes on.

The Bible is the story of God's relationship with humanity and all of creation, and it is thus a story with which we humans can identify.<sup>32</sup> In the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 we see God establish five possible relationships: a relationship between God and all of creation – human and non-human, for all of creation was made to praise and glorify God (Ps 19:1); a specific relationship with human beings made in God's image (Gen 1:26); humans divinely placed in relationship with each other (Gen 1:27,28; 2:18,21-24); a relationship with oneself reflected through the absence of shame at being naked (Gen 2:25); and the relationship between humans and the rest of creation – the other living creatures (Gen 1:28-30) and the earth itself (Gen 2:15). This is not to be an exploitative relationship; humans are to act like God to sustain the living creatures and the land, and also to continue in the act of creating. Non-human creation also exists within an ecological relationship. No part of creation can be altered without having an impact somewhere else.

In the Genesis 3 story we see how these relationships were all fractured when sin disrupted creation and all the relationships within it, thus opening the way for exploitation at every level of relationship. The Bible itself contains stories of exploitation, both of humans and of the land. In the Zimbabwean story, in spite of all the infrastructure and safeguards set up, it is evident that human frailty led to the collapse of ZIRRCON.

But God did not leave humans and the rest of creation without hope to face despair and exploitation alone. This is also evident in the Zimbabwean case. Through the shedding of his blood and his death on the cross Jesus Christ brings hope and the offer of reconciliation in all five relationships established at creation. It is through Jesus Christ that God reconciles ALL creation (all things) to himself (Col 1:19, 20). Salvation through Jesus Christ is thus not just a matter of God offering salvation to the human soul. Conversion, that crucial turning to Jesus Christ, incorporates the turning of

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<sup>32</sup> Bediako, 'Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition', 2-11.

all that has to do with life in this universe towards God.<sup>33</sup> Conversion thus has implications for all our activities in creation. It is not just a matter of being good stewards of the world around us on behalf of God. God's Spirit works in us to fully reconcile humanity to God. The Spirit works as well through human agency as we participate with Christ to sustain and renew life. Care of creation is not the sole prerogative of well-intentioned individuals or organisations specifically directed at environmental issues. It is one of the significant marks of Christian mission.<sup>34</sup> It is integral to and synonymous with proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers, responding to human need through loving service and seeking to transform the unjust structures of society.

Third, there is an integral relationship between the spiritual and the physical that manifests itself in a holistic approach to activities. Planting trees, rehabilitating an urban area, reducing carbon pollution, stopping littering and cleaning up rubbish are all sacred activities linked with the Creator God. Actions associated with these activities thus become rituals which reflect the sustaining and renewing hand of Christ.

In conclusion, some onlookers may misunderstand the process and not share the vision. Caring for creation is risky business and open to misappropriation as human sinful actions continue to disrupt life, even within the church. There is always the possibility that even the best planned actions and processes will fail because of human corruption, and this situation will continue until Christ returns. The care of creation is not simply 'the responsibility of government'. Rather, it is an integral part of Christian mission, and, therefore, part of the responsibility of the church as it seeks to fulfil that mission.

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Christian Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross (eds), *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008).

# ‘TEXT OF LIFE’ AND ‘TEXT FOR LIFE’: THE BIBLE AS THE LIVING AND LIFE-GIVING WORD OF GOD FOR THE DALITS

Peniel J Rufus Rajkumar

## Introduction

Perhaps one word which imaginatively captures the relationship between the Dalit communities and the Bible is ‘*glossolalia*’ (speaking in many tongues) – because the Bible has spoken in multiple tongues *to, for* and *through* the Dalit communities. Therefore, on the one hand, we can speak of the Bible as being a ‘Text of Life’ – which is seen as reflecting the struggles, survival stories and successes of the Dalit communities within the wider framework and prism of a theo-story (God’s own story); and on the other hand as a ‘Text for Life’ – a tool which Dalit communities have creatively and conscientiously appropriated to further the flourishing of their life at its most fragile moments. Any discerning reader of Dalit theology can attest to the strong biblical underpinnings of Dalit theology, which further testify to the fact that the Bible has opened multiple possibilities for the Dalit communities to resist oppression, reaffirm identity and recover possibilities for the flourishing of life in a heteronomous manner.

This two-fold, mutually complementary, dimension of the Bible as a ‘Text of Life’ and ‘Text for life’ reveal an understanding of the Bible as both living and life-giving. The Bible is living because it almost serves as an on-going habitus [what does this mean? ‘almost serves as an ongoing habitus’ means nothing to me!] in which the ‘emplotment’ of Dalit (hi)stories is made possible through the mutual embrace of the world of the Bible and the world of the Dalits – leading to, and lending to both worlds, the gift of new meanings. The Bible is life-giving for the Dalits because it is discerned as holding in it the promise of life. As has been pointed out, whether as a ‘dynamic source of energy’ for their ‘corporate and individual attempts at liberation’,<sup>1</sup> or as ‘the basic faith document that inspires and instills hope and resilience and acts as a shield and a sword in their existential faith journey’<sup>2</sup> the Bible is pivotal especially for the Christian Dalit struggle for restoration of justice and the reclamation of life.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Jesurathnam, ‘Towards a Dalit Liberative Re-reading of the Psalms of Lament’, *Bangalore Theological Forum*, XXXIV:1 (June 2002), 1-34, 2.

<sup>2</sup> I. John Mohan Razu, ‘The Bible, A Shield and A Sword: From a Perspective of the Subalterns’, in Israel Selvanayagam (ed), *Light on Our Dusty Path: Essays for a Bible Lover* (Bangalore: South Asia Theological Research Institute and Board of

### The Bible as a 'Text OF Life'

As with different theologies of liberation the Dalit communities have understood biblical narratives as the story of God's solidarity with them. What makes the Bible a living text for them is the fact that it resonates with their own stories. It is not a record of past events but the unfolding story of God's on-going relationship with the Dalits. The Bible is a living text because it testifies to the truth as it is embodied in the struggles of the Dalit communities. The Dalits often read their own stories into the text to reaffirm their identity and recover their dignity.

#### Case 1

The Catholic scholar Jose D. Maliekal recounts the story of how a Dalit named Ebenezer, who was a village leader belonging to the Madiga community (a Dalit community found in the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh and usually associated with dead flesh and leather) creatively reinterpreted the biblical narrative of Thomas's post-resurrection meeting with Jesus to reaffirm his own Madiga identity. In this story, based on a real life experience, Ebenezer boasts that St. Thomas the Apostle belonged to the Madiga community because he dared to place his fingers into the wounded flesh of Jesus. This story is an obvious reference to Jesus' post-resurrection conversation with Thomas found in John 20:26–29. It is creatively interpreted with an identity focus, which seeks to make the point that the apostle who is credited with bringing the gospel to India himself 'was a Dalit'. There is potential in this reinterpretation to dispel the prejudice that exists towards the Madigas because of their occupational dealings with dead flesh. Yet it needs to be noted that nowhere in the biblical narrative is it recorded that Thomas actually touched the wounds of Jesus. Jesus only invites Thomas to put his fingers into his wounds according to the biblical text.<sup>3</sup> Maliekal identifies this interpretation as being 'the software-chip of a potential Madiga identity theology', whereby Ebenezer was 'trying to assert his ride in his traditional trade, the identity-marker of his caste, by tracing an aetiology for it and taking off the stigma attached to it'.<sup>4</sup> The strength of the textual appropriation of the Bible by the

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Theological Education Senate of Serampore College, SATHRI/ BTESSC, 2008) (58-77), 58.

<sup>3</sup> See Clarke's interpretation of this story in Sathianathan Clarke, 'Viewing the Bible Through the Eyes and Ears of Subalterns in India', paper presented at the Ecumenical Enablers' Programme organized by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) on 'The Quest for New Hermeneutics in Asia' in Bangkok, Thailand, from March 28 to April 2, 2001. Also published in *Biblical Interpretation*, 10:3 (2002), 251-257.

<sup>4</sup> Jose D. Maliekal, 'Identity-consciousness of the Christian Madigas Story of a People in Emergence', *Jeevadharma: A Journal of Christian Interpretation*, XXXI:181 (Jan 2001), 25-36, 25.

Dalits lies in such understandings of important biblical characters in interaction with the experiences of the Dalits, to reconfigure the communal identity of the Dalit communities in an affirmative and identity-enhancing manner.

## Case 2

Dalits not only perceive their own lives in the biblical texts but also read the lives of their oppressors through biblical texts in a most profound manner. They use the Bible as a prism through which to reflect on the life of their oppressors. One example of this can be recounted from my own experience. Following the gruesome violence against Dalit and tribal Christians in the Kandhamal district of Orissa in August 2008 (in which about 40 people were killed and thousands displaced from their villages following the burning of their homes), I was visiting one of several refugee camps set up for the thousands who had been displaced. I met a group of Dalit Christians who, despite having suffered for embracing the Christian faith, had started a 'prayer fellowship' in the refugee camp. Out of curiosity I asked the man who was the leader of the group what he thought of those people who had burnt his house, killed his relatives and made him a refugee. Amidst the uncertainty and the miserable conditions of the refugee camp and in the most sincere manner, he said that he and his family prayed that *the power of the resurrected Christ would touch his persecutors in the same way that it touched Saul in the Bible and converted him into the apostle Paul, an apostle who became even willing to risk his life for the cause of the very people he once wanted completely to annihilate*. His reply left me stunned. What is fascinating is the manner in which he was able to re-imagine his own story in the light of a larger biblical narrative to re-humanise someone who had been most inhumane towards him. In the seamless manner in which he placed these narratives alongside one another, we can see the Bible as being truly the book of life. In their appropriation of the biblical narratives Dalits have the capacity to foster what Maria Arul Raja calls the spirit of 're-creation' which will enable 'both the "re-creation" of the Dalit identity from the debris of the battered self and the recreation of any reality into a new reality by Dalit intervention.'<sup>5</sup>

Having said this, the way in which Dalits appropriate biblical texts is polyphonic and not monolithic. Different meanings can be derived from one single text. The Exodus story of the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptians and their occupation of the 'Promised Land' is one good example. Some Dalits have understood themselves as the Israelites who were the liberated slaves from Egypt for whose sake God was willing to

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<sup>5</sup> A. Maria Arul Raja, 'Harmony in the Midst of Anarchy: The Anatomy of the Spirit of Dalit Liberation', *Vidhyajothi Journal of Theological Reflection*, 63 (1999), 416-428.

fight and lead to victory. But for others it has been different and the Exodus paradigm has been inadequate. Taking his cue from the unlikely prospect of any radical or large-scale revolutionary structural change to the Dalit situation, Clarke makes a pertinent point about the inadequacy of the Exodus paradigm for the Dalit communities:

...the notion of an all-powerful God, who intervenes and completely reconfigures the world for the sake of the oppressed, does not find a dominant place in Dalit thinking and acting. This problematises the grandiose conceptions of God that result from postulating the Exodus paradigm as the heart of liberation theology. In the Indian context it seems that the "mighty acts of God", which deliver God's chosen oppressed ones from the clutches of their oppressors, have either changed their aim or exhausted themselves... there has been a winding down of the mighty acts of God! There are no miraculous signs clearly disrupting the hierarchical and unequal social order in India. There is no spectacular parting of the seas; there is no drowning of the violating and violent ones who exploit and destroy the poor and the Dalits. To put it as starkly as possible, the dictum of God's "preferential option for the poor" has remained quite sterile in terms of practical, concrete improvements in the structures of the society for the good of the poor.<sup>6</sup>

As I have described it in a different context, from a Dalit perspective it often seems as if the ten plagues that God brought upon the Egyptians only affects the Dalits:

Because in Dalit experience...

Only *their* waters are transformed into blood,  
And more frogs, into their houses flood,  
Gnats infest their grounds;  
And flies their food and un-sutured wounds.

Their... their livestock alone die of disease  
And it is their bodies that fester with boils.  
Thunder and hail target their homes alone;  
As does unfathomable darkness with its pall of gloom.

Locusts destroy *their* bonded fields,  
Making them bonded labourers for life.  
Finally, it is not their first born alone... but...  
Their every-born, whom death in its relentless pursuit fells.<sup>7</sup>

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### The Bible as a Text FOR Life

The Bible is not just a text which like a prism refracts the various dimensions of the life of the Dalits; it is also a text *for* life. It is a tool to

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<sup>6</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, 'Dalits Overcoming Violation and Violence: a Contest Between Overpowering and Empowering Identities in Changing India', *The Ecumenical Review*, 54:3 (July 2002), 278-295, 285, 286.

<sup>7</sup> Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, *Challenges of Transition: Religion and Ethics in Changing Contexts* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 30

further the fullness of life for the Dalits. However, what needs to be taken into account when considering the Bible as a life-giving text is that Dalit appropriation of the Bible is not solely trans-textual. There are several ways in which Dalit communities appropriate the text of the Bible in their struggle for liberation.

When dealing with the Bible as a life-giving word for the Dalits there is often a tacit inclination for researchers to be overtly text-centered in their focus. However we need to recognize how, by focusing too much on the textual process, especially in contexts of illiteracy, we quite unintentionally become implicated in the power dynamics implicit in 'reading, understanding and interpreting the word'. In these contexts there is need to be open to acquire an awareness of the other non-textual ways in which the Bible may be active in the lives of communities commonly regarded as 'inferior'.

There is a need for researchers to reorient themselves to the various ways in which the Bible has acted in an empowering manner for different communities and to understand the place of the Bible in the life of the Dalit communities in creative interaction with such practices. One good example of the way in which the Bible 'acts' in the life of the Dalit communities in a non-conventional manner is the case of how the Bible as a book, which can be accessed only through education, proved to be empowering to Dalit women in south India. Historian-theologian James Tanneti helpfully delineates how Telugu Dalit women who developed a fervour to become Bible women constructively appropriated the dynamics of the new significance which access to the Bible offered them, in the course of their search 'for an alternative religion of the book as a weapon to challenge the ever-absorbing and aggressive Hinduism' which denied the privilege of reading, let alone reading scriptures, to Dalits and especially Dalit women. According to Tanneti:

Dalits, who shared oral traditions, would have seen the act of reading and writing as an empowering experience as well as a challenge to Hinduism, which also was a text-based culture. Dalits considered literacy as a political weapon with which they could challenge their Hindu oppressors ... According to Hinduism, the very recital of the religious scriptures and their sounds is sacred and emancipating to one's soul. It was the prerogative of the Brahmins, the 'highest' caste in the Hindu hierarchy. In this context, mastering these texts and their sounds is a power claim. Through mastering the sacred texts (the Bible in this case), Telugu women were attempting to create parallel power structures in which they could assert their power. It is evident in the response the women's seminary in Tuni received and in the way Telugu women, especially Dalit women, mastered (memorized) the texts, and rendered them in story forms to their Hindu counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James Taneti, 'Encounter between Protestant and Telugu Women's Paradigms of Scripture', paper presented at 'Comparative Theology: Engaging Particularities Conference', Boston College, 2007, 8, 9.

Thus, for these communities who were not only systematically denied access to traditional scriptures (Dalits who recited the scripture had their tongues cut off and molten lead was poured into the ears of Dalits who even inadvertently listened to the reading of the Hindu scriptures) but were also discriminated against on the basis of the sanctification and justification offered by the same scriptures, this access to the Bible was subversive as it had the potential 'to replace the worldview of the Hindu scriptures and displace the Hindu Vedas'.<sup>9</sup> The Bible 'not only filled a void but also supplied the Dalits with a framework for knowledge that they did not have to begin with and which they desired'.<sup>10</sup>

When understanding the Bible as a life-giving book it is also necessary to recognise the trans-textual and sensory dimensions of the emancipatory appropriation of the Bible by the various subaltern communities, and to give space for subaltern reception of the performative dimension of the Bible which is crucial to their understanding of the Bible as being emancipatory. [Please ask the author to rewrite this paragraph in language that is easily understood] It is appropriate for us to turn to the pertinent examples that Kiran Sebastian gives from his pastoral experiences:

In one case, the family proudly pulled out a steel trunk which was under the rolled-up mattresses in the small house, took out several layers of folded clothing, took out a clean white towel in which a pristine Bible, with many of its pages uncut, lay wrapped; in another, the family pointed to the open Bible which had been placed on a small shelf on the wall, decorated with coloured flashing lights, but when I gingerly took it off the shelf, discovered not only a thick layer of dust, but the remains of a number of flying insects; and in a third case, was given the Bible from among a pile of magazines, only to discover on opening it, that it was serving as a store for the cut-out pictures of film actors and actresses, preserved amongst its pages. The fourth example comes from the time when I was a pastor in the urban Hudson Memorial Kannada congregation in Bangalore, where (among many other things) I had to bless unusual objects, including in this case a machine which converted old paper into pulp and then into egg-trays. The owner told me that he employed a number of 'rag-pickers' to bring him paper of suitable quality for this purpose, and discovered that there were a large number of New Testaments and Bibles (most probably those distributed gratis by organizations like the Gideons) in what had been brought in. He told me that at first he had tried to 'rescue' the Bibles from the pile, but then when he realized how many there were, just let them continue the journey of reincarnation into egg-trays.<sup>11</sup>

In a context like this, according to Sebastian 'what is interesting and intriguing in the examples is the complex nature of the inter-link between

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<sup>9</sup> Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, 'Dalits Bible and Method', in *SBL Forum*, n.p. [cited Oct 2005]. Online: <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=459>.

<sup>10</sup> Melanchthon, 'Dalits Bible and Method'.

<sup>11</sup> J. Jayakiran Sebastian, 'Can We Now Bypass that Truth?', *Transformation* 25:2 (3 April & July 2008), 80-91, 86, 87.

the reality of commitment to a faith-praxis and the instrumentalization of the orienting symbols of that faith.<sup>12</sup>

The Bible, in these cases, has variously been seen as something so precious that it needs to be carefully stored away out of sight, but unlikely to be out of mind; as something to be illuminated externally, while the 'lamp to our feet' idea, in terms of 'containing' something illumining, is switched off; as something adding value and providing security to that which offers enrichment to one's life; as something whose worth would not be erased, even when the 'black marks on white paper' were no longer legible.<sup>13</sup>

These examples point to the unconventional nature of the relationship between the life-giving nature of the Bible and the Dalit communities.

### Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the relevance of the Bible for the Dalit communities transcends the spiritual dimension and acquires a much more holistic relevance. In this regard the Bible becomes the book of life in every sense of the term. As the 'living' word of God it helps the Dalits creatively to negotiate the dialectic between the timelessness and the time-boundedness of biblical experience and Dalit experience; as the 'life-giving' word of God it promises and 'produces' empowerment, instils and inspires hope, confirms confidence and castigates everything that deters Dalits from embracing God's promise of life in all its fullness for all. Therefore, one can claim that the Bible is a book which truly furthers life in all its fullness for the Dalit communities.

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<sup>12</sup> Sebastian, 'Can We Now Bypass that Truth?', 87.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian, 'Can We Now Bypass that Truth?', 87.

# THE BIBLE'S IMPACT ON CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

Pamela Wan-Yen Choo

China, the world's most populous nation, makes up 20% of the total world population today. Over the last 20 years, the population of China has increased by 270 million, from 1,133 million to over 1,350 million.

The Church in China has grown dramatically, 30 times over since 1949. It is one of the fastest growing churches in the world today; its exponential growth has taken place particularly over the last three decades since the Cultural Revolution. Official statistics in 2011 record the numbers of Protestants and Catholics in China at 23 million and 6 million respectively, with an average of 500,000 Christian believers baptized annually. Some unofficial reports put the number of Christians in China at nearly 100 million, while others more conservatively say it is 50 million.

The Bible has made an undeniable impact on the growth of the Chinese Church and on the increasing number of Christian conversions in China. This is evident over the last 30 years or so, when Bibles, prohibited during the Cultural Revolution, were made available in the 1980s. The number of Bibles made available is related to the growth of the Church in China and the number of Christian baptisms. From a wider perspective, Bible-based activities have also made a significant contribution to Chinese society. The dual impact of the Bible on Church and society will be explained in greater detail in this chapter.

## The Bible's Mission in China

We can define the essence of Bible mission as 'the task of making the Word of God available and accessible to all people'.

The earliest written record of the Bible in China can be traced to the Nestorian stone tablet in the city of Xi'an. Another significant milestone in the history of Bible mission in China is the completion of the first Chinese Bible translation by Robert Morrison (1782-1834), the first Protestant missionary to China. Founded in 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) provided a grant to Robert Morrison for his translation of the Chinese Bible<sup>1</sup> in 1807. Translation work for the Chinese Bible was completed in 1819 and it was printed in 1823.

The China Bible House (CBH) was set up in 1937 through the joint efforts of the American Bible Society and the BFBS, later joined by the National Bible Society of Scotland (NBSS) in 1945. CBH was involved in

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Broomhall, *The Bible in China* (British and Foreign Bible Society: London, 1934), 56.

the translation of different Bible versions and languages and in the publication and distribution of Scriptures throughout China. Millions of copies of Bibles and Scriptures were printed and distributed, leading to the conversion of hundreds of thousands of Chinese. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, CBH was allowed to continue its work for ten years. Unfortunately, CBH had to close in 1959 due to the political situations in the late 50s.

### **Bible Printing and the United Bible Societies**

The most difficult period in the history of Bible mission in China was the decade-long Cultural Revolution beginning in 1966. The Red Guards, who confiscated and burnt Bibles, also punished and imprisoned many pastors and church leaders.

From 1979 onwards, under Deng Xiaoping's Reform Policy, Chinese churches were re-opened and the printing of Bibles was again allowed. Some Chinese Christians recovered their precious buried Bibles. But the Bibles remained few and scattered, too few to meet the surging demand for the Word of God by a nation just coming out of a decade-long spiritual famine.

In 1984, aware of the desperate need for Bibles, the China Christian Council (CCC) requested the United Bible Societies (UBS) to provide the Church with paper for the printing of Bibles. UBS immediately responded by shipping the first batch of 100 metric tons of Bible paper, purchased from Finland, to China in 1985. In 1986 Bibles printed on this paper started to roll off the printing press belonging to the People's Liberation Army.

UBS has since continued to make Bibles available and affordable in China. To date, this support has moved from providing Bible paper to funding the cost of paper for the printing of Bibles by China Christian Council /Three Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM).<sup>2</sup> Since 1996, UBS has also made similar provision for Catholics in China through China's Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA)/ China's Catholic Bishop Conference (CCBC).<sup>3</sup>

### **A Bible Printing Press in China**

Since the Church in China was allowed to open its doors in the 1980s, the present state-owned printing enterprises have been unable to meet the mounting demands for Bibles in China in terms of speed and quantity.

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<sup>2</sup> China Christian Council (CCC)/National Committee of the Three Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) oversee the registered Protestant churches in China.

<sup>3</sup> China's Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA)/Catholic Bishops' Conference (CCBC) is the parallel body for the Catholics in China.

Once again, Chinese Church leaders sought UBS's help in the establishment of a Bible printing press in China in order to meet the demand. Amity Printing Company (APC) was established in 1987 to give priority to the printing of Bibles for the Church in China. APC is by far UBS's most visible contribution to Bible mission in China. Described as 'the largest single project of UBS accomplished in a remarkably short space of time', Amity Press was a joint venture with the Amity Foundation.<sup>4</sup>

The Press began printing in 1987 and by 2012 more than 100 million Bibles had been printed. 60 million copies were distributed in Mainland China and 40 million copies in various languages for export to other countries where the need for Bibles is also pressing.

Today, Amity Press prints approximately 50 Bibles every minute, a total of 11 to 12 million copies a year. 'Amity is arguably the largest Bible printing press in the world!' was the claim made by Kua Wee Seng, Coordinator of UBS China Partnership, at a celebration of the printing of Amity's 100 millionth Bible in November 2012. He added, 'From being a banned book during the Cultural Revolution, the Bible has become the bestselling book in China! This is a miracle of God in response to the prayers and support of Christians in China and all over the world.'<sup>5</sup>

The Nanjing-based Bible press not only feeds the local Christians' growing appetite for Bibles. Many employees who work at the plant also share how they have been led to faith by their Christian superiors and colleagues. Yang Chen is one of them:<sup>6</sup> 'When I became a Christian in 2000, I was fascinated by the Bible. When I was not on duty, I could read the Bible all day without getting bored.'

Amazed by the transformation in character of her co-worker Xie, from blunt and caustic to a quiet and gentle spirit, Yang discovered the secret of Xie's changed life. It was found in the Big Book which communicates the empowering love of God and attracted her to the Christian faith. Through their daily contact at work, Xie led Yang to Jesus.

Yang's testimony is not unique. Countless others have been impacted by Amity's contribution to Bible ministry.

### Impact of Bible on Church Growth

'Given the Chinese Christians' high regard for the Bible, the Bible is crucial in the growth of the Chinese Church,' says Elder Fu Xianwei, Chairman of *China's TSPM*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Amity Foundation is an independent Chinese voluntary organization created in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians to promote education, social services, health, and rural development in China.

<sup>5</sup> Conversations with Kua Wee Seng, Coordinator of United Bible Societies China Partnership.

<sup>6</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscp.org/apc-yangchen/>

<sup>7</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscp.org/fuxianwei/>

The growth of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Church in China is phenomenal: the registered Protestant Church in China records a 30-fold increase since 1949. The Church currently reports a figure of 400,000 Protestant and 100,000 Catholic baptisms annually. Over the past decade, the average net growth of Protestants and Catholics per year has been 1 million and 200,000 respectively.

The number of Christians in Jiangsu province, home to Nanjing's Amity Bible printing press, jumped from 800,000 in the 1990s to 1.8 million in 2010. The majority of these believers live in the rural areas and many of them testified that it was hearing or reading God's Word that led them to Christ.

Tang Chuiyin from Tang Shan city in Jiangsu is an elderly believer who testifies that she came to believe in Jesus after her nephew encouraged her to read the Bible.<sup>8</sup> Struck by the countless passages that revealed a God who had profound love for all of creation, including herself, her faith grew and she found strength to start a house gathering for prayer and Bible study with two other women. The group soon began to grow, leading to the purchase of an old house for larger meetings and worship. This old house grew into what is now known as Jiangsu's Tang Shan Protestant Church. One unassuming grandma who read the Bible and started a small group has grown into one of the bigger churches in Jiangsu today: Tang's testimony exemplifies the Bible's impact on church growth in China.

The Bible also left an indelible mark on another person in Henan province who shares his surname with Grandma Tang. It was the reading of a handwritten copy of the New Testament many years ago that brought Rev Tang Weimin to the cross of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> Today Rev Tang is not only Vice-President of China Christian Council and Director of the Commission on Rural Church Ministry in China; he is also the church leader of Henan, a province with the largest number of Christians in China. Through Rev Tang and his leadership of a three to four million-strong church, millions of Chinese lives have been impacted by the Word of God.

### **Impact of Bible Translation on Growth of the Ethnic Minority Churches**

Church growth is also happening in the ethnic minority groups in China. Among many other reasons for this growth, the greater availability of more ethnic minority Bibles has been crucial.

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<sup>8</sup> Amity News Service 99.11/12.7: *A Church Born 'By Accident'*

<sup>9</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscop.org/power-of-a-handwritten-nt/>

The ethnic minority peoples constitute close to 114 million of the population in China.<sup>10</sup> In Yunnan province alone, 85% of Christians are from the minority groups. Since the 1990s, the Church in China has supported the work of Bible translation into the various minority languages through the formation of minority language group translation teams with the help of UBS.

In 2009, translations of the Big Flowery Miao Bible<sup>11</sup> and the East Lisu New Testament were completed. Another 6 translation projects which involved the East and West Lisu, Black and White Yi, Wa and Mongolian people groups, are on-going. About 430,000 ethnic minority language Christians in Yunnan will soon be receiving the Bible or Bible notes translated into their own heart language.

A total of 9 ethnic minority language Scriptures are now legally printed and distributed in China. These Bible translations are fuelling the growth of ethnic minority churches in China. As more ethnic Christians are able to read and listen to the Word of God in their own heart languages, more ethnic Chinese are coming to Christ. Nonetheless, there is still a need for more support for Bible translation work in order to reach all the 55 ethnic minority groups in China.

### **On Bible Training**

As the Church in China grows, heresies and false teaching in China make it urgent to ensure that all believers receive sound biblical training.

There are currently 23 officially recognised Protestant seminaries and Bible schools in China, which train pastors and church workers under CCC/TSPM. Many local city churches also conduct their own Bible-based training for lay leaders and church volunteers. UBS, together with other Christian ministries, have stepped in to assist the Church by providing Bible resources and sound biblical training.

With millions in China turning to Christ each year, these training resources are still grossly insufficient to meet the people's growing appetite for sound biblical training.

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<sup>10</sup> Communiqué of the National Bureau of Statistics of People's Republic of China on Major Figures of the 2010 Population Census [1] (No. 1), National Bureau of Statistics of China, April 28, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See Suce Yan Yu's article in this volume.

## Impact of Bible on Society

### *On Literacy*

Many Christians in China are adults residing in rural areas and belonging to the group of people classified as ‘illiterate’.

Using the Bible as its main text, the Church in China organises Bible Literacy Classes to teach older adults how to read and write the Chinese script. These literacy classes ‘not only help rural church-goers recognize words to enable them to read the Bible; they also bring about a greater pursuit of the Word of God and truth. Spiritual growth has led to church revival. Bible literacy teachers claim that students who graduated from literacy classes last year not only come more regularly for church meetings but they also participate more actively in church ministries.’<sup>12</sup>

### *On Children*

There are 222 million people in China who are 14 years old and below according to the *China 6th National Population Census 2010*.<sup>13</sup>

For many years now, many churches have been running Bible-based Sunday school programmes for children as well as summer youth Bible study camps. The Church has also approached Christian organisations to assist in the provision of Bible materials, tools and training.

As a firm believer that the next generation should be nurtured on biblical values, the Chairman of *China’s TSPM*, Fu Xianwei, recalls his own childhood experience and attributes the growth of his Christian faith to his attendance at the Sunday school programme and the weekly church fellowship.<sup>14</sup>

### *On Medical Health*

In addition to 46 Bible distribution vans and 24 Bible motorcycles, UBS provided 18 more Bible distribution vans equipped with basic medical supplies for the Protestant and Catholic Churches in China. These vans add a holistic dimension to Bible mission as they deliver Scriptures and bring a team of local healthcare professionals along to provide basic medical care for the rural poor.

During the 2012 Yunnan and 2013 Sichuan earthquakes, local pastors deployed these Bible-Medical vans to deliver medicine and send rescue

<sup>12</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscp.org/scripture-literacy-classes-build-faith/>

<sup>13</sup> Communiqué of the National Bureau of Statistics of People’s Republic of China on Major Figures of the 2010 Population Census [1] (No. 1), National Bureau of Statistics of China, April 28, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscp.org/fuxianwei/>

workers immediately to the earthquake sites. Rev Wang Hong, a pastor in Luzhou Christian Church, was a key member of the medical rescue team in the Sichuan earthquake. In his view, the Bible-Medical van proved to be a great vehicle to provide help in such emergency situations.<sup>15</sup>

### *On Life Transformation*

Ex-gangster and gambler Xiong began reading the Bible in 2003. It wasn't long before things began to change within him and around him. He controlled his bad temper and began to pay more attention to his family members. In addition to attending church regularly, he also started helping out with chores he had never in his life done before: laundry, cooking and looking after his young child, ferrying his daughter to and from school as well as coaching her in her homework.<sup>16</sup> The Bible has changed Xiong; he left the gangs and a life of crime for a life in Christ.

### **Chinese Christians Love the Bible**

The incredible growth of Bible mission in China can also be attributed to the Chinese Christians' intrinsic love and high regard for the Bible. Some believers have even committed large portions of text to memory in order to preserve God's word. It was this practice of Scripture memorisation that kept many Chinese believers, like the late Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, 'alive' during his imprisonment from the 1950s to the 1970s. Honorary President of China's Catholic Patriotic Association and China's Catholic Bishops' Conference, Bishop Jin, from the Shanghai Catholic Diocese, once shared how he was able to endure 27 years of imprisonment by reciting and reflecting on John's Gospel.<sup>17</sup>

Since my youth, I have been reading the Bible. I read it every day when I entered the monastery and the Society of Jesus. I love the Bible, especially the Gospel of John. I had memorized the whole Gospel of John, in Latin, when I was studying at the monastery. It was from memory that I was able to recite and reflect on God's Word from John's Gospel during my imprisonment when I had no access to the Bible.

Bishop Jin is one of the most prominent Church leaders in China today – beloved by the Catholic communities, respected by the local government. His passing was mourned by many Christians within and outside China.

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<sup>15</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscp.org/lushan-earthquake/>

<sup>16</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscp.org/ex-gangster-becomes-christian/>

<sup>17</sup> Extracted from <http://www.ubscp.org/bishop-jin-luxian/>

### **In Conclusion**

China's church growth over the last three decades has been incredible and Bible mission has contributed significantly to this growth and to society in China. However, in spite of the millions coming to Christ each year, Christians still remain a minority in China. There is still more work to be done in the area of Bible mission in China, in this century and beyond.



# THE IMPACT AND ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN BIG FLOWERY MIAO COMMUNITY

Suee Yan Yu

'Birds fly in the sky, fish swim in water; Miao live on the mountains'; so runs a Miao saying. It refers to the rugged terrain in the south-western part of China in which the Miao live; some villages are only accessible by hours or days of walking. These mountainous regions are also prone to earthquakes. Many houses have suffered various degrees of damage, with cracks in the walls and leaks in the ceilings, but families continue to live there. They survive by subsistence farming. Living conditions are harsh.

In these mountainous regions, vibrant churches have been established in almost every village, and hymns and choruses sound from the hills and mountains, blending in with the chirping of birds and the sounds of rustling leaves in pristine nature. For the Miao, the Bible and the hymn book are the only literature they have, made available after decades of hard work, and they treasure these books.

The Big Flowery Miao settled primarily in Yunnan and Guizhou. In Yunnan and the borders around Guizhou, it is estimated that the Big Flowery Miao population is over 300,000, and about 200,000 are Christians. The figure in Guizhou is harder to obtain. Tony Lambert estimated that there are 300,000 Miao Christians in Guizhou,<sup>1</sup> but this figure includes various Miao subgroups. It has also been estimated that the Big Flowery Miao population in China is around 600,000, and about 60 percent are Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Miao is one of the fifty-five official minority groups in China. Miao is an umbrella term that comprises a linguistically and culturally related group of people. According to some linguists, there are 3 primary Miao dialects, 70 secondary dialects and 18 vernaculars.<sup>3</sup> Big Flowery Miao is one of these Miao dialects. In the past this group was oppressed, bullied and enslaved. Their masters would use the back of a Miao slave as a stool to mount horses. Miao slaves were housed with the animals. They lived in despair, deeply entrenched in slavery, poverty and superstition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. R. Covell, *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith among China's Minority Peoples* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 92.

<sup>2</sup> These estimates are contemporary figures provided by the leaders of Miao Churches in Yunnan.

<sup>3</sup> Junxue Han, *Christianity and Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan* (Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2000), 4-6.

<sup>4</sup> Tan Zhang, *Shimenkan – In Front of the Narrow Gate* (Kunming: Yunnan Education Press, 1992), 25-30.

### **The First Big Flowery Miao New Testament**

Several missionaries have worked with the Big Flowery Miao; the best known is a British missionary called Samuel Pollard.<sup>5</sup> He arrived in Yunnan in 1887, learned the Miao language, dressed like them, and opened his heart to them. After years of reaching out to the Miao, he eventually witnessed a mass movement of the Big Flowery Miao to Christianity. Pollard, working together with Han and Miao Christians, developed a written script and translated the Scriptures into Big Flowery Miao. The first gospel was published in 1906, and the New Testament was published in 1917. Subsequently the New Testament was revised and printed in 1936. Some selections of the Old Testament texts were also translated, but they were not published.

Socio-political changes in the decades that followed the founding of the People's Republic of China (1 October 1949) disrupted religious activities. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Bibles were burned and Christians went through difficult times.

### **The Big Flowery Miao Bible**

A combination of factors led to the start of the Old Testament translation among the Big Flowery Miao. The open door policy adopted by the Chinese government in 1978 made it possible for churches to resume worship services. The demand for scriptures increased. 20,000 copies of the Big Flowery Miao New Testament were printed in 1983, but these were not enough to meet the needs of the believers. The Big Flowery Miao churches in Yunnan held several consultations and decided to work on the translation of the Old Testament. A translation team was formed in 1988 and the translation journey began. In due time, the work received the support of provincial and national church leaders and the State Administration of Religious Affairs. Since 2001, the United Bible Societies, working in partnership with the relevant authorities, have provided training, technical expertise and financial support to ensure the quality of the translation.

After the completion of the Old Testament, a new translation of the New Testament was embarked upon. The Big Flowery Miao New Testament, revised and published in 1936, is a good version and has served the needs of the Miao Christians for generations. It reflects the scholarship and language usage of the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There was a need to have a new translation to reflect contemporary biblical scholarship and the usage of the Miao language today. Some of the mistakes and inadequacies in the old version have also been corrected. For instance, the term 'righteousness' in the old version was translated as 'god', the closest term the translators could find. In the new translation, the term

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about Pollard and his ministry, see S. Pollard, *Samuel Pollard amongst the Miao* (Hankow: Religious Tract Society, 1939).

‘righteousness’, when used in the context of God’s acceptance of a person through faith, was translated as ‘having a right relationship with God’ or ‘God accepted him/her’, depending on contexts, and this helps the believers to have a clearer understanding of the meaning of ‘righteousness’.

The translation of the Miao Bible was carried out by Miao Christians in Yunnan. A group of believers spent years living in the same house, drafting the new translation of the Scriptures together in a group setting. The work was done by mother-tongue speakers of the language. The translation consultant from the United Bible Societies played a complementary role, primarily in the area of training, advising, guiding, and working together with the translators to ensure the quality of the work. Empowering local people to do Bible translation for their own community is the policy and practice of United Bible Societies.

After years of dedication and hard work, encouraged and supported by the Miao churches, the Big Flowery Bible was published and launched in 2009. This is the first time a Bible has been translated by local Christians and published in China since 1949! Since the publication of the first Gospel in 1906 to the completion of the Bible in 2009, the journey has taken over a hundred years.<sup>6</sup>

### **Impact of the Bible**

To have the Scriptures in their own language is a great milestone for the Miao. It gives them a sense of identity. Previously they were despised and oppressed by their surrounding neighbours, but now they view themselves as children of God. This Bible brought about a drastic change in self-understanding resulting in a cultural revival and a remarkable transformation in the society. For over 2000 years, Confucianism failed to make inroads into Miao society, but Christianity succeeded in less than a few decades. The impact is most clearly seen in the realms of literacy, education, and the transformation of the community, especially when the New Testament was first published.

The Miao relied on oral traditions for thousands of years. The development of a written script has allowed Bible translation activities to proceed and helped to preserve Miao cultures and traditions. It has also enabled the people to learn to read or write using their own language and to pursue formal education. Based on the survey carried out in 1950, the Methodist Church established 5 secondary schools, 96 primary schools, a medical school and a theological seminary in the south-western part of China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; most of these are for the training

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<sup>6</sup> For more details about the Miao Bible and its implication for Bible translation work in China, see S. Y. Yu, ‘The Story of the Big Flowery Miao Bible’, *The Bible Translator*, 62:4 (October, 2011), 207-215.

of Miao and Yi minorities.<sup>7</sup> Children from Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan came to Shimenkan (Stone Gate Threshold), a remote village in Guizhou, for education. Shimenkan became the centre of education for the Miao people. It was so famous that letters from overseas addressed simply to 'Shimenkan, China' would reach their destination!<sup>8</sup> A girls' school was also established to make sure women had the opportunity to receive formal education. In less than 50 years, thousands of Miao children received primary and secondary school education, more than 30 completed tertiary education, and two received doctoral degrees.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this formal schooling system, programs were also established to train Christians for evangelism and ministry.

Following the teachings of the Bible also brought about other significant changes in the lives of the people. In the past, the Miao were addicted to alcohol, and drunkenness led to all kinds of social problems. Miao villages traditionally have a 'flowery house', where young men and women gather together for sexual orgies. During festival times such orgies could go on for days, often fueled by alcohol. Miao people also offered sacrifices to their ancestors, to mountains, water, spirits etc, and this added to their financial burden. After embracing Christianity, such practices were stopped. A majority of the Miao now live moral and upright lives, and gain the respect of peoples around them.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to translating the New Testament and sharing the Good News, Pollard and his co-workers adopted the strategy of reaching out to the Miao with the help of Miao. Pollard selected some Miao Christians and sent them out in pairs. They went on their journeys and shared the gospel with others. In this way, the gospel spread quickly from village to village, county to county, and numerous people embraced Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Pollard and his team carried out their ministry in a holistic way. They preached the gospel, fought for the rights of people, often at the risk of their lives, and provided basic health care. They taught the people basic hygiene and gave treatments for simple ailments. Many who were suffering with sickness and diseases came for help. A medical care center was also established to take

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<sup>7</sup> Zhang, *Shimenkan*, 184.

<sup>8</sup> 'Guizhou Weining County Shimenkan: Stone Gate in Miao boarder Reopens Revival of "Cultural Holy Land"', *Southern City Post* (19 August 2009). See also <http://www.sinacom.cn>

<sup>9</sup> Zhang, *Shimenkan*, 184-185. See also Renda Dong, *Research in the Spread of Christianity around the Boarders of Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan (1840-1949)* (Beijing: People's Publishing Press, 2004), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Zhang, *Shimenkan*, 170-178.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Pollard, Frank J. Dymond et al., *In Unknown China* (trans. Renda Dong and Min Dong; Kunming: Yunnan Ethnic Publishing Press, 2001), 719. See also Zhang, *Shimenkan*, 74.

care of patients who needed hospitalization. In addition, an orphanage and a centre for lepers were established.<sup>12</sup>

The way Pollard and his wife lived made a big difference in the success of their mission. They opened their hearts to the people and practised what they preached. This left a deep impression on the people. The former Chinese president Hu Jintao, while he was serving as the secretary general of Guizhou, encouraged the provincial officers to emulate the example of Samuel Pollard. He said, 'In 1904, an Englishman by the name of Pollard came to the poor and desolate village of Shimenkan in Weining county of Guizhou. He brought investment; he built schools, football fields, swimming pools for men and for women. He developed the old Miao script, wrote teaching material like, "I'm a Chinese, I love China", and accepted poor students for education free of charge. Later, when the local people fled during an epidemic, he stayed behind and took care of his dear Chinese students. Eventually, the epidemic took his life.'<sup>13</sup>

The publication of the Big Flowery Miao Bible in 2009 was a major milestone. For generations of Miao Christians, having the entire Bible remained a distant dream. When the Miao Bible was finally launched, the believers were understandably excited. Bible reading classes were held in most churches, either before worship service or during the evening. Believers gathered and read Bible passages together, page after page. Those who knew the Bible a bit more helped those who knew little; those who could read taught those who couldn't. No doubt individuals read the Bible at home by themselves, but they also came together in churches and read the Bible as a communal event, helping one another to grasp the significance of God's word. They also felt a sense of intimacy reading or listening to God's word in their own language. Some were so enthusiastic that they read through the Bible several times, and marked the pages heavily.

Studying the Bible together also inspired a sense of mission among the churches. After the publication of the Miao Bible in 2009, some church leaders established a mission sending agency. Thus far, they have sent out several families as evangelists and new churches have been planted. There are also plans to embark on social work such as setting up a drug rehabilitation centre. Since the 1950s, the Miao churches have generally lacked a sense of mission. Now, the church has awakened to the need to reach out to others. Besides sending and supporting evangelists, the Miao

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<sup>12</sup> Hanxian Yang, 'Selected reading from "A brief history of Christianity among the Miao around the borders of Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan"', in Xuezheng Yang and Aiguo Wang (eds), *Yunnan Religion Research: Special edition of the historical record of Christianity in Yunnan 2004* (Religious Department of Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences: Kunming: Yunnan Academy of Education Printing Press, 2004), 13-18, 57.

<sup>13</sup> 'Guizhou Weining County Shimenkan'.

churches also need to support their pastors financially so that they can devote their time and energy to carrying out pastoral ministries.<sup>14</sup>

### **Needs and Challenges**

With the rapid social and economic developments taking place in China over the last decades, the Miao churches are facing new challenges. With the increase of contact with the wider society, other groups have made inroads among the Miao community in recent years. They conduct training classes and emphasize their own unique ideologies or heretical teachings. Some Miao Christians are exposed to this form of teaching and have started influencing their church members, and this has created some division in the church. There is a need to equip the Miao Christians so that they can distinguish truth from falsehood, and stand firm in their faith. This is an urgent task that needs to be carried out more systematically and extensively.

With the spread of education and information via technology, there is also a higher expectation of pastors and church leaders. Pastors are expected to have a good grasp of biblical content, and be able to demonstrate the relevance of God's word to present day situations. Continual education of pastors is essential so that they will grow and develop new skills. Training in strategic thinking can help church leaders to embark on longer term planning, helping Christians to grow and multiply. Counselling skills could enable them to help believers who are in need. Leaders also need to be able to identify the gifts and talents of believers, and encourage them to devote their time and talents in service. The training of capable Christians for leadership is an urgent task.

In addition, some of the Miao believers, especially those who are under the age of 30, do not know how to read or write their own language. Literacy classes would help these people learn their language. Since there are no Bible resources or commentaries available in the Miao language, there is a need for a Miao Study Bible to help readers to understand God's word. There is also a need to have the Bible in different media (e.g. mp3, in digital format) to meet the needs of the younger audience. The leaders of Miao churches require wisdom and discernment to encourage, equip and mobilize believers to be salt and light in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>14</sup> Prior to 1949, Miao churches supported their pastors financially. From 1950 onwards, Miao churches rely on pastors who serve on a voluntary basis. Some Miao leaders are now proposing that churches should provide for the financial needs of their pastors. A few churches are giving their pastors and elders a small sum a year as a token, but more needs to be done.

### **Concluding Reflections**

The publication of the Big Flowery Miao Bible in 2009 marked an important milestone. It concluded a long journey of Bible translation that started in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, it was the beginning of another journey. Miao Christians need to learn the content of God's word and live by it. Miao leaders are convinced that their Bible will play a crucial role in the renewal of the community. Its impact is already visible in various ways; the most important is the transformed lives of the believers. What is happening in the midst of the Miao community reminds us that translating the Bible into the language of the target community remains an essential part of mission. Talents and resources should be channelled into helping people to have access to God's word in their mother-tongue.

The Bible is the power of God for the salvation of those who believe. William Cameron Townsend once said that, 'The greatest missionary is the Bible in the mother-tongue. It needs no furlough and is never considered a foreigner.' This assertion is true, but for the Bible to have greater impact in society, it needs to be complemented by holistic ministry which includes discipleship, evangelism, training, literacy and social programs. In addition, the life and conduct of the messengers are just as important as the message they bring.

Discussing or studying the word of God is a bit like sowing seeds. It will bear fruit in the lives of the believers; some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. God's word is effective and powerful and will accomplish God's purposes. It has been said that 'you can count the seeds in an apple, but you can't count the apples in a seed.' So it is with studying or teaching the word of God. It produces fruit in mysterious and remarkable ways, also today!

# BIBLE ENGAGEMENT AMONG AUSTRALIAN YOUNG PEOPLE

Philip Hughes

It is hard to get a reliable estimate of young people's involvement in church activities, but it has certainly been declining in Australia over recent decades. We estimate that around 10 per cent of Australian young people in secondary school attend a church monthly or more often.<sup>1</sup>

However, more than at any time in history, Australian young people are exposed to the Bible through schools. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics,<sup>2</sup> of all secondary school students in Australia, 39 per cent attend a non-government school. The vast majority of these schools are church-related. By far the largest group is Catholic, which currently educates close to 20 per cent of all Australian young people. The Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists and Uniting Church all have large numbers of schools across Australia. There are also increasing numbers of parent-controlled or other conservative Christian schools. In most of these schools, religious education is a significant part of the curriculum and includes study of the Bible.

A few government schools also offer subjects such as 'Text and Traditions' or 'Religion and Society' in which there is also some study of the Bible. In primary schools, however, religious instruction is provided by volunteers from local churches. Most Christian religious instruction revolves around Bible stories.

Yet talking with many Australian young people, one gets the impression that they have little idea what is in the Bible. In interviews I have conducted with young people in church-related schools, I have found them highly articulate about topics such as religion and science or the problem of evil, but much less articulate about the content of the Bible. Surveys conducted among young people suggest that 4 per cent of young Australians personally read the Bible daily, another 6 per cent read it at least once a week, and 15 to 20 per cent read it occasionally, apart from reading it at school or in church.

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<sup>1</sup> P.J. Hughes, *Putting Life Together: Findings from Australian Youth Spirituality Research* (Melbourne: Fairfield Press, 2007), 158 provides one source, but probably over-estimates the numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools, 2011* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012), 24.

In 2010 and 2011, a group of organisations which included Scripture Union, Youth Works, the Lutheran Church and The Salvation Army (Southern Territory), led by the Bible Society, commissioned a research project to discover the ways in which young people personally engage with the Bible and what were some of the encouragements and discouragements in that engagement.

## **Discouragements in Personal Bible Engagement**

### *1. Church Practice*

Many young people, including many who attend church, never consider reading the Bible personally and are not encouraged to do so by their churches. The Bible is certainly read in church services of all denominations and Bible passages are often the starting point for sermons and homilies. But that does not translate into encouragement to read the Bible at home, or to engage personally with relating the Bible to life and society. Indeed, there is an implicit assumption in some denominations that it is not wise to read the Bible yourself as you may well misinterpret it. Rather, it should be read in the context of the church community, and the church needs to provide the interpretation.

Attitudes to the study of the Bible have changed in recent years in the Catholic Church. Bible study is certainly regarded as an important part of the religious education curriculum in their schools. Yet young Catholics rarely read the Bible personally. Most Catholics continue to focus on the community of faith to mediate the practice of faith, rather than discovering or developing this through personal Bible reading.

In many non-evangelical Anglican and Uniting Churches,<sup>3</sup> the measure of the commitment of faith is seen primarily in terms of people's involvement in the life of the church and in activities contributing to social justice and the welfare of others rather than in personal devotion. In Pentecostal churches, there is a lot of emphasis on the Bible, but one's personal experience of God is, in practice, regarded as even more important. One large Pentecostal Church where we spoke to youth leaders and young people had a section on its website providing a guide for daily Bible readings. Nevertheless, in practice, young people were encouraged to experience God in their lives more than to find God through reading the Bible.

In a world where personal experience is seen as the ultimate authority, young people tend to look for 'what works' for them. That approach to life

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<sup>3</sup> The Uniting Church in Australia was formed in 1977 from all Methodist Churches in Australia, plus many Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. Each congregation in the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations decided whether they would be part of the Uniting Church in Australia.

has an impact on their attitudes to the Bible. Two young Christians, respectively female and male, explained their attitudes in the following terms.

There are other ways of being strong in faith or developing your faith or showing your faith than studying the Bible, and maybe those work better. I get more out of discussion or listening to someone talk than I might do out of trying to find a set passage and studying it.

It's not the only thing you want to do as a Christian, you want to go out into the world and explore your faith in different ways and learn from a whole lot of different sources.

## *2. The Chore of Reading*

Many young people read very little, especially in the form of books. Some younger people said to us that they much preferred activities such as sport to reading. When they do read, it is often brief messages from friends or from news sources on their computers. Bible reading requires a sustained effort of a kind that is 'uncomfortable' for many young people. We were a little surprised at the number of university students who told us that they only read when they have to.

It should also be remembered that out of 7 million Australians under the age of 25 years, 1.2 million speak, as their first language, a language other than English.<sup>4</sup> We talked with some young people who reported that reading English was difficult for them because it was not their first language. Many of these people also find reading in their first languages difficult. They may be fluent orally, but have never practised reading in their first language.

While reading is a chore for many young people, other young people enjoy reading, particularly novels. The Bible, on the other hand, uses language and images that are often hard to understand and many young people find that the Bible does not engage them like a contemporary novel.

Reading the Bible involves a high level of dedication. The benefits need to be evident for it to be worth the effort.

## *3. Finding What Is Relevant*

Many young people are not convinced that the Bible is particularly relevant to them. Some are sceptical about whether the Bible is true. Others see it as an ancient book unlikely to be relevant to contemporary living.

Many school students in church-related schools regard the study of the Bible as one of the least attractive parts of the religious education curriculum. The best parts of the curriculum, they say, are the study of

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Population and Housing Census 2011, TSP\_0.xls, Table 11.

ethics, social justice and human sexuality. They are much less enthralled by topics relating to the church and the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, we met young people who were curious about the Bible. Quite a number of young people told us that they had tried to read the Bible from the beginning. Some had failed to make it through Genesis. Others, with a great deal of persistence, had made it through to Leviticus and given up. Not only was it hard to read, but most of what they read appeared to be irrelevant to them. Others had read passages that fascinated them, such as the Book of Revelation, but often remained mystified by them.

Several young people said they found it hard to know what to take literally and what applied to life today. Many sections of the laws in the Pentateuch certainly feel as if they applied to an ancient society very different from our own. One young couple who were interviewed had been struggling with alcohol and drug addiction. They were trying to get their lives back on track and were convinced that there was some good guidance for them in the Bible. They said how they often just opened it and read what they found. Sometimes it was helpful, but other times it was not what they needed. There were parts of the Bible they found comforting such as Psalm 23, and the discussion of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians had been helpful. However, they said they found it hard to make sense of many parts of the Bible. They commented on how much of the Old Testament seemed really strict. They did not know what applied today. Was it really so bad for girlfriends and boyfriends to sleep together? Should the laws of the Old Testament be taken literally? And how could a Father put his Son through an experience such as death on a cross? Several other young people we interviewed noted it was difficult to know what to do with the stories of violence. Several young people mentioned that they found the story of the crucifixion of Jesus confronting. How could good come out of such violence and suffering?

There is a strong sense among most young Australians that they must make up their own minds about religion. In an individualistic post-traditional culture, most young people feel that they must make up their own minds about the traditions of religious faith and what they should believe. They are well aware that there are many opinions about religion in society. Not only are there many religions, most of them with their own scriptures, but half the population does not regard religion as having much importance at all. Hence, the only way of resolving the multitude of opinions is to make a decision for oneself. In contemporary Australia, authority resides primarily in the experience of the individual rather than in traditions. The Bible is not seen as a primary authority in its own right. 'Whatever works for you is fine' is a common attitude.<sup>6</sup> At best, then, the

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes 2007, 189.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes 2007, 148.

Bible is peripheral in working out personal attitudes. Most young people feel that 'trying out lifestyles' is more likely to be helpful.

## **Encouragements in Personal Bible Engagement**

### *1. Group Practice*

Most young people who read the Bible were members of churches, youth groups and Bible study groups which encouraged them in their reading and assisted them in the interpretation. In some churches, young people read the passages of the Bible that were to be discussed in the Sunday night youth service. In other churches, they read the Bible in preparation for group discussion. A youth leader told us how he had breakfast with two or three young people every week to discuss their reading and what they were learning.

In most cases the group set the passages to be read. It provided a check on whether young people had actually read the passages and assisted with the interpretation of the text. Often the group recommended a particular way of reading and interpreting. Some young people were using the SOAP method of reading the Scripture, **O**bserving what was happening in the passage, **A**pplying the passage, and then **P**raying over it. Some young people were recording their reflections in journals. However, the group review of Bible reading was more important than the adoption of any particular method in encouraging the reading of the Bible.

The highest levels of biblical literacy, as seen in young people's knowledge of the Bible and ability to talk about its meaning, occurred when young people had undertaken a systematic Bible study course. While few school students enthused about talking about the Bible in religious education, those who had done a course which was examined in their final years of schooling, such as 'Text and Traditions', 'Religion and Society' or a course on Christian ministry as part of their school studies, had a much stronger sense of what the Bible was about and how it related to their lives. Such studies demanded a lot from students and not all young people would be willing to accept such demands. Nevertheless, where young people had applied themselves, their understanding of the Bible grew strongly.

A few churches offered such courses themselves, often not just for young people but for older people too. Systematically taught courses which focused on understanding the Bible as a whole or on specific parts of the Bible contributed greatly to understanding the Bible. On the other hand, they demanded a lot from those who participated.

One young person we interviewed was heavily involved in a Baptist church. He was articulate and had a good sense of what the Bible was all about. Yet he struggled in his personal reading:

I need someone to explain a lot of it, because a lot of it is based on context. If you're reading isolated chapters you need someone to show you where everything fits in. Otherwise it's just words on a page and you'll easily forget it.

The formation of groups has become more difficult in an era in which much of the communication between young people occurs electronically, through social media. Getting commitment to a regular group meeting is difficult in an era in which most face-to-face activities are arranged at the last minute and depend on what seems the best option at a particular moment. Yet groups, even if they are just a couple of young people with a mentor, remain a priority for developing engagement with the Bible and an understanding of it.

## *2. Finding Relevance*

Participation in groups or courses can certainly help young people discover the relevance of the Bible. Most Bible study groups focus as much on how to live the Bible as they do on the content.

However, experiencing the Bible as relevant depends on the attitudes one brings to it. If young people read it simply as stories of long ago, it has little relevance. If they read it as God's communication today, they are far more likely to experience it as relevant to life. Most commonly, young people were looking in the Bible for some general reminders of God's love and care. For example, they saw stories of God's blessing as indications of the potential blessings they might receive. One girl put it in these words:

The good thing about it is, like, that if you're going through a hard time then when you read the Bible, if you open it up whenever, you'll notice that you open it up to a passage relevant to what you're going through. And I find that I'm a massive stress-ball and I worry so much – Year 12 does that – but after reading, like, in Luke it says 'you should not worry'; it kind of comforts you almost. So I try not to worry.

Some young people said that they looked for experiences similar to their own within the biblical stories. For example, one young adult spoke of the story of the prodigal son and found within it the reminder that older brothers should not be jealous of younger brothers! Several young girls said that they found the story of Ruth meaningful to them. Several young people mentioned the idea of Ruth and Joseph remaining strong in adversity and finding a way out of difficult circumstances.

Another young person spoke of the importance of the story of Joseph for him as indicating that God understands dreams. He also found the whole idea of the slave who became a king inspiring. In a similar vein, a number of young people said their favourite story was about David and Goliath; the idea that the underdog could win was inspiring and so was David's courage:

I like David and Goliath, because everyone thought he had no chance. And then he won...I'm sure we've all been told 'Nah, that's not going to happen' or something and then you read that and it just gives you a bit of a lift.

Many Australian Christian young people see their faith as a resource on which they can draw when they need help. It may provide guidance about decisions, but more importantly, it provides reassurance when times are difficult.<sup>7</sup> God's love is frequently understood as his readiness to help. Young people spoke of the Bible as reminding them that God was there and would help them in times of need. Many young people had favourite passages that they would turn to in such times.

However, young people rarely consider specific passages to relate to specific decisions in life. It is more indirect. A young adult described it this way:

I think that the Bible and what I've learnt about God from the Bible and prayer and stuff influences who I am and why I make decisions. My morals, a lot of that comes from Bible stories from when I was growing up, and my parents have been influenced by the Bible. I don't think I often make a decision and think of a Bible story to make that decision. But I think that it's influenced who I am. It's influenced the way I want to live, and I try to live a life that does follow Jesus, a life of justice and equality. And that affects the decisions that I make. It has a small indirect influence. Like a couple of weeks of Proverbs at small group, we were encouraged to take the wisdom lessons and apply them to life. So there is a little bit of that.

### Conclusions

The study showed that the best way to encourage young people to read the Bible is to encourage them to participate in a Bible reading group. The Bible Society, which was the lead organisation in commissioning the study, has encouraged local churches to provide suitable groups in which young people can engage with the Bible.

Historically, the Church has always played a large role in the interpretation of the Bible. Despite the emphasis on individual faith in contemporary western society, the Church, through its various groups and activities, continues to have a significant role in the formation of faith. But it is easy for churches unintentionally to discourage personal Bible reading and emphasise what happens within the service of worship. Within worship services it is common to hear the Bible taken as a starting point for reflections on faith, but less common to hear a study of the Bible that grapples with its actual meaning in its original context.

The Bible communicates wisdom and insights from a very different age and from cultures very different from our own. The process of identifying the enduring principles of faith that apply in every age and culture, and

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<sup>7</sup> P. Hughes 2007, 160.

understanding how those principles challenge the cultural norms of contemporary society, requires considerable skill.

Most young people (and probably most older people) look in the Bible for that which confirms their way of life and the cultural patterns they have adopted. Most people look for what makes them feel comfortable and at ease. That does justice neither to the Bible nor to the Christian faith.

It is very easy to use the Bible for predetermined purposes. The challenge for the contemporary Church, particularly in its work with young people, is to develop the skills of identifying the wisdom of the Bible, including what makes us uncomfortable, that helps us to evaluate how we live and to critique the norms of our society. Only if that occurs will engaging the Bible be truly transformative.



# THE BIBLE AND CHILDREN IN MISSION

Edesio Sánchez Cetina

## Introduction

The use of the Bible in the formation of children, as we have seen it in Latin America, and according to our experience of the last 30 years as members of the Translation Department of the United Bible Societies, includes various items that form the summary of this study:

- a theology developed from the child's perspective;
- a translation of the Scriptures and the preparation of helps which regard children not just as the ones who are being taught, but who are equally the subjects of their own education and who educate and shape adults;
- the development of faith communities which provide a place for the full participation of children in all areas of pastoral activity and mission.

## A Biblical Theology from the Child's Perspective

I am convinced that before undertaking missional projects and initiatives aimed at children and adolescents it is vitally important to develop a biblical theological framework on which to base and build such ministries – evangelization, education, liturgy, pastoral ministry, recreation and others.

The overwhelming majority of projects begun by churches and parachurch organizations are developed from the perspective of adults, attempting to make the child a 'little adult' as quickly as possible, irrespective of cost. Seen in this way, the child becomes the object rather than the subject of the programme, and the aim is that the child should conform to what the adult considers and has established as 'normal' – which more often than not is to shape the child in terms of the supposed 'real world' or *status quo*.

I have learned over the past decades to approach the Bible with the eyes of a child, that is, from a child's point of view. Through reading the Bible in this way, with the metaphor of the child as a starting point for my exegesis, I have been developing a theology of the child. This has helped me and others to develop translations, missional and pastoral materials and perspectives that bring a balance to the adult-centred practice of the

Christian life and church activities. What follows are some aspects of such a theology.

The creation account presents God essentially as *soter*, that is, one who 'redeems' or 'saves'.<sup>1</sup> The semantics of Genesis 1 speak to us of a God who 'brings forth' the earth from a situation of disorder and emptiness to one of 'order' and life. Therefore God's plan 'to rule over' or 'to govern' is to act so as to give life and bring order. God's activity in Genesis 2 is both creative and salvific: God creates by changing dryness into fertility, loneliness into togetherness, the absence of help and support into a presence which completes and produces results that benefit the creation and its 'inhabitants'. In this way the creation texts already provide a glimpse of the exodus: freedom from a situation of death to one of life, liberty, community and solidarity.

By this process of creation and salvation God establishes a space for life in which there are no ethnic, racial, social or political divisions. We were all created with 'ontological equality'. From the point of view of a theology of creation God did not create individual countries, their borders, or the social and political systems seen in human society. There is no place for one human to dominate another. In the spirit of Psalm 82:3,4 God makes human beings responsible for creating a world characterised by harmony, peace and justice.

This plan undergoes a radical change in Genesis 3. A different story develops. Human beings use their freedom to decide, and shift inexorably away from God's original plan. That becomes clear when they opt to follow the serpent's voice rather than the voice of God. In taking this step they allow, as Harvey Cox put it, 'a mere animal to tell them what they should do'. Cox states:

If we read that old story carefully, we will see...it is a sin of *acedia* (sloth). Eve shares with Adam the assignment of exercising mastery over all the creatures of the field. Her 'original' misdeed was not eating the forbidden fruit at all. Before she reached for the fruit she had already surrendered her position of power and responsibility over one of the animals, the serpent, and let it tell her what to do...Their sin is our sin. It is not promethean...We fritter away our destiny by letting some snake tell us what to do.<sup>2</sup>

If we follow Cox's logic, sin is to reject one's own self, refusing what one really and truly is. In Genesis 3 the writer uses the image of the serpent to underline the level of inhumanity to which human beings fall by rejecting their creation in the image of God, to become a meaningless replica of the image instilled in them by a mere snake. This is precisely the sin of *acedia*, laziness or apathy. It shows itself in listening to the voice of the dominant forces of this world which have created structures, institutions

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller study see Gerhard von Rad, 'The theological problem of the Old Testament doctrine of Creation' in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1966), 130-143.

<sup>2</sup> *On Not Leaving it to the Snake* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), xiii-xiv.

and practices marked by racism, ethnocentrism, marginalisation, censure, oppression, violence and death.

In the Bible the subject or protagonist of these inhuman forces, the enemies of God's plan, are human beings marked with the image of 'adult', 'powerful' and 'egocentric'. As a result when we think of God's plan only from the perspective of Genesis 1 and 2, we find an element which needs to be adjusted or nuanced in the light of other texts – from both Testaments – which re-appropriate the theme of God's plan, not in terms of the image of the adult, but of that of the 'child', of 'infancy'. Here we will set the images of the adult and the child over against one another to represent the two opposing plans of God and the serpent. The world of 'the serpent' can be defined as the 'real world' or the *status quo*. One apparent alternative to this at first appears to offer a way that frees us from the *status quo* or the 'real world'; in fact it locks up those who opt for it in a world of their own making, where all that matters is themselves and their personal safety. In other words, it is a temporary, 'personal' solution, concerned only with one's own interest, and not at all with the other. Genesis 20:1-15; 28:6-9; and aspects of Ruth 1:1-22 are examples of this.

As opposed to these two alternatives the Word of God offers us texts which I call 'God's surprises' or 'the third way', full of the imagination and creativity that enable us to dream and build a world quite distinct from the two ways already mentioned – a world of solidarity, social justice, concern for others, especially the weakest and most vulnerable. We find this option personified by the weak and vulnerable and defined in terms of the 'child'. Among the texts I refer to, often markedly poetic and prophetic, are Psalm 8; Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:3-6; Matthew 11:25; 21:14-17; Luke 2:10-12; Mark 10:14,15; and stories like those of Naaman (2 Kings 5) and Zaccheus (Luke 19.1-10). God's plan there can be summed up as 'the new creation'.

The theme of creation and the metaphor of the child as 'the most important citizen of the kingdom of God', protagonist of God's plan, meet together in Psalm 8. In this Psalm, as in the Genesis texts, creation finds a focus in humankind. In this text the poet-theologian puts the adult to one side and chooses the child as the paradigm of humanity – a 'better' example of the image of God and of God's stewards on earth. After singing of the greatness of God's creation, the poet affirms:

With praises from children  
and from tiny infants,  
you have built a fortress.  
It makes your enemies silent,  
and all who turn against you  
are left speechless. (Ps 8: 2 CEV)

It is not a great, powerful adult who takes the lead against evil to defeat the enemy! It is a child!

Both here and in Jesus' rereading of this text in Matthew 21:14-17, children are the point of reference in the victory over evil and in the

silencing of those who wrongly hold power and impose their will on others. When the psalm affirms the subjection of all creation under human control (vv. 7-9), it does so in the light of the opening affirmation of the role of the child. This relates well to what God says through Isaiah:

He will not judge by appearance or hearsay;  
 he will judge the poor fairly  
 and defend the rights of the helpless.  
 At his command the people will be punished,  
 and evil persons will die.  
 He will rule his people with justice and integrity.

Wolves and sheep will live together in peace,  
 and leopards will lie down with young goats.  
 Calves and lion cubs will feed together,  
 and little children will take care of them. (Isa 11:3-6 CEV)

In the new creation, in God's new plan, all that is acceptable or is the norm in the 'real world' or the *status quo*, is replaced in the world the prophet describes, by a 'little child' who takes the lead. In contrast to the so-called 'normal' or 'real' world, the world described by the prophet opens new opportunities to be inclusive and embrace solidarity. In this world the biblical author has deliberately chosen the metaphor of the child as the paradigm for the vulnerable, for that which does not impose itself on others, and for that which welcomes the anomalous and the 'extraordinary'. It thereby threatens standardised, conformist society.

Children, women and people who are in some way disabled fall outside what is thought to be 'normal'. They are often marginalised, discriminated against and excluded. In contrast, the prophetic message proclaims a very different, 'abnormal' world that does not fit into a dominating, homogenizing way of thinking. Instead it announces a world where what has been seen as abnormal, unusual, incomplete or deformed is welcomed and received fully and freely.

In Psalm 8, Isaiah 11 and other Scriptures it is a child that is presented as the paradigm of the new humanity, with all its transforming and creative power. In Matthew and Luke the Good News of salvation begins with the baby Jesus: God-with-us. God comes to us as a child, and we see the divine plan, or the beginning of the messianic reign, summed up in a child. In this way the Incarnation emphatically indicates something that should be seriously considered in our missional, educational and pastoral planning.

The men who followed Jesus struggled to understand God's plan to create a new humanity whose most important traits were best expressed through a child. It is not surprising that at different times and in different ways Jesus had to remind them of this:

At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants' (Mt 11:25).

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it (Mk 10:14,15).

When creation, new creation, incarnation and salvation are understood through the metaphor of the child, the idea of the ‘dominant adult’ is deconstructed. This different hermeneutic creates a space for the inclusion of the diverse forms our humanity takes, which would normally be excluded by the concept of the image of God fostered by a hermeneutic and theology rooted in the *status quo*.

### Translating the Bible for Children

In the 1990s churches in Latin America approached the United Bible Societies to request the preparation of a Spanish translation for the continent’s children and young people.<sup>3</sup> The *Traducción en Lenguaje Actual* (TLA), published in 2003, was the result.

Translating the Bible for children or young audiences is not simply a matter of applying a set of principles such as a limited vocabulary of about two thousand words, or using carefully formed, uncomplicated sentences, easy to follow and understand, with everything related to that level of language. It involves responding to the urgent need to engage such an audience in its ‘here and now’.

Those of us involved in the project quickly realized that we needed to immerse ourselves in children’s literature in Spanish: stories, novels, poetry, songs, language of games, etc. For example, we discovered that glossing and paraphrase, sometimes used in translations for children, were unnecessary. It was equally unnecessary to restrict ourselves to a limited vocabulary of simple terms or to avoid longer words that were harder to pronounce. More than that, we learned that a good translation for children should be a literary work of excellent quality, with a richness of tone and cadence, even in everyday language.

Translation principles were developed that took into account, aside from other principles established by the Bible Societies, additional elements such as language comprehension level, characteristics of Spanish children’s literature, vocabulary, sentence and paragraph structure and syntax oriented to readers and listeners of less developed academic levels. Using speech patterns as the primary semantic approach, the translation was oriented more towards being listened to than being read by the primary audience, avoiding the use of ‘ecclesiastical’ and ‘doctrinal’ terminology, and taking into account those who are unchurched. But above all our translation was based on a theology and hermeneutic developed from the perspective of a young person, of a little child.

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<sup>3</sup> In many countries of Latin America children under 15 make up at least 40% of the population.

The following are some of the elements taken into consideration in the TLA:

1. Since the TLA is oriented towards being listened to rather than read, attention is given to the oral understanding of the text. The focus of the passage, transitions, social location of the participants, relation between existing and new information, beginnings, endings, changes of nouns and pronouns, relation of subject and predicate, how words are accented, sounds and grammatical rhythm were all taken into account.
2. In the translation process the paragraph took precedence over smaller elements of the section. Careful attention was therefore given to the overall discourse structure. The text has also been formatted to make this clear, so that in the case of narrative each new element in a dialogue is marked by a new line.
3. Attention has been paid to both explicit and implicit information in the text. In some cases, such as formulaic lists in genealogies (e.g. 1 Chron 1:43-54) the explicit information has been rendered implicit, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition. In other cases, implicit information is expressed explicitly in order that the reader or hearer can understand the whole meaning of a sentence or paragraph. For example, in Luke 2:1 the 'whole world' subject to the census is translated as 'everyone who lived in the Roman Empire'; in 1 Kings 1:5 'Adonijah the son of Haggith' is rendered 'Adonijah, the son David had with Haggith'.
4. In order to achieve a translation that is faithful to the meaning, natural in expression and clear, the TLA pays careful attention to idiomatic expressions, figurative language, and to the deeper meaning of the text, achieved through what I call 'exegetical translation' (the two texts above are examples of this).
5. Inclusivity: care was taken to avoid male-chauvinist and patriarchal language, taking into account aspects of gender in exegesis and translation. In addition, people who have some kind of disability or who work with the disabled helped us to avoid phrases or expressions that were degrading, condescending or hurtful. Texts that have hidden or silenced children and other minorities have been worked with so that not only the biblical text, but also paragraph and section headings, empower them, by giving them proper visibility and prominence.

Due to particular linguistic characteristics of Spanish, it is more difficult to achieve lexical inclusivity in it than in some other languages. Nevertheless ways have been found to avoid the use of 'man' (*hombre*) where the text refers to men *and* women.

In passages where women have a prominent role, paragraph titles reflect this. The title for Joshua 2 in the Spanish Reina-Valera Bible (RV) is 'Joshua and the Spies', despite the fact that the protagonist in the account is Rahab. The TLA title is 'Rahab and the Spies'. In the RV the heading of Acts 18:24-28 is 'Apollos preaches in Ephesus', whereas TLA has 'Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos', highlighting the fact that the passage deals with how Apollos was brought to a fuller understanding of the Christian faith by Priscilla and her husband.

There are also a number of cases where progress in scholarship has given a clearer understanding of certain texts, and led to significant changes in the TLA from earlier Spanish translations. For example, the translation of 'head' in 1 Corinthians 11:3 reflects the idea of source or origin within the term's possible meanings, while that of 'authority' in 1 Corinthians 11:10 reflects the control the woman has of her head.

In the ten years since its publication the TLA, a translation that was originally designed for 8 to 14 year-olds has been welcomed by a much wider section of the population, including those for whom Spanish is a second or third language, such as indigenous people. It has also become the text of reference for a wide range of materials for children and young people and for a number of study Bibles: the *H<sup>2</sup>O* Bible for young people, the *Isha* Bible with helps and articles from the woman's perspective with the aim of empowering women, the *Biblia de la Familia*, etc.

Children and young people now have a translation which is easy to understand. They also have tools and approaches to Bible study geared to their needs, their levels of understanding and education, and their awareness of the world around them. These have been designed with the aim of providing spaces for reflection and developing attitudes which promote respect for themselves and for others, empowerment, and a life based on justice and peace.

### **Mission and Pastoral Care: From and to the Child**

One of the basic characteristics of childhood is play. It is not innocence or detachment, but the constant inclination to play. Both the biblical text and the sciences dealing with human personality are agreed on this. Educational psychologists have convincingly shown that games and play define the child.

Isaiah 11:3-6 was mentioned earlier. It is impossible really to understand this text without reference to the playful character that is part of the important role of the child in it. In fact, Isaiah 11:8 uses the Hebrew word that has 'play' as one of its meanings (*sha'a*). Moreover Matthew 21:12-17 indicates that whereas the merchants and religious leaders had no problem with commercialism and corruption in the Temple, they were angry and upset by the healing of the blind and the lame, and the hubbub of the children crying 'Hosanna!' Children must have room to participate more fully in the theological and missionary environment. For this reason, games, music and dance are mediums that must be employed to communicate the Word effectively.

I dream of one day creating materials that, used in conjunction with biblical texts translated for the comprehension level of a child and with methods of exegesis manageable by a child, will allow an eight year old to perform exegesis and come to hermeneutical conclusions as serious and profound as those expected from an adult. The TLA is in a sense a 'post-

missionary' translation of the Bible,<sup>4</sup> whose distribution and use now involves us in the latest advances in first world communication technology. Yet at the same time it is just as important to tune our 'antennae' towards the privileged recipients of the biblical message, to see what we may learn about communication and what is demanded by children and with them the poor, the indigenous and outcast communities.



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<sup>4</sup> See Edesio Sánchez C., 'Word of God, Word of the People: Translating the Bible in Post-missionary Times' in Philip A. Noss (ed), *A History of Bible Translation* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007), 387-408.

# BIBLE TRANSLATION, THE QUECHUA PEOPLE AND PROTESTANT CHURCH GROWTH IN THE ANDES

Bill Mitchell

‘One of the most significant aspects of the Third Latin American Congress on Evangelization<sup>1</sup> was the participation of our indigenous brothers and sisters, men and women who with a powerful, prophetic message shook and unsettled the calm, middle-class mentality of many participants. Their plain, simple language and their particular way of speaking drew far more cheers and applause than the carefully crafted papers and speeches of our academic colleagues. They, more than everyone else, grasped the very heart of Jesus’ message of Luke 4:18,19 – for it is these words that most clearly provide the frame of reference and context for the mission of the Latin American Church today.’<sup>2</sup>

The indigenous delegates made up 15% of the 1200 participants. More than one delegate, from urban centres like Buenos Aires, amazed at their presence, asked ‘Who are these people? Where are they from?’ In fact, the majority were Quechuas – from Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador<sup>3</sup> itself. In what follows we propose to respond to those questions by looking at Bible translation into the Quechua language and the role of those Scriptures in the Andean republics, with special attention to the Cuzco region of southern Peru.

## Language

The Quechua language was first spoken around two thousand years ago somewhere in Central Peru. From there it expanded both north and southwards, vying for dominance with Aymara, Puquina and other languages. In the mid 1400s the Quechua-speaking Incas began their conquest in the region. Starting out from their small state around their capital Cuzco, in less than a century they ruled over an empire that stretched 4000 kilometres on the Pacific side of the continent. When the

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<sup>1</sup> Tercer Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización held in Quito, Ecuador, 25 August-5 September 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Edesio Sánchez Cetina, *Deuteronomio* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2002), 406-7.

<sup>3</sup> In Ecuador the name ‘Quichua’ is used, while the name ‘Quechua’ is preferred in Bolivia and Peru.

Spanish arrived in 1532, they found Quechua being used as the *lingua franca* in most areas of the Inca empire. The Church's use of Quechua in the following century strengthened the language and even took it into areas where it was not previously spoken.

Today the Quechua family of languages extends north from Santiago del Estero in northern Argentina, through Bolivia, northern Chile, Peru and Ecuador to southern Colombia, where Inga, the most northerly variety of the language, is spoken. Census figures vary, but the total number of speakers in the Andean area is around 10 million, with Bolivian, Cuzco, Ayacucho and Chimborazo being the major dialects.

### Scripture Translation

Following the Conquest colonial administrators insisted that the indigenous people should learn Spanish; nevertheless the Church upheld the importance of the vernacular for its life and work. This in turn led to the preparation of grammars and dictionaries of the language and translations of creeds, catechisms and Scriptures. In the latter case it was the lectionary passages for 'Sundays and feast days' that were most frequently translated in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>4</sup>

The first complete New Testament was translated in 1822-1824 in Lima, Peru. However the manuscript was misplaced in the final stages of the Independence struggle and was never published. It was not until 1921 that a complete Bolivian Quechua NT was published. Translation work into other dialects of the language went ahead slowly in Peru and Ecuador, with New Testaments published in 1947 (Cuzco, Peru), 1952 (Bolivia), 1954 (Chimborazo, Ecuador), and 1961 (Ayacucho, Peru).

The arrival of a new wave of missionaries following the Second World War, together with the establishment of national Bible Societies, the creation of Summer Institute of Linguistics 'branches' (Bolivia 1954-87; Ecuador 1953-92; Peru 1946-2011) and the Second Vatican Council gave a new impulse to translation in the region. The last 30 years of the 20th century saw a steady stream of new translations and revisions. As the Protestant churches multiplied, these were increasingly prepared by Quechua translators rather than expatriates:

*Bolivia:* Oruro NT – 1976, Cochabamba NT – 1977, Apolo NT – 1987.

*Colombia:* Inga NT – 1996.

*Ecuador:* Tena NT – 1972, Chimborazo NT – 1973, Imbabura NT – 1976, Cañar NT – 1987, Northern Pastaza NT – 1992.

*Peru:* Cuzco NT – 1969, Ayacucho NT – 1981, Ancash NT – 1992, San Martín NT – 1992, North Junin NT – 1997, Southern Pastaza NT – 1997.

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<sup>4</sup> See further Bill Mitchell, 'Sacred Scripture in early colonial Peru: rationale, translation and use', *Bible Translator*, 47.3 (1996), 301-313.

Complete Bibles were produced by Bible Societies in a number of dialects – Bolivia (1986), Ayacucho (1987), Cuzco (1988), Chimborazo (1989) and Imbabura (1994). The Bolivian and Chimborazo Bibles also had editions with the deuterocanonical books. The Roman Catholic Church produced the liturgy and lectionaries in various dialects, as well as the Napo NT (Ecuador 1988), the Huancavelica NT (Peru 1994), the *Pachacamacpac Quillacsha Shimi* Bible (Ecuador 1997),<sup>5</sup> and the Huancavelica Bible (Peru 2002).

In Peru the publication of new translations has continued.<sup>6</sup> In addition, revised editions of the Ayacucho, Bolivian, Cuzco and Chimborazo Bibles have been published, as have complete Bibles in the Huallaga (Peru) and Cañar (Ecuador) dialects. OT translation is ongoing in a number of dialects where only the NT currently exists.

### The Protestant Church in the Cuzco Region

Reliable statistics of Protestant church growth among the Quechua people of the Andean republics in recent decades are tantalizingly few, yet observers of the religious scene over the last 40 years are agreed on the growth that has taken place, to a point where the evangelical community often represents over 10% of the population.<sup>7</sup> The following figures come from personal experience in the Cuzco region.

In January 1973 while carrying out linguistic field work, the writer asked the staff and students of the Sicuani Bible Institute<sup>8</sup> of the *Iglesia Evangélica Peruana* (IEP) how many Quechua churches there were in the Department of Cuzco and the north of the Department of Puno. The answer was 130.

During the above-mentioned 1992 conference in Quito an observer from a theological college in England asked the Rev. Hilda Valeriano of the IEP in southern Peru what she did. Probably misled by her low key answer that she ‘worked with women’, he asked, ‘how many people are in the

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<sup>5</sup> This Bible is in a ‘unified’, ‘pure’ Quichua created by the translators which, despite its promotion by the R.C. Church, has failed to win acceptance among the faithful.

<sup>6</sup> 2002: Northern Conchucos NT, Southern Conchucos NT. 2003: Huamalties NT, Margos NT. 2004: Cajamarca NT, Lambayeque NT. 2006: Wanka NT. 2007: Ancash NT. 2011: Pano NT. 2013: Eastern Apurimac NT.

<sup>7</sup> For church growth and social transformation in the Chimborazo region of Ecuador, see John Maust, *New Song in the Andes* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1989): 106-114 and William Reyburn, *Marching Through Babel* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2002), 305-307. Today there are over 500 evangelical churches in Chimborazo and a further 40 in Quito and 70 in Guayaquil of the ‘Chimborazo diaspora’.

<sup>8</sup> Sicuani is 120 kms. south-east of the city of Cuzco.

congregation you work with?’ She replied, ‘I look after the women’s programmes in the 550 churches in our Synod in the Department of Cuzco’.

In November 2009 students from the Cuzco Quechua region<sup>9</sup> of the country taking part in the UBS Translator Training Programme in Lima, gave the number of churches there as 1800. The majority of these are IEP congregations, with a number of other denominations and independent groups represented.<sup>10</sup> The relevance of the Bible to this growth is seen in factors such as the churches’ request in 2000 for a revision of the Bible, and its ongoing distribution and use since the publication of the revised Bible in April 2005.

### Role of Radio

In a world of high illiteracy, the role of radio has been key in the proclamation of the Word of God. In the 70s and 80s few stations were as influential as the World Radio Fellowship’s *Voice of the Andes* (or HCJB) broadcasting from Quito, Ecuador. ‘Hermano Marcos’<sup>11</sup> was heard daily from 4 am to 6 am in the Quechua dialects of Imbabura, Chimborazo, Ayacucho, Cuzco and Bolivia, going north to south geographically.<sup>12</sup> Other mission agencies quickly followed the HCJB model establishing radio stations.<sup>13</sup> At first secular radio stations were reluctant to accept evangelical programming, but as that community grew and the policy changed, local churches made full use of their local stations for Bible reading and preaching. Commenting on the role of the Scriptures in Quechua and the development of these radio stations, Washington Padilla observed, ‘the

<sup>9</sup> The Cuzco Region, the north of the Puno Region, the province of Caylloma of the Arequipa Region, and parts of the Madre de Dios Region in the eastern lowlands – a current population of 1,500,000.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Assemblies of God, Baptists, Cathedral of Faith, Maranatha churches, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventists, and Way of Life. Pastor Alejandro Silva García, National Director of the Bible League in Peru, who is from Cuzco, estimates the number may now be 2000 (personal conversation in Lima, 16 November 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Farstad, a gifted linguist.

<sup>12</sup> The author remembers Farstad’s ‘audience research’ visit to Cuzco in the mid 80’s when a shoeshine boy in the airport spread the news that he had just cleaned Hermano Marcos’s shoes. Farstad was suddenly overwhelmed as a huge crowd formed around him. People left the check-in lines to meet the man whose Quechua programs they had listened to for years. The police intervened to restore order!

<sup>13</sup> E.g. La Voz de la Laguna de Colta (Chimborazo), Radio Amauta (Ayacucho), Radio Cruz del Sur (La Paz). For Ecuador see Alice Mitchell, *Voices in the Andes: The Churches’ Use of Radio in Ecuador* (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology and Public Issues), 1993.

psychological and cultural value of these instruments was to be of incalculable value in the succeeding years.<sup>14</sup>

### Winds of Change

In exploring the growth of the evangelical churches amongst the Quechua people, it is difficult to ignore political and social changes that have taken place.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Peru, two such might be mentioned: the Agrarian Reform of the left-wing military government (1968-75) and the Shining Path guerrilla war (1980-1992).

The Agrarian Reform brought to an end Peru's centuries-old *hacienda* system and replaced it by a system of cooperatives, run by the former *colonos* of the *haciendas*. As well as being a major land reform, it also brought to an end the age-old linkage between the landowning class, the judiciary, and certain religious authorities. Doors that had been closed to itinerant evangelical preachers disappeared, and in the ensuing social upheaval caused by the Reform the Word of God in the Quechua language found a ready audience. In southern Peru the growth in evangelical churches paralleled the Reform, and the distribution and use of indigenous language Scriptures.

The guerrilla war waged by the Maoist Shining Path was of a different order, beginning in the Ayacucho region and spreading further south to the Cuzco region, and then towards major urban areas of the country. Some 70,000 people died in a twelve-year period,<sup>16</sup> with atrocities committed on both sides. Civil authorities and government services were withdrawn from rural mountain areas to the larger towns and lower valleys. At the height of the conflict my wife Alice wrote to a friend:

We are moved by the witness of so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ living in the 'emergency zones'. In hundreds of isolated towns and villages they are called upon to fill positions of authority, as the only people who are trusted and have enough courage to do so. They suffer at the hands of both the terrorists and the Armed Forces. Many have been brutally killed and have bravely stood before their captors and told them that they don't fear death, as what could be better than to be with the Lord.

In many communities only the evangelical church continued to function. The Quechua Bible became a symbol of hope. Its laments gave voice to the

<sup>14</sup> *La Iglesia y los Dioses Modernos: Historia del Protestantismo en el Ecuador* (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1989), 398.

<sup>15</sup> See further Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga (eds), *Resurgent Voices in Latin America: Indigenous Peoples, Political Mobilization, and Religious Change* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), and Timothy J. Steigenga (ed), *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> This included some 300 pastors.

people's pain, and through it they found that God was with them in their suffering.<sup>17</sup>

### Vernacularization of Music

In the period under consideration few if any books have had a greater circulation in southern Peru than *Allin Willaykunaq Takinkuna*<sup>18</sup> in its various dialects and editions – the hymnbook of the Quechua churches. It existed well before the church growth documented here, and was the work of poet, evangelist and Bible translator Florencio Segura (1912-2000) and the British missionary Kenneth Case, as they worked together in the mid-1940s on hymnody and Bible translation (i.e. the Ayacucho NT published in 1961). Segura's hymns drew on a rich legacy of traditions to teach the message in an oral culture. He recognised that sung theology was the quickest way for the Quechua to grow in their new faith. 'Largely owing to his parallel work on the biblical text, his hymns became theology via music.'<sup>19</sup>

These laid the basis for the development of indigenous music in the churches, leading to regional and international Quechua music festivals in the 1980s and '90s, building as they did on Bible conventions, which occupied for evangelicals the space that the traditional Roman Catholic *fiestas* had held. Laporta observes that the Quechua hymns, conventions and Bible conferences brought the evangelical groups together, creating new social spaces and symbols which in turn fostered a communal solidarity. Access to the Bible in their own language gave them a new sense of dignity and worth.<sup>20</sup>

### From *indio* to *in Deo*

While social upheaval and change are factors in Protestant growth, and radio and music important catalysts, the Scriptures in Quechua have also played a key role. Language plays a fundamental role in the struggle for survival of minority groups. A people projects its understanding of reality

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<sup>17</sup> The Ayacucho Quechua Bible was dedicated in 1987; over 30,000 copies were distributed in the following years. Further south the same was true following the 1988 dedication of the Cuzco Quechua Bible.

<sup>18</sup> 'Good News Songs'. The writer was a member of the Quechua Commission of the Southern Synod of the IEP from 1976-84 and in that period the Commission published on average 6,000 copies of the Cuzco edition of the hymnbook annually.

<sup>19</sup> Deborah Chapman, *Florencio Segura: Communicating Quechua Evangelical Theology via Hymnody in Southern Peru*. Ph.D. Thesis, Edinburgh University, 2006: 348.

<sup>20</sup> Hector Laporta V. 'Protestantismo y Cultura' in Tomás Gutiérrez (ed), *Protestantismo y Cultura en América Latina: Aportes y Proyecciones* (Quito: CLAI, 1994), 34.

and portrays its own identity through language. The Quechua people were long looked down upon as *indios*. Many had internalised what they had been repeatedly told – that Quechua was not a proper language, but a mere dialect, not to be compared with Spanish.<sup>21</sup> The Quechua Bible is an affirmation of their worth and of the status of their language and identity as a people.

For a people who have suffered marginalization and oppression, the ‘Good News’ begins in the first pages of the Bible. Reflection on the *imago Dei* leads to a new understanding of themselves, of their dignity, worth and personhood, of the mutuality between men and women, and of their responsibility for creation as God’s stewards. There develops a nascent theology of creation, which resonates with the Andean people’s understanding of the all-embracing sacral nature of the world in which they live.

Carlos Mesters has drawn attention to how the indigenous people of Peru are engaging with the Scriptures in a way that leads them to re-read and take responsibility for their own history: ‘The prophetic writings are the ones that draw their attention, for they seem to be mirrors of their actual situation.’<sup>22</sup>

Quechua people speak of themselves as *runa*, which means both ‘human being’ (male or female) and ‘Andean indigenous humankind’. The fact that the ‘Word became *runa*’ (John 1:14) gives the Incarnation a meaning of divine solidarity, identification and location with them that the Reina-Valera Spanish Bible, traditionally used by the evangelical community, does not convey to them: ‘La Palabra se hizo *carne*’ (‘The Word became *flesh*’).

*Ayllu* and *ayni* are basic concepts in Quechua social organization. *Ayllu* is both the kinship group and the community, by nature egalitarian. *Ayni* brings together ideas of mutuality, reciprocity and responsibility for the other, inherent in the social solidarity of the *ayllu*. This is the soil in which Pauline ideas of the church as a body have taken root in the evangelical churches, which have inevitably defined themselves over against the hierarchical structures of the state church. The togetherness and the solidarity of these groups reflect the ‘intense relational dimension’ of the Andean communities from which they originate.<sup>23</sup>

An analysis of the pattern of evangelical growth would involve a study of the role of kinship networks, trade patterns between different ecological niches, seasonal population movements and migration. The sharing of their faith by Quechua Christians with family members, friends and neighbours has been and is fundamental to the growth. Church outreach programmes

<sup>21</sup> One meaning of the expression ‘hablar en cristiano’ is ‘to speak Spanish’.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Consideraciones sobre la catequesis de los pueblos indígenas’ in Juan D. Botasso (ed), *Iglesia, Pueblos y Culturas 2* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1986), 195.

<sup>23</sup> José Matos Mar. *Desborde popular y crisis del Estado: El nuevo rostro del Perú en la década de 1980* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1987), 87.

and indigenous mission groups<sup>24</sup> have played an important part. Literacy programmes,<sup>25</sup> Audio Scriptures<sup>26</sup> and Bible storying have been welcomed. The new media now begin to play a part.

However, not everyone sees the Bible in the same light. In the Liturgy of the Word celebrated in the Inca fortress of Sacsayhuaman in Cuzco on 3 February 1985, Pope John Paul II received an open letter from a number of indigenous organizations. They gave him a Bible and told him: 'In five centuries this has not brought us love, peace or justice'. They asked him to give it back to their 'first world' oppressors, since they clearly needed it more than the Andean people did.<sup>27</sup>

### Postlude

The translation, diffusion and use of the Scriptures in the vernacular in the Andean region have been accompanied by remarkable growth of Protestant churches, as the Cuzco example indicates. At the same time the rediscovery of the Scriptures in the RC Church since the promulgation of *Dei Verbum* in 1965 has led to renewal at parish and diocesan levels, and is now likely to be strengthened by the 2010 *Verbum Domini* Apostolic Exhortation, which sees the Biblical Apostolate as the transversal of all pastoral work.<sup>28</sup>

Modernity, globalization and rural-urban migration are among the factors now resulting in language loss and change in many Quechua dialects. Yet the language continues vibrant in many areas, including the poorer neighbourhoods of cities like Lima, Guayaquil and Quito – and with *diaspora* churches even in Manhattan and Minnesota.

In these decades of major change, violence, confusion and chaos, the Bible in their mother-tongue has enabled Quechua people to glimpse an alternative horizon. For the evangelical community itself it is the wind of God that is blowing, the reign of God that is coming. It is an expression of the looked-for *pachakuti* of Andean mythology, the great 'turning-upside-down-of-the-world'. It is the Quechua *sumaq kawsay* ('living well'), the anticipation of the biblical *shalom*, the other shining path 'which shines brighter and brighter until full day' (Prov 4:18).

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<sup>24</sup> See for example Runa Simi in Ayacucho (<http://www.runasimi.com/>) and ATEK in Cuzco ([www.atekperu.org](http://www.atekperu.org)).

<sup>25</sup> Literacy 'transference' courses have helped Quechua pastors who read well in Spanish but read their own language poorly. The agglutinating structure of the Quechua language makes for long words which make reading more challenging.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, <http://www.faihtcomesbyhearing.com/audio-bible-peru>.

<sup>27</sup> Pablo Richard. '1492: The Violence of God and the Future of Christianity' in Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (eds), *1492-1992: The Voices of the Victims* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 64-5.

<sup>28</sup> Benedict XVI. *Verbum Domini* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), §73.

# **THE BIBLE IN MISSION: WOMEN FACING THE WORD**

Elsa Támez

It is not easy to deal with the subject of 'Bible and Mission' from the perspective of women. In the biblical text we find a message that sets us free, the Good News. This part of the Bible empowers women. Yet at the same time it is a message that carries within it the patriarchal culture of Bible times, which does not favour women. Since our own contemporary culture in Latin America is patriarchal, we see this being strengthened and legitimized by the biblical text. The Bible's ambivalent situation gives rise to confusion regarding how women are to be treated. As a Christian woman seeking to be true to the Good News of Jesus Christ, and as someone who is concerned about the situation of women, especially those who suffer multiple marginalization due to their class, ethnic group, and gender, I have taken an interest in working with those biblical texts in a way that helps to give dignity and self-respect to women and re-establishes equitable relations between men and women. This, for me, is mission in the Bible.

I begin this paper with two cases that shaped my way of interpreting the Bible in relation to marginalized and abused women. Following that I will share another example of church women who led me to re-read the Bible, taking into account the problem of patriarchal culture, not only in the biblical text but also in our context. Finally I will end with a hermeneutical reflection on the Bible in Mission from the perspective of women in general.

## **The Biblical Message Empowers Women**

At the beginning of the 1980s I was invited to La Paz, Bolivia, to hold a workshop for Aymara women from the Methodist Church. I was told to speak in simple terms so that they could understand me. They were poor, indigenous women. They were marginalized, oppressed women – as a result of their ethnic group, class and gender. At that time we women theologians of Latin America were trying to read the Bible from the perspective of women, and we had begun to develop a feminist theology. However, I felt that the feminist discourse we were using was very advanced for these women; they had not yet discovered the God who stood alongside oppressed women and men. Their faces and their body language told me that I should begin at the very beginning. I decided simply to help

them see that as women we were all children of God, made in God's image and likeness.

We studied Genesis 1:27 from all angles, in the setting of the first creation account. We used a very simple approach; we divided into groups so that everyone could speak. It was a one-day workshop. The image of those women remains with me; they were happy and they liked to sing during the breaks. But there was one woman who I realized had problems from the moment I saw her. She was tall and thin, but she was not upright when she walked. She was bent over and did not look me in the eye when I spoke to her. That morning I tried to chat with her twice, but each time she looked away. But to my surprise, as we went on with the study of the text, little by little she began to change. *She* didn't speak, but her body *did*. Gradually she began to look the other women in the eye. When I approached her she looked at me directly, and when I asked her how she was feeling about studying the text of Genesis 1:27, she answered, 'Good', and smiled. The workshop went ahead and to my surprise, towards the end, when the participants evaluated the workshop and shared what lessons they had learned for their lives from the Bible, this woman went to the front and standing up straight and looking at all the women, said simply that God had spoken to her through the Bible. I have never forgotten that moment, and I have often spoken about it. I was a witness of how the Word transforms not only lives but also people's bodies.

This ought to be the goal of the mission of the Bible. But it is not always like that. In a symposium in Costa Rica of women theologians and theology professors, a Brazilian theologian told us that in one place in Brazil there is an office that helps abused women. The unexpected thing she discovered was that a very high percentage of the women registered as abused were evangelicals, rather than Catholics. This surprised all of us. After discussing this for a time, we arrived at the conclusion that when the Bible is read in a literalistic way or from a fundamentalist viewpoint, it becomes a book opposed to women. The women biblical scholars who participated in the symposium stated that we could not allow the Bible to be used against women.

### **The Biblical Message Vindicates Those Who Suffer Discrimination**

The second case that shaped the way I interpret the Bible is that of Doña Luisa. She was a sister in the Methodist Church in Costa Rica. She worked as a domestic servant and always took part in all the church activities. Luisa was in the adult Sunday school class that I taught. One day she came up to me timidly and asked me why Sarah mistreated Hagar (Gen 16; 21:8-21). Luisa was concerned by Hagar's situation. She wasn't satisfied by the traditional explanation that justified Abraham's action of expelling her from the house, so that Hagar went away to the desert with her small son. I found myself unprepared to give her an answer. To be honest, I had never

thought about it. I was accustomed to the traditional way of understanding this passage, because I was reading it from the viewpoint of Sarah, and not from the perspective of the foreign slave.

I set myself the task of studying the text, taking Hagar as the starting point, putting myself in her place and observing God's attitude towards the slave woman. The more I became involved in the study of the text, the more I discovered things that I hadn't seen at first glance. In studying the legal background of that culture, reworking the biblical translations, and then trying to read the text from the perspective of a domestic employee in our own context, like Doña Luisa, I began to glimpse God's solidarity with the Egyptian slave Hagar, a woman discriminated against because of her social status, her culture and gender. She had the privilege of seeing God (an epiphany) when very few women in the Bible had such an experience. Perhaps only Hagar and Mary, the mother of Jesus, experienced this. God reserved an important place in the history of salvation for Hagar and did not abandon her in the desert – either when she fled before Isaac was born because Sarah was mistreating her, or later after she was thrown out of the house by Abraham. Instead God desired that she would be present, always bursting in upon us, as if to make us see that people of other cultures and religions are there, challenging us and questioning us about them, as people who should not be excluded from God's blessings. God is on their side and protects them.

One Sunday in the adult class I proposed that we should study the story of Hagar. We did it by answering a series of questions that I had prepared. Everyone there, men and women, knew the story from Sarah's perspective, but as they thought about and answered the questions, their attitude began to change. They were discovering how God protects and vindicates seemingly insignificant people in the Bible. Doña Luisa was very excited with the Bible text, seeming to understand better what was happening in Abraham's family because she was on the same wavelength as Hagar. At the end of the class she thanked me with a kiss. I hugged her and told her that she had taught me more than I had taught her. From then on I read the text with a keener eye. Luisa taught me to read the Bible with different eyes and to discover in it things that are easily overlooked. This teaches us that in the mission of God it is not a matter of communicating a 'one size fits all' message, one based on a reading that ignores the context, rather it is a matter of entering into dialogue with the different audiences so that the message will really be relevant.

### **Biblical Texts that Oppress Women**

If the mission of the biblical message to marginalized women is about the Good News that brings joy and dignity to people, we need to address those texts which do not dignify women, but are instructions which marginalize and oppress them. In the introduction to this paper we alluded to the

problem of the patriarchal culture in which the biblical texts were produced. It should not seem strange that we find stories or teaching that reflect the patriarchal culture itself. In fact what is strange is finding texts that favour women, and do not fit the norms of that culture. There are quite a few of them. However, we find it hard to accept that the biblical text, seen as sacred and canonical, should speak in certain places against women, texts such as the one which does not allow women to teach (1 Tim 2:11,12), or says that they should submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22,23; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6). Taking these texts as normative has been used to justify violence against women, to a refusal to bring violent husbands to account because they are seen as the head of the home, and to the non-ordination of women by certain churches. These are examples of how certain forms of fundamentalism or a literalistic reading of the Bible obscure the mission of God in the Bible.

For a long time in Latin America we women biblical scholars avoided the problem of the patriarchal texts. We concentrated on texts that offered a message that liberates people. When women in the groups asked us about these problematic texts, we answered superficially and suggested that they read the Gospels instead and those texts that speak in favour of the marginalized and those who suffer. But for women who take the Bible as the Word of God, this reply was inadequate. There was always a doubt: is it the will of God that I should not speak in the church, that I should not teach, or that I should submit to my husband even when it isn't right? At the end of the 1990s the time arrived when we had to take seriously what is said in the letters to Timothy and Titus.

In a workshop of the Ecumenical Research Department in Costa Rica (DEI), I was once invited to deal with the Pauline letters from the perspective of the excluded. Romans and Galatians present a powerful message of freedom from the law and from structural sin.<sup>1</sup> During the week's workshop we discovered in Paul's writings the great liberating potential of the biblical message. Nevertheless some women were not satisfied with this because we did not deal with the texts that speak against women, especially 1 Timothy 2:9-15. This really challenged me and led me to an in-depth study of this letter.<sup>2</sup>

The following year I was again invited to deal with the Pauline material and I focused my attention on 1 Timothy. The group was made up of women from the church with a certain level of feminist awareness. I asked them to read the whole letter. Then I asked them how they had found it and what the letter was about. Curiously the group only remembered the texts that spoke against women, so that their first reaction after reading it was one of disappointment and rejection. In 1 Timothy there are a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Elsa Tamez, *Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Elsa Tamez, *Struggles for Power in Early Christianity: A Study of the First Letter to Timothy* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: New York, 2007).

very interesting passages, such as the problem of the love of money and the critique of the wealthy. But almost everyone remembered only 2:9-15 (and the case of the widows in 5:3-16). This is the result of the rhetorical strategy of the author, of his use of imperatives, and the concentric structure of the passage centred on verses 11 and 12 that emphasize that a woman should not teach, but should keep silent and be submissive.

We studied the rhetorical situation of the text, examining each verse carefully and locating the letter in its first century historical context of the Roman Empire and the situation of women of that time. We came to the conclusion that the letter addressed a particular local context, in which the Christian community of Ephesus was dealing with various problems related to a struggle for power. In addition to the conflicts between presbyters and wealthy women, there was a problem with other teachings, possibly Gnostic, which prohibited marriage (4:3). The affirmation that women are saved through childbirth (2:15) was a response to the Gnostic position that stated that only virgins would be saved. The issues surrounding marriage also appear in the discourse about young widows, who possibly had taken a vow of celibacy (5:11-14).

In analyzing the social situation of the Ephesus community, we concluded that this was no arbitrary concern of the author. It was related to the hostility of Graeco-Roman society towards these fragile communities of believers, and to teachings that were foreign to the tradition which were circulating in the Christian community (5:14). This was the explanation for why the letter gave instructions which excluded women from leadership in the congregation. The discussion was very interesting and the attitude of the women towards the letter began to change. They felt themselves under no obligation to follow the norm of 1 Timothy 2:10,11, because they understood that it referred to a specific situation. At the same time we understood the Pauline expression of Galatians 3:28 as foundational applying to all. There is neither male nor female, free nor slave, Jew nor Greek, because all of us – women and men – are one in Christ.

### Conclusion

For Christian women mission implies sharing in the mission of God (*missio Dei*) through the Good News of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Liberator. The Bible, as canon, is the privileged source that helps us to understand the purpose of God in history. But as we have noted above, the meaning of God's mission is not always easy to discern, because the written revelation is communicated through the stories of real people, through poems, letters, discourses, etc., produced in different times, places, and circumstances, and especially in patriarchal contexts. The biblical text is not an abstract, a-historical manual, but a book about people's lives, expressed in different literary genres, against this patriarchal background. This is a good thing, because it shows that God is revealed in history and through diverse

cultures. As a result the texts offer us criteria for understanding the mission of God. And this Good News should always lead people to grasp their true dignity as children of God.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the reception of the texts, we know that the reading process is dynamic, since women hear and read the text from the perspective of their own gender, culture, ethnic group and place in society. The mission of sharing the Good News is not always the same. It varies, depending not only on the texts chosen for study, but also on the women who read them, conditioned as they are by their contexts. It will therefore be the interpretation of each particular biblical text that defines the meaning of the mission of God for each particular group of women.

The examples in this paper indicate how women receive the Word. In my experience the same message is received in different ways by different groups of women, depending on their culture or social position, but more than anything else by their degree of feminist awareness. Therefore mission is not to 'take the Word' as if it applied in the same way, equally, everywhere, but instead to enter into intercultural dialogue between the text and the women's context. The one who shares the message must be very aware of the circumstances of women. For example, I have always said that it is not the same to speak of repentance and conversion to women of low social status as it is to people with a dominant role in a high social category. In the case of women at the bottom of the social scale, with low self-esteem and looked down upon by society, one cannot begin to evangelize by emphasizing their condition as unclean sinners so that they will turn to God. It is not that repentance and conversion are unimportant; in fact many of these women have internalized this understanding of themselves as 'sinners', since society speaks of them in this way. Instead, it would be better to speak to them in terms of their worth as those whom God has created in his own image. However, in the case of men and women who because of their status and power adopt a dominant, oppressive role, the message that God has created them, that they come from God, will be of little use since this only serves to strengthen and legitimize their position of dominance. It would be better to remind them that Jesus Christ came to serve and not to be served, and that those who hold the most important positions should be the servants of all others. I am, of course, exaggerating, but the example shows us the importance of the relevance of a given message to a specific audience.

The history of the influence of biblical texts teaches us that the texts have power not only to set free but also to oppress.<sup>3</sup> From this it follows that the hermeneutic that determines the message carries with it a profound ethical responsibility.

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<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Lutz, *Matthew in History, Interpretation, Influence and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 33.

# BIBLICAL ADVOCACY – ADVOCATING FOR THE BIBLE IN AN ALIEN CULTURE

David Spriggs and Sue Coyne

## Introduction

For the last fifteen years and more the Bible Society (BFBS) has been committed to campaigning to raise the profile and credibility of the Bible in the context of culture. This intentional advocacy for the Bible is now firmly incorporated into our mission alongside availability (translation, publication, distribution). Originally this advocacy was described as ‘making the Bible accessible’<sup>1</sup> or ‘it is about people seeing the Bible is for them’.<sup>2</sup> Another way we express this is ‘preparing the church to meet the culture and the culture to meet the church’. It is also a significant component of our staff and organisational structure – The Biblical Advocacy Team. This has been functioning for a decade or so, but to this we have recently added an international advocacy team. For we wish both to learn from and share with others the insights we are developing globally with respect to Bible advocacy.

This commitment to Bible advocacy arose from our analysis of British and, more generally, western and global urban culture, where a powerful alienation from the Bible has taken place. For the sake of building confidence in Scripture in both culture and church, it is vital to tackle this alienation.<sup>3</sup>

There is also a business case for Bible advocacy. We need constantly to renew and extend our donor base to sustain our Bible work. If people have no positive evaluation of the Bible they are unlikely to contribute to our

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<sup>1</sup> Originally the mission to the churches was ‘credibility’ – helping the church recover confidence in the Bible as its core text – and the advocacy to the culture was ‘accessibility’

<sup>2</sup> See *Is This Really Bible Society?* (2010), 4

<sup>3</sup> Colin Greene, ‘Lesslie Newbigin – A Bible Society Perspective’ in, *The Bible in Transmission – A Tribute to Lesslie Newbigin* (1909 -1998), 14. ‘The influence of Lesslie’s writings as well as his personal advice and counsel was a seminal factor as the Society [i.e. Bible Society] sought to define its strategic aims and objectives. For a much fuller exploration of the issues see M Robinson and C Greene, *Metavista: Bible, Church and Mission in an Age of Imagination* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2008). Martin Robinson and Colin Greene were the intellectual architects for Bible Society’s innovative advocacy approach.

mission. So biblical advocacy is necessary to safeguard the future resourcing of the global work. But more fundamental still is our theological rationale for this aspect of our mission.

### A Theological Rationale

Biblical advocacy is about seeking to minimise the barriers that people have to engaging with the Bible. It is clear in the biblical text that God is committed to this task.

Following Lesslie Newbigin and others<sup>4</sup> we recognised that the Bible is not primarily a story of God’s exclusive relationship with his chosen people (both Israel and the Church) but with the whole world. The Bible claims to be the true story of the world. It begins with creation and ends with new creation. The Bible tells us that God loves the whole world. His desire to have real communication flows out of his love. This is why God sent the Son and is one aspect of why the Son endured the cross – so that he could draw all people to himself.<sup>5</sup> So advocating for the Bible in the culture develops out of the deepest level of God’s being.

Theologically, biblical advocacy can also be supported from God’s understanding of cultures, and the mission of the church. The Bible is fundamental to the revelation of God, so our central task is to initiate an engagement between people and the Bible. Thus, we seek to remove barriers to engagement with the text, whether those barriers are linguistic or, with respect to biblical advocacy, cultural. In order to manage this huge challenge, we have focused on four key cultural drivers – arts, politics, media and education; we will return to these later.

We cannot use manipulative techniques or impose the message on others – the response must be free.<sup>6</sup> The Bible reveals that God seeks a relationship of love and love cannot be imposed by emotional, intellectual

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<sup>4</sup> C G Bartholomew and M Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture, Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 18-22; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) and *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); N T Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, (London: SPCK, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Compare Lesslie Newbigin, ‘Truth and Authority in modernity’ in Ed Sampson et al, *Faith and Modernity* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 75, “When we speak of finding in Jesus the clue to the meaning of the whole human story, we are not speaking of a mere cognitive exercise. We are speaking of that act of atonement wrought in Jesus.... It is not merely a matter of illumination, of new understanding; it is a matter of reconciliation....”

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 137-141, especially 138: “It is the will of the Father to provide a time and space wherein men and women can give their allegiance to the kingdom in the only way it can be given – namely, in freedom.”

or physical coercion. To do so would conflict with the Bible's revelation of God as love, who seeks to generate and sustain our freedom to respond.

We have recognised that we need to encourage a renewed engagement with the wisdom literature of the Bible, which over the last century, both within the scholarly community and the churches, has been neglected, although this trend is now being reversed.<sup>7</sup> This genre of literature engages with the wider culture. The wisdom material provides a vital bridge between the believing community and the wider world.

### Theory and Praxis

We want to *change* culture biblically and not simply *engage* with it; we are advocating for the Bible and not simply offering an apologetic. So we selected these four 'cultural drivers' – arts, politics, media and education. These are *drivers* of culture as well as voices within culture. Our model was based on the fact that media and politics feed off each other, generating public debate on issues. The media use the arts to embed their messages in our psyche and once a debate has achieved some measure of acceptance – the new 'perceived truth' is disseminated in our culture through education.

During the last fifteen years we have innovated and evaluated a whole range of advocacy approaches and processes. These include 'one offs' such as a retelling of the 'Prodigal Son' in the fashion magazine *Vogue*<sup>8</sup> through to longer-term partnerships like the Telling Place that fostered biblical story telling. We have also set up our own think-tank, *Theos*, to engage in public issues in an on-going dialogue. *Theos* produces reports on the inadmissibility of 'God' in public political debate, or the proper role of biblical faith in the public education system.<sup>9</sup> We recognised the disproportionate effect of think-tanks in re-shaping British politics during the last forty years. *Theos* also operates at a popular level through public debates and newspaper articles. Another burgeoning field is film; 'The Pitch' is a short film competition.<sup>10</sup>

In order to convey something of the scope and interconnectivity of our work (arts, politics, media and education) we will now explore two case studies in more depth.

The '**city wide media campaign**' is a short-term, geographically restricted event. It demonstrates our commitment to work with the

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of this renewal of scholarly interest see, Katharine Dell, 'Reviewing Recent research on the Wisdom literature', *The Expository Times*, 119:6 (March 2008), 261-269. She writes, "Research on the wisdom literature continues to grow in quantity and diversity in relation to different interests and approaches" (261).

<sup>8</sup> *Vogue*, May 1999, pages 112-117

<sup>9</sup> For access to many of the reports and other material visit [www.theosthinktank.co.uk/](http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/)

<sup>10</sup> See [www.enterthepitch.com](http://www.enterthepitch.com)

churches, whom we regard both theologically and pragmatically as our key partners. This example also shows something of the range of activities advocacy can involve.

The second, **Cross Ref-it**, is essentially independent of the churches and is an on-going process. It shows how arts and education can be linked to electronic media to achieve global impact.

### **City Wide Media Campaigns – Bristol**

With the arrival of our new CEO in 2002, the advocacy team, indeed the whole organisation, was challenged to develop a high profile Bible advocacy campaign across a city. This we did in Nottingham, Bristol and Greater Manchester (2003, 2005, 2007). For our case study we will look at the Bristol campaign. Nottingham helped us gain considerable experience and enabled us to recruit one of the key support ministers, the Methodist Rev Rob Cotton, to strengthen our engagement with the churches. We wanted to involve the churches as thoroughly as possible, partly because of our theological understanding, but also to provide us with insightful and informed knowledge of their communities as well as venues for many local, church based manifestations of the campaign. Having won the support of the regional church leaders, we initiated a local steering group representing the range of churches and areas of Bristol. This was set up a good 12 months before the campaign. We involved them in the work of biblical advocacy but also educated them about their own ‘post modern’ mission context. We also placed a strong emphasis on the Christian community praying for this campaign, recognising that the battle for hearts and minds is a spiritual issue and requires spiritual resourcing!

A highly visual media campaign used large billboards, bus shelter ads, internal and external bus ads, even a taxi and thousands of beer mats distributed to many of the pubs and restaurants in the city. We sought to increase the visual and emotional impact by relating the advertising to one of Britain’s longest running and most successful soap operas – Eastenders. We had used this strategy successfully in Nottingham but now wanted to generate even more impact and strengthen the link to the Bible. The billboards would carry images of characters from the soaps and a strap line relating to particular incident. Three current Eastenders’ incidents were selected. Of course, we could not use actual TV characters so the media company we engaged found look-alikes. We used a media company partly to ensure that the campaign was professional, but also to involve its people in the advocacy – working with the media to change their perception of the Bible as well as working through the media to change the culture. The text and images also encouraged interaction by means of a question to which people could text an answer. The results were posted at the end of the campaign.

The two strap lines carried by the different visuals were, ‘Soap stories and the Bible. Both full of life choices, struggles and emotions’ and ‘The Bible: more relevant than you thought?’ There was also a web site for people to engage with more thoughtfully. We expected church people to use these visuals to engage with people, neighbours, work colleagues, family and acquaintances, in conversations about the connection between the soap stories, the Bible and their faith.

A substantial part of the campaign was the events that took place during the same period.<sup>11</sup> These were of two main kinds. Some we called ‘show case events’. These were high profile and professional. For instance, we worked with the city’s arts cinema (the Watershed) to stage films which were followed by discussions about how the film engaged with biblical stories and issues. We enabled a local author, Neville Boundy, to stage his play about the nature of the Gospels, and worked with a Christian music and dance school to present a musical about Esther (‘Luv Esther’<sup>12</sup>) – a biblical story relating to politics. Two other events require a fuller account.

In Bristol there is a professional circus training school, Circomedia.<sup>13</sup> They had recently acquired a redundant Anglican church (St Paul’s Church, Portland Square) that had been refitted as their performance venue. Biblical advocacy with them started with early conversations with the artistic team, about our aspirations and willingness to use circus performance to communicate the Bible. They had not heard of the parables of Jesus! So we told them some which they found fascinating. They chose to retell a combination of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. The impact of the performance on the two hundred strong audience was immense. Through high wire and trapeze work as well as in the arena, performers achieved a deeply moving expression of God’s redemption. The impact on the performers and the school only God will know.

The other key event was a major debate in the prestigious City Council building that involved members of the Council. Issues of local democracy, power and justice were centre stage in Bristol at the time. In order to stimulate the debate, Justin Butcher made a dramatic presentation of ‘city’ issues from the book of Jeremiah. A panel that included the council leader and the bishop provided information on the state of the city. The Rev Dr Chris Sunderland then facilitated conversation with the audience. He runs an organisation called *Agora* and has gone on to do many other things, including taking a leading role in the setting up of Bristol’s local currency initiative.<sup>14</sup>

Local churches provided other events. One Pentecostal church erected a large marquee on the green opposite the cathedral; they provided

<sup>11</sup> These were promoted collectively in an attractively produced booklet.

<sup>12</sup> To find out more, Google ‘luv esther’.

<sup>13</sup> To find out more about this company – [www.circomedia.com/contact/](http://www.circomedia.com/contact/)

<sup>14</sup> For some insight into the wide range of Rev Dr Chris Sunderland’s work see [www.agora.uk.com](http://www.agora.uk.com), [www.earthabbey.com](http://www.earthabbey.com) and [www.growzones.com](http://www.growzones.com).

entertainment, refreshments and sought to demonstrate in different ways to passers-by that the Bible was worth their attention. In contrast to the high tempo activities in and around the marquee, was a labyrinth in the Cathedral, that drew on the creative skills of a local artist to enable participants to reflect on biblical issues. Many churches put on smaller activities, using film, comedy or debate to open the minds of congregants and their friends to the significance of the Bible today. The campaign attracted media attention from press, radio and television. The visual quality and topicality of the bill boards were especially good for TV presentation. Indeed we had one of the look-alikes present in person for the cameras.

Hopefully, this brief summary will have conveyed something of the complexity of campaigning for the Bible even in a medium sized city of 500,000. It illustrates how we linked arts, media and politics (education did not feature much) and how we sought to build the confidence of the churches in the Bible and in their ability to engage with their own culture.

Attempts were made to measure the impact of this campaign on the city. Results showed that people's perceptions of the Bible shifted in a positive direction. They also make clear that it is difficult and challenging to gain recognition for our message about the credibility of the Bible among all the other persistent voices in the media. Helping the churches is time consuming and church leaders struggle to keep up this kind of mission activity among their congregations. It is important to have realistic expectations of what can be achieved, even with substantial investment of human resources and money. Campaigns like this can only provide a blip on the cultural radar, but they are a vital sign of God's Kingdom.

### **Cross Ref-it**

English is the most popular A-Level subject (taken by around 90,000 students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland alone). Around the world, engaging with English literature and language is widely regarded both as pleasure and a means of economic betterment. The central text which has shaped the thought and language of authors, poets and playwrights in the literary canon is the Bible. For over seven centuries, writers have drawn on its imagery, stories and phraseology as a subtext, confident that their readers would pick up every allusion.

Yet this understanding is disappearing from 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. In an educational environment that is often hostile to Christianity, avoidance – and consequent ignorance – of its central text is an increasing problem. Teachers, inspectors and examiners are concerned that students are ill equipped to engage with the works they study, because of ignorance of the Bible and Christianity. Funded by the Bible Society as a partner project with the Stapleford Centre and Christianity and Culture, [www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info) has been developed as a response to A-Level English Assessment

Objectives on understanding the cultural context and worldview that undergirds the creation of literary texts. Written by UK teachers, examiners and academics, since its inception in 2005 the Cross Reference Project has built up a valuable reserve of contextual material. A great proportion of this inevitably relates to the Bible and Western Christian worldview, thus providing a mandate for the Project to explain biblical references and the core ideas of the Christian faith.

[www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info) explains every biblical allusion encountered in the A-Level texts for which it provides commentary. Linking directly to an online Bible (the AV and a parallel modern translation), it demonstrates how authors have added meaning to their work. There are explanations of most of the key biblical themes that permeate literature, as well as modern synopses of (no longer) famous Bible stories. (The same treatment is provided for classical and historical allusions.) Supporting contextual material includes information about the wider cultural influence of the Bible, as well as explaining its origins and how to approach it.

From a student or young teacher's point of view (generally unaware of their knowledge gaps) the site specialises in providing resources to help them succeed academically. Alongside exam text study guides, recent developments include lessons based on AV resources that highlight intertextuality, linguistic analysis of Language Change (using the 'cultural constant' of Bible translations) and text revision apps.

The latter are being marketed at the cost of an average i-Tune, whereas the rest of the site is free. Although originally envisaged as a subscription site, [www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info) only took off once it was recognised that current youth culture expects to find information freely available on the web. Over the years, project materials have been constantly updated so as to function effectively within the new technologies used by its primary market. Even so, an entire site redesign will be required by 2014 in order to make data as future proof as possible.

Traffic on the site has grown exponentially. During 2012, the site received over 648,000 visitors, recording up to 4,000 users per day (compared to 14,000 for the whole of 2008). Geographically, [www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info) is accessed by students and educationalists from 212 countries. After the UK and US, China generates most traffic. The top twenty areas in terms of usage also include Europe, the Middle East (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Egypt), the Indian sub-continent (India, Pakistan) and Far East (e.g. Singapore, Taiwan, The Philippines, South Korea, Malaysia).

Although early marketing was paper based and aimed at schools, now it is almost all electronic and viral: at the start of 2013 there are almost 6,000 subscribers to the regular blog, around 1.2,000 Facebook fans and the site features on Google+, Twitter and Pinterest. Direct advertising via Google Adwords allows new material to be flagged up as syllabus requirements change.

The Project's next initiative is to develop a series of interactive graphic pages which explore themes / motifs across texts, a key feature of recent English syllabuses. This will draw on current material while feeding biblical and classical perspectives more overtly into the mix.

www.crossref-it.info would not work if it did not effectively address the felt needs of its users. Commended for its '*immense care, attention to detail and accuracy*' (a Head Teacher), students appreciate that, 'It's easy to find the relevant info', while a teacher reports, 'When I have trouble getting my class to understand a particular concept, I go to Crossref-it.info.'

Interestingly, another user comments, 'Wonderful to have a resource which recognises the paucity of many students' knowledge of the Bible and the Christian tradition, which is so important to the study of literature – and yet not a preachy, religious or Christian site.'

In a sceptical educational climate, www.crossref-it.info successfully puts biblical knowledge back at the heart of literary engagement, for sound pedagogic reasons. Great literature inevitably raises issues central to human identity, which are discussed in classrooms around the world. Cross Reference Project materials advocate the centrality of the Bible in these discussions and facilitate informed biblical engagement.

## Conclusion

Bible Advocacy to the culture has deep level theological and missiological justifications but it also has potential practical benefits for BFBS. The process is profoundly shaped by the rapid changes taking place in western culture. We seek to work in four key areas to change the culture and not simply engage with it. This strategy requires risk taking, imagination, commitment and determination; more and more we are utilising the new media and the opportunities they bring. It also requires us to seek partners in the culture and the churches. We seek to build relationships with gatekeepers but to deliver engagement 'on the ground'. Many of these principles are illustrated in the two case studies we have introduced. We have established the viability of our approaches but recognise that this is a long term commitment. However, without it, the place of the Bible in church and culture will continue to deteriorate.

# SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND LIVING LIFE AS A MESSAGE: A CASE STUDY OF TWO CHRISTIAN COLLEGES<sup>1</sup>

Steve Bird

Every life is a message being lived out before others. Intentional or not, humans live their lives in ways that fit or contravene cultural expectations and promote particular values or beliefs. People know others see them and they live in ways that are intended to either gain social acceptance (at least) and/or to change their own or others' understandings of who they are. This raises some very interesting questions for Christians: Does the way Christians engage with their holy texts affect the degree to which they live their lives as an intentional message to others? Is it a message meant to persuade others to adopt the understandings of reality that guide the Christian faith?

## Theory

A common tenet across the wide variety of sociological theories is that our understandings of ourselves and the world around us are socially constructed. This is no less true for sociological theories of religion and the construction of our religious selves and behavior. Emile Durkheim argued in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* that people construct their understanding of the sacred and that their created sacred reality provides a context for them.<sup>2</sup> Max Weber argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that the created understanding of life found in Protestantism provided the basis for social change to the forms of capitalism that are so common today.<sup>3</sup> In a wildly different vein of theory, Erving Goffmann has explored in numerous works the ways through which humans construct their understanding of reality and how it then guides their actions and

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<sup>1</sup> The two colleges are small Christian colleges in the Midwest of the USA.

<sup>2</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1915, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribners, 1904, 1958).

interactions.<sup>4</sup> The classic argument for societal maintenance of a shared understanding of the sacred, is found in Peter Berger's focus on large scale socially constructed and maintained sacred canopies; thus Berger also argued for social construction of religious understanding and its reciprocated effect on those who live within that understanding.<sup>5</sup>

Even theorists such as Rodney Stark and Roger Finke who have made such effective arguments for utilitarian rational choice models of religious behavior do not critique the claim that religious social reality is constructed and is the context within which religious life is lived.<sup>6</sup> This is evidenced in Stark and Finke's own works as well as those of others who have sought to blend their work with Stark and Finke's. Christian Smith, for example, in *American Evangelicalism* used the early work of the rational choice theorists and the symbolic cultural thinking of theorists like Berger to create what he calls a subcultural identity theory.<sup>7</sup> And in this theoretical work, like all the others, there is a fundamental tenet that religious understanding is socially constructed and lived within. It is clearly widely accepted from all theoretical approaches, then, that humans live within a reality wherein they have created meaning and can affect each other's understandings of life and reality.

Where does the Bible fit into this process of social construction of religious meaning? As humans seek to take the revealed truth of God and make sense of it in their lives, how do their different types of interaction with it influence their religious life? In particular, how do different kinds and contexts of interaction with the Christian scripture relate to living a missional lifestyle?

### Analyses

The research that is the subject of this chapter considers two questions. First, when Christians interact with the Bible does the social context matter more or does their method of engagement with the Bible matter more, and, second, which of the different contexts or kinds of engagement with the Bible matter for explaining which Christians live their lives in a way that is meant to help others change their understandings of life (a missional lifestyle)? This research is based on survey responses from 748 college

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<sup>4</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (London: Harper and Row, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

students at two Christian colleges in the USA's Midwest.<sup>8</sup> All students at both colleges were invited to participate. 592 (33 percent) of the students participated at one college while 156 (approximately 9 percent) of the students from the second college participated.<sup>9</sup> Both colleges have a common shared understanding of the Bible and religious meaning.

### How Students Interact with the Bible

To ascertain the students' interaction with the Bible, they were asked about their interaction with the Bible in six different *contexts*:

- in private,
- with family,
- in worship settings,
- in small groups,
- while with groups of friends, and
- in their classes.

For each context, a series of eight questions focused on the *kinds of interaction* was asked:

- Experience the presence of the Holy Spirit?
- Connect the passage to my beliefs?
- Connect the passage to my feelings?
- Connect the passage to my actions?
- Connect the passage to my thoughts?
- Reflect on what it means for me personally?
- Put myself personally into the passage?
- Reflect on what it means for other people and society?

The students thus provided responses on eight kinds of interaction with the Bible within six contexts – a total of 48 questions.<sup>10</sup> They then indicated whether they experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit when involved in private times with the Bible, whether they connected passages to their beliefs when involved in private times with the Bible, and so forth for all eight kinds of interactions with the Bible. Following this they answered whether they had any of those kinds of experiences when engaging with the Bible while in family times of Bible use. The same eight kinds of scripture engagement were reconsidered in all six of the contexts.

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<sup>8</sup> Using surveys – or any particular research approach – provides specific strengths and weaknesses. To see more about the methods used for these surveys see the materials at <http://tucse.taylor.edu/research>.

<sup>9</sup> Due to timing issues on the second campus, the survey was administered in the last week of classes and after the end of the semester when students were focused on other concerns.

<sup>10</sup> All statistical analyses and results that follow were statistically weighted for gender representativity.

### Kinds and Contexts of Interaction with the Bible

Using the 592 students with greater representativity for their college, these 48 questions were analyzed<sup>11</sup> to determine the underlying patterns in the data – to see if students’ responses to the questions reflected a greater importance of context for Bible interaction, a greater importance of kind of interaction for Bible interaction, or some mix of the two.

To understand what was done mathematically, imagine a room with 1000 people milling about. Given enough time, these people will tend to congregate into natural groupings they find most satisfying. After some time has passed and the groups have formed, analysts could look at each group and see if they can define what differentiates the groups.

The analysis done here uses a mathematical technique that allows the variables (the 48 survey questions) to naturally group together. Once this has been done, we look at which variables have grouped together and see if we can define what differentiates the collections of variables. This process (as used here) can lead to any outcome. All of the questions could group together in one large group or they could group together in any possible set of small groups. In this technique it is called ‘loading’ when a variable joins a group. Variables don’t load together out of self-aware motivation like the people in our imaginary example would, but the underlying patterns in people’s responses provide the mathematical basis for seeing which questions group together. The interesting matter here is whether these questions which the students answered will group together according to context or according to the kind of interaction with the Bible.

Let’s consider some possible outcomes. All of the variables could group together by context regardless of the kind of engagement<sup>12</sup> or by kind of engagement regardless of context.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, the variables could load together in some mixed way where some questions group together because they are all asked about engaging the Bible in certain contexts while other variables group together because they all ask about the kind of engagement they ask about. In essence we can see whether the *kinds* of engagement with the Bible matter more than the *contexts* of engagement with the Bible, what those are, and vice versa.

Students’ responses indicated that four kinds of interaction with the Bible trumped the context of interaction:

- Experience the presence of the Holy Spirit?
- Connect the passage to my feelings?

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<sup>11</sup> Using factor analysis with principle axis factoring and varimax rotation.

<sup>12</sup> In this case the questions asked about engaging with the Bible in your private time would all group together.

<sup>13</sup> In this case the questions asked about kind of engagement in your private time with the Bible would all be separated – the question about connecting the Bible to your beliefs would group with the other questions about connecting the Bible to your beliefs, which were asked for the other contexts, and so forth.

- Put myself personally into the passage?
- Reflect on what it means for other people and society?

Consider, as an example, the question about experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit when engaged with the Bible. This question was asked six times (once for private Bible time, once for family Bible time, and so forth for all six contexts). All six of those questions loaded together in the analysis – not because we thought they should but because the patterns in the students’ answers made it the natural mathematical grouping. Remembering that they could have grouped together with other questions,<sup>14</sup> the fact that they all grouped together means the degree to which a student experienced this kind of scripture engagement was consistent across the contexts.

Now consider the question about connecting the Bible to their beliefs. This question was also asked six times (once for each context). But these six questions did not group together. They each loaded with other questions from the context they were asked in. Which means connecting the Bible to your beliefs is a kind of scripture engagement that does not transcend context. People experience it in some contexts but not others – it is context dependent. The four kinds of scripture engagement that transcended context were: experiencing the Holy Spirit, connecting the Bible to their feelings, putting themselves into the biblical narrative, and reflecting on what the passage meant for other people and society. The rest of the 48 questions about interaction with the Bible loaded into the contexts where the Bible is experienced.

All of the questions grouped together, then, into nine indexes or groups. Four of these were based on a kind of engagement with scripture that transcends where the Bible is experienced. The other five groups of variables were based on a context of engagement with the scripture. These variables could have grouped together into any possible set of groups, so the fact that they grouped together into this collection of nine indexes show us the kinds of interaction and contexts of interaction that really do affect students’ experience of the Bible. In an upcoming section an analysis will be run to see the relative importance of these kinds and/or contexts of interaction with the Bible for explaining the adoption of a missional lifestyle. Here are the names for the nine groups of variables or indexes that will be used in that analysis:

- The SE (scripture engagement) Holy Spirit index (a kind of scripture interaction)
- The SE self in passage index (kind)
- The SE others and society index (kind)
- The SE connection to feelings index (kind)
- The SE personal connections index (context)

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<sup>14</sup> For example, they could have loaded together with the other questions for the particular context of Bible exposure they were asked for.

- The SE family index (context)
- The SE classes index (context)
- The SE friends index (context)
- The SE worship index (context)

Our main finding here, then, is that four kinds of Scripture engagement transcend the context of the engagement.

### **Spiritual Lifestyle**

Students were also asked a wide variety of questions about their spiritual lifestyles – their practice of a variety of kinds of spiritual practices and disciplines. These questions were analyzed using the same technique described above. Of the 32 questions that asked about spiritual practices, 18 joined clear and distinct groups:

- The SD (spiritual disciplines) Worship index
- The SD Evangelism index
- The SD Reflective Christianity index
- The SD Bible and Other Study index
- The SD Social-Bible exposure index

Each of these scales has three or four survey questions combined together that naturally group together analytically.

In total, then, the survey provided a variety of indexes that provide insights into kinds and contexts of engagement with the Bible and insights into the kinds of spiritual disciplines or lifestyles that students adopt.

### **A Focus on Mission**

The question being addressed here is how different kinds or contexts of engagement with the Bible relate to the respondents' commitment to mission. One of the spiritual disciplines indexes provides a nice measure of students' willingness to interact with others with the intent of changing understandings of reality. These questions grouped into that index:

- I talk to non-believers in ways that I think will help them come closer to Christ
- I act in specific ways around non-believers so they might come closer to Christ
- I go out of my way to be in contact with non-believers
- I serve those in need

The students' responses show that, on average, they were involved in these activities monthly or a few times a month. In the lifestyle indicated in this index the students showed a wide variation in their approach to engagement.

### What Leads to a Missional Life?

Considering only those variables related to the evangelism index and the interaction with the Bible indexes, we can learn (using another statistical approach called OLS regression<sup>15</sup>) that none of the *contexts* of scripture interaction stand out as consequential in affecting a student's commitment to mission, while two of the *kinds* of Bible interaction do matter: experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit when interacting with the Bible<sup>16</sup> and placing oneself personally into the passage when interacting with the Bible.<sup>17</sup> These appear to be the only kinds of Bible interaction that relate to living a life around others intentionally trying to shape their meaning-making about Christianity. These two indexes of scripture interaction explain 9.5 percent of the variation among students ( $p < 0.001$ ) on the life in mission measure (SE Evangelism). And when you think about it, being able to explain almost ten percent of variation in people's behavior using just a couple of variables is pretty noteworthy. (See Model One in Table One).

However, adoption of a proactive life before others is shaped by more than just interaction with the Bible. What role, for example, does the adoption of the other aspects of the Christian way of life play in this? What place do those other groups of variables have that tapped into the way students live the Christian life? Model Two in Table One explores how they relate to living one's life as a message to others. Using the same techniques used to see which kinds or contexts of scripture engagement matter for living a missional life, we can also see just which aspects of Christian life affect the likelihood that a person will live a missional life in order to influence others, so that they will reconsider their understandings of meaning and purpose.

Adding the indexes for the Christian ways of life allows the model to explain an additional 36.7 percent of the students' variation on the

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<sup>15</sup> OLS regression identifies the variables that best predict the variation in the dependent variable. So, in this circumstance, the technique allows us to see which indexes on Bible interaction or on spiritual lifestyle do, in fact, matter for predicting which students intentionally engage in activities focused on persuading others to adopt the Christian understanding of reality.

<sup>16</sup> Standardized Beta = 0.241;  $p < 0.01$ . OLS regression identifies the factors that matter for predicting which students adopt a missional lifestyle through a "Beta weight". When Beta weights are larger and statistically significant, we can conclude that a particular variable does matter for predicting a missional lifestyle. 'Larger' is considered from a scale that begins at zero and rarely gets as high as one with data from surveys. The probability values shown using a and being less than 0.001 in these results indicate the probability that we could get the analytical results from chance alone. By usual convention in these kinds of analyses, we have confidence that our statistical model can be trusted if the probability of getting the results we did are at least less than 0.05.

<sup>17</sup> Standardized Beta = 0.159;  $p < 0.01$ .

evangelism index – a notable amount. Two ways of life matter: first, living a life focused on worship<sup>18</sup> has a very strong, statistically significant effect on the likelihood of higher values on the evangelism index (Beta = 0.552). Second, living a life of spiritual reflection<sup>19</sup> also had an independent statistically significant effect, but the effect was moderate in strength (Beta = 0.185).

Having added these additional aspects of the Christian life to the model, we find in Model Two that the interaction with the Bible that continues to be consequential (with a weak, statistically significant effect) is placing oneself in the passage when reading or hearing Bible passages.

*Table One. Hierarchical Regression Standardized Beta Coefficients*

	Model One	Model Two
SE Holy Spirit	.388	.081
SE Personal Connection	.036	-.051
SE Self in passage	.266	.110
SE Other People and Society	.014	-.036
SE Feelings	.030	-.001
SE Family	-.149	-.027
SE Classes	-.103	-.016
SE Friends	.260	.038
SE Worship	-.199	-.066
SD Worship		.552
SD Reflective		.185
SD Bible and Other		-.049
SD Social engagement with the Bible		.056
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.095	0.462

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<sup>18</sup> The worship index includes questions about how frequently students attend worship services, how often they read the Bible or hear it read in worship services (church, chapel, etc.), how often they engage in fellowship with Christians and how often they indicate they personally practice worship of God.

<sup>19</sup> The index measuring a focus on spiritual reflection included questions asking how frequently students reflect on the meaning of scripture in their life, reflect on what it means to be a Christian, reflect on the meaning of prayer in their life, and intentionally practice submission. The question on practicing submission is self-defined by the students. It provides a chance for the respondents to indicate that spiritual submission plays a role in their lives but different respondents could have interpreted the word submission quite differently.

## Conclusion

The results from the students who participated in this study show that the nature and frequency of living a missional lifestyle vary widely.<sup>20</sup> Those who are involved in this lifestyle of mission are the students who practice a life of worship, engage in spiritual reflection, and interact with the Bible through a placing of self in the narrative.

What might this mean in terms of how these students engage in the process of social construction of meaning referenced earlier? If we consider the combination of these three elements, it suggests that there is a way of living and thinking in the Christian reality that is based around thoughtful reflection oriented toward both worship and narrative construction of meaning from the biblical text. It is plausible that the students more prone to be engaged in a life of mission are thinking thoughtfully and prayerfully while living a life of worship that is understood within a grand biblical narrative. They know the great story, they see themselves in it, they reflect on the meaning of it, and they find it all a context of praise for God.

It is also worth noting the role the Bible plays in this particular process. Not only does the index on scripture engagement through placement of self in the passage involve biblical influence, so do the indexes on reflection (which includes a measure of one's reflection on the meaning of scripture in one's life) and the index on the spiritual discipline of worship (which includes a measure of experiencing the Bible in worship services). The presence of measures of biblical influence in these many indexes is not due to *a priori* decisions by the researchers. A benefit of using factor analytical statistical techniques to identify which survey questions should end up in any given index – or even which indexes should exist – grows organically out of the patterns of the data. What students reported as true in their lives created the groupings of variables that became indexes. It is important to notice, then, that the Bible shows up in consequential ways in many of the different indexes and, even though that biblical influence was measured in disparate ways that protect against over identified models that have predetermined outcomes, those indexes with biblical elements prove to be consequential in these models.

The students in this study, as well as all Christians everywhere, are clearly involved in the collective process of making meaning of reality and they are using the biblical text in that process in notable ways. As pertains to their missional commitment, the Bible is particularly influential to the extent that Christians see it as a grand narrative that they are placing themselves into – a great story of worship and reflection that is lived out in front of others such that they too will see themselves in certain ways in the biblical narrative.

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<sup>20</sup> As indicated by living before others in ways intended to shape their perceptions and socially constructed meaning systems.

# READING THE BIBLE WITH TODAY'S JEPHTHAHS: SCRIPTURE AND MISSION AT TIERRA NUEVA

Bob Ekblad

Tierra Nueva is a ministry to migrant farm workers from Mexico, inmates, ex-offenders and gang members, based in Burlington, Washington. Currently our ministry includes a Family Support Centre, gang ministry, recovery house, farm and English and Spanish congregations.

Since Tierra Nueva was founded in Honduras, Central America in 1982, the Bible has occupied a central place in our ministry. While our original focus was demonstrating and teaching sustainable agricultural and preventive health practices among the rural poor, we read and studied Scripture together as a team on a daily basis. As we visited remote villages, organized agricultural committees and trained leaders, people eventually asked us to lead them in Bible studies as part of our courses in agriculture and health. Most of these people were illiterate or semi-literate peasants living in remote villages, excluded from the traditional churches for various reasons. By our third year we were regularly reading the Bible in gatherings in cornfields, under mango trees, in people's homes and in community centres. Since 1994 Tierra Nueva has expanded to Burlington, Washington, where our ministry advocates for Mexican farm workers, offers pastoral support to gang members, ex-offenders and people in recovery. Here we lead weekly Bible studies in Skagit County Jail, in juvenile detention centres, in the cabins of Mexican immigrant farm workers in area migrant camps, in people's homes and in our storefront ministry centre and church.

Tierra Nueva focuses on helping people on the margins of society discover for themselves the good news of God's saving love in Jesus through reading of Scripture in direct rapport with their lives and world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A number of books and articles document my approach, including: Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned* (Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2005). See also Bob Ekblad, 'Reading Scripture for Good News Across Barriers of Race/Ethnicity, Class, and Culture', *Interpretation*, July 2011. I have found the following authors especially helpful as we've developed our approach. Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield, 1999); Gerald West, *Doing Contextual Theology: A Resource Manual*, PDF; Gerald West, *A Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), available free online at <http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/ujamaa/resources.htm>.

The following contextual Bible study on Jephthah and his daughter in Judges 11 offers an example of how we read Scripture with prison inmates.

I normally would not choose to expose uninitiated Bible readers to a text as complex and difficult as Judges 11. However, while preparing a graduate level lecture on ‘toxic’ Old Testament texts I discovered an angle on this story that seemed to offer good news to men marked by rejection, exclusion and inadequate embrace.

The men are ushered into the jail’s multipurpose room from their cellblock and take their seats in a small circle of blue plastic chairs. I invite everyone to introduce themselves and we begin with a prayer before reading the text. Before asking for volunteers to read the text I give a brief introduction to the story that presents some minimal but important background.

I describe the book of Judges as a collection of stories about a chaotic time in Israel’s history with some differences from, and similarities to, what many of us may have witnessed or experienced. Judges describes the people of Israel as constantly forgetting about God and re-offending as they are seduced by the destructive lifestyle practices of the people living around them. This appears to weaken them, making them vulnerable to being attacked by aggressors, who end up oppressing them. When they cry out for help God raises up people who lead them to freedom. There were lots of rival ‘gangs’ in the land (Philistines, Canaanites, Midianites...), all competing for the same territory. The Sons of Ammon are the latest threat.<sup>2</sup> They come up against the sons of Israel living in a place called Gilead. The people and leaders wonder, ‘Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.’

I ask someone to read Judges 11:1-3, and invite people to summarize what we know about Jephthah. The men note that he’s got a reputation as a fighter, he comes from a bad background, his mother is a prostitute, he’s driven off by his brothers from his father’s real marriage, and that he takes off and gathers others like him around him into a gang and they go out on missions. *Sureños* gang members in the group find this intriguing. As people familiar with rejection they know firsthand the appeal that acceptance and common adventures offer.

I add that Jephthah’s father has the same name as the city, Gilead, and briefly ask what they think that means. I suggest that today’s equivalent of his father’s name in our community would be ‘Mount Vernon’ or ‘Skagit County’ and his brothers from the proper marriage would be the ‘respectable’ members of society.

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<sup>2</sup> The sons of Ammon themselves come from the extreme margins, the fruit of an illicit encounter, when Lot’s daughters sleep with their drunk father after they’ve been led out of Sodom during its destruction (Genesis 19:30-38).

I point out that Gilead's sons' action of driving Jephthah out associates them with Joshua, and God's work of casting out Israel's enemies, the bad guys, from the land. In other groups more familiar with Scripture I share that Jephthah's fleeing associates him with Hagar, Jacob, Moses and Israel in their fugitive status.

'Do you guys know any men like Jephthah who come from bad backgrounds and are driven away by respectable people?' I ask. People identify with this question and it's clear that many of them are themselves contemporary Jephthahs.

'Yeah for sure,' a man responds. 'This sort of thing happens right here.'

Others nod, captivated by the story. It's easy for the men in the jail to see themselves as contemporary Jephthahs, and many readily identify themselves as the 'worthless men' who gather around this outlaw in the land of Tob.

'Have some of you had significant experiences of rejection?' I ask, knowing full well that this word is written on some of their bodies with tattoos like '666', 'F the World' and 'Trust no one'. Their red jail uniforms and plastic ID bracelets further stigmatize them, and many have already appeared earlier in the day for the Thursday court docket, standing before prosecutors and the public, handcuffed and in leg irons. The men look up from their Bibles and acknowledge their experience of exclusion, eyes full of pain and resignation.

I point out that 'worthless fellows' is a judgmental (and inaccurate) translation, and that the original version calls Jephthah's followers 'empty men', which seems to take the edge off this easy identification with a rejected brother. My role as trained reader of Scripture always includes bringing detail from the text as evidence for the defence of those who feel accused by God and men. Jesus shows that God did not come to condemn the world but to save. Reading the Old Testament with Jesus as our Rabbi is a core value of our ministry.

We're ready to read the next verses, and I invite someone to read Judges 11:4-6 and then quickly summarize it. We focus in on the final verse, where the elders present their first offer: 'Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon' (v 6).

'So here the sons of Ammon come against Israel and how do the elders of Gilead respond?' Copyrighted Material

'The elders are feeling threatened by their enemies. Now they need him to help them fight since he's a warrior,' someone says.

'They invite him to be their leader in the battle against the sons of Ammon,' another observes.

I ask the men whether feeling needed by someone who has rejected you, or getting a job or position is enough to heal the wound of rejection? The men all agree that being needed is not enough. I can see the wheels turning in their heads as they imagine their employers needing them on the job site, the mothers of their children needing them for money for rent, diapers and

food, or parents in Mexico needing money wired for basic needs back home – whatever extra can be wrung from the meagre wages of back-breaking labour in the fields. Being needed does not heal rejection. In contrast, being wanted and cared for apart from what we can do for someone is definitely superior – if in reality this could ever truly be an option.

I invite everyone back to verse 6 and ask them a series of quick questions. ‘What if the head of the county’s drug task force set up a special meeting with you here in the jail and said, “Look, drugs are out of hand here in the valley. You know all the players and how the system works. Come and work with us and eradicate drugs from the valley. We’ll make you chief of enforcement!”’

‘How would you respond if that happened to you?’ I ask.

There’s a mixed response from the men. Willie, a Chicano heroin addict fresh from a long stint in prison says he’d go and help them out. He’s in a cooperative mood, ready to do anything to avoid more time. Another man says he’d help but wouldn’t accept any official position. This guy too seems willing to cooperate with the authorities, even if their motives aren’t right. He wants freedom but is out to safeguard as much of his dignity as possible. He’d rather they be in debt to him than he to them.

Other are shaking their heads and totally refusing on principle: ‘No way homes,<sup>3</sup>’ says a gangster dude. ‘They’re just out to use him after they’ve rejected him. I’d want no part in that arrangement.’

I invite someone to read Jephthah’s response, which gives voice to feelings not far beneath the surface of many men in the room.

‘Did you not hate me and drive me from my father’s house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?’ (11:7).

The men seem impressed by Jephthah’s defiance and honesty before the authorities. I ask them if the text ever mentions the sons of Gilead hating Jephthah. Someone astutely observes that rejecting him is the same thing as hating, and that he’s stating things accurately.

I ask if any of them have experienced some serious rejection lately, like being refused entry into Drug Court – a treatment-focused alternative to prison. I’m looking right at a young man with tattoos on his face who looks surprised.

‘How did you know that?’ he asks. ‘Today they refused me.’ He looks down, trying to hold back tears. I realize I’d unknowingly tuned into information the Holy Spirit was revealing about him – a dimension of the gift of prophecy that we often see operating in our Bible studies that opens people up as they feel personally addressed.

I ask someone who hasn’t read yet to read the next verse to see how the elders respond, and invite the men to decide how they would interpret the next offer: ‘The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “For this reason we have

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Homes’ or ‘homie’ are short for homeboy, gang language for someone considered a fellow gang member.

now returned to you, that you may go *with us* and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead' (v 8).

'Now they need him, and they're so desperate that they're offering him a deal. They offer to make him head over everyone,' someone says.

I point out that the first word used in 11:6, captain or chief, is a less impressive leadership title than the word '*rosh*' used here, which means shot caller, top leader. In fact it looks like they're increasing the offer. They really need him and are strategic and political in their recruitment.

I point out that the elders' inclusive 'go with us' before mentioning 'to fight', could be a deliberate effort to address his rejection. I ask the inmates whether they think the elders' 'acceptance' is convincing.

The more seasoned men are quick to see through the scheme. 'I wouldn't do it,' says Porky, a Latino gang member facing prison and deportation. 'No way in hell.'

I invite people to look at the text again, aware that we're running out of time, and so is Jephthah. Suspense fills the circle as someone reads verses 9, 10.

"If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the Lord gives them up to me, will I become your head?" The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The Lord is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said."

Some of the inmates seem disappointed that Jephthah is too quick to accept the offer. They see it as agreeing to a plea bargain that doesn't offer full freedom, only a conditional acceptance. And yet it's Jephthah who makes his headship conditional. Is Jephthah hanging on to his dignity here, clarifying what success looks like and bringing God's help into the bargain?

The next scene in 11:11 shows the people of Gilead's *unconditional* acceptance. They make him both *head* and *chief* over them *before* he's even gone into battle.

After summarizing Jephthah's impressive diplomacy towards the king of Ammon and the king's refusal in 11:12-28, I invite someone to read the beginning of the next section in 11:29. There God appears to support the people's embrace: 'Now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah...'

The scene is now set to present a tragic turn in the story. Jephthah's deep insecurity about his acceptance becomes apparent as he gambles everything to assure the anticipated success. A volunteer reads 11:30:

Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, "If you *will indeed give*<sup>4</sup> the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's and I will offer it up as a burnt offering" (11:30-31).

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<sup>4</sup> When there's time and it seems appropriate I point out that the Hebrew verb *natan* (give) appears two times side by side, emphasizing Jephthah's fear-based insistence before God underlying his vow.

‘Why do you think Jephthah makes this vow?’ I ask the men. ‘What is he expecting will come out of his house to meet him? Certainly someone precious! What does this vow tell us about the way he views God?’

‘He thinks God requires him to sacrifice something of great value in order to get victory,’ someone says.

‘Have any of you ever made promises to God when you’re in trouble – like if God helps you avoid prison time you’ll stop using drugs, go to church or something?’ I ask.

Nearly everyone is nodding as they’ve all made deals with God to assure help. They seem to appreciate this reality being named and freely confess what’s normal in a jail context.

‘So what else does Jephthah’s vow here tell us about how he views God?’ I probe, hoping to further expose the dominant theology operating in this text and among the men. ‘Does Jephthah trust that God’s salvation is a free gift? Does he believe God accepts him just the way he is?’ I ask.

The men can see that Jephthah does not trust in God’s unconditional acceptance. He doesn’t believe that God likes him and cares about him and is committed to giving him and the sons of Israel victory. God’s powerful, miraculous help is not viewed as freely given. Jephthah probably envisions God as helping only if he sacrifices, offers payment (a noble arrangement), merits aid, or negotiates or begs for help.<sup>5</sup> He opts for acting as if God only truly helps people who make extra-ordinary sacrifices.

‘What about you guys,’ I ask. ‘Do you know people who think God is like this?’ Everyone nods, and many still assume this is an accurate portrayal.

We discuss together how Jephthah might be beginning to taste the power and pleasure that even conditional acceptance has brought him. Rather than stepping out into the uncertainty of unconditional grace and uncertain victory, he’s willing to gamble everything to assure his new position as ‘head’ and ‘chief’ offered him by the elders and people. Fear of failure to measure up to people’s hopes and expectations of victory drive him to add requirements of his own making. Fear of another rejection makes him bargain with God in ways that go beyond the elders’ earlier offers. He offers to sacrifice to God the first thing that comes out of his house to meet him, if God will ‘surely give’ him victory over the sons of Ammon. That way he will ‘deserve’ the unmerited favour he had received from people and God. This seems to him more real and believable than pure grace.

I summarize how the Lord gives Jephthah victory over the sons of Ammon, and then invite someone to read about the startling outcome in 11:34, 35:

‘When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was

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<sup>5</sup> This image of God is widespread. I present this extensively in my book *Reading the Bible with the Damned*.

his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take it back."

We wrap up our discussion of Judges 11 with some final reflections. We talk about the pressure to comply that comes on us when we get what we've bargained for – even if we were not required to make vows. If Jephthah didn't fulfil his vow, would his victory over the sons of Ammon be reversed? Would Jephthah's favour then be lost and his acceptance be forfeited? Even more faith is required to transgress a bargain with God after prayers are answered. Yet this pressure leads to death. Jephthah's only daughter is the casualty, and his family line will now be cut off.

If Jephthah's and our own negotiations with God for salvation will not free us, what, or who, can or will? I invite the men to look briefly at Luke 9:22, to add Jesus' words to the discussion.

'The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.'

'In contrast to Jephthah, who left the land of Tob and his "empty men" to become accepted as head and chief over the elders and the people, what happens to Jesus according to this passage?' I ask.

'He is rejected by the elders and killed, responds one of the men.

The connections between Jesus and the men are even clearer than between Jesus and Jephthah. Most inmates can't imagine ever achieving the status of Jephthah, the mighty warrior needed and sought after by the elders and people. The elders' rejection and execution of Jesus prompts an even closer identification between the men and Jesus, and the death penalty pronounced on Jesus gives him even more stature in their eyes.

We end our time looking at Jesus as one who experiences rejection from people but acceptance from the Father, who raises him from death on the third day. Bringing this difficult Old Testament story into relationship with Jesus represents a practice we deliberately engage in at Tierra Nueva. Just as the crucified, resurrected Jesus accompanied despondent travellers on the road and showed them from the Torah and prophets that Israel's Messiah had to suffer, we invite people to read with Jesus as their Rabbi, as an essential part of our accompaniment ministry.

Listening for Jesus' word is to take the Father's call to the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration with the utmost seriousness. In the presence of Moses, representative of the Torah and Elijah, representative of the Prophets, the Father counters Peter's efforts to place them on the same level by spotlighting Jesus: 'This is my beloved Son, listen to him.' Guided by the Holy Spirit, we find these stories witnessing to Jesus, and making him even more appealing.

Like the Jephthah who gathers other rejected ones around him in the land of Tob (which I point out means 'good'), Jesus himself was rejected

and continues to be so. Like Jephthah he gathers rejected ones into his company and goes out with them on mission. I invite someone to read Luke 9:23-25 to conclude:

‘And he was saying to *them all*, “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, *and follow me*. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?”’

The men are surprised to hear Jesus so directly call people to join him in his despised and rejected status, and even to follow him as disciples. Already outside the camp and having experienced significant loss, people on the margins can find it easier to surrender themselves to Jesus, if they can believe that he loves them and wants them just the way they are.

In another Bible study where I had more time I invited people to reflect on how they would reach out to Jephthah and the ‘empty men’ in the land of Tob so that they would be prepared for the visit from the elders of Gilead. I ask what they think brings healing to wounds of rejection?

Curtis, a truck driver in his forties, who is in recovery from years of drug addiction and now a member of our community, immediately responds to my question.

‘Jesus and the people in this church healed the wound of rejection. Even though I was still screwing up, still out using drugs, these people just loved me for who I was and continued to love me unconditionally, and this was able to keep lifting me up, knowing that they loved me for who I am.’

‘To accept people where they’re at and to see each one as a child of God, rather than according to their sin is what’s important,’ adds Zack, a 17-year heroin addict and ex-offender who now works with Tierra Nueva. ‘When you see their sin, it convicts them. And when you see them as a child of God it empowers them. And that’s what we need to be doing, empowering people with that unconditional acceptance,’ Zack continues.

In agreement with Zack and Curtis, we at Tierra Nueva see that Bible study is most effective when participants are brought together into supportive, inclusive communities that both gather people together and send them out on mission.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE REVEAL SPIRITUAL LIFE SURVEY

Nancy Scammacca Lewis (on behalf of the REVEAL Team)<sup>1</sup>

What church activities promote the most spiritual growth? This question, and the assumptions behind it, kicked off what is now known as the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey. When Greg Hawkins, executive pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, asked this question in 2003, he believed what many pastors believe: Take an un-churched person, expose him or her to church activities like worship services, small groups, and serving opportunities, and that person will grow spiritually. The more someone dives into what the church offers, the more that person grows in love for God and love for others. When Willow Creek surveyed its congregation in 2004, the results revealed a different reality: there was little change in levels of love for God and others based on how much someone participated in church activities.

Once the shock wore off, the REVEAL research team worked to determine what did drive spiritual growth (defined as ‘growing in love of God and love of others’). A comprehensive analysis of the data indicated that the best predictor of spiritual growth was a person’s self-described relationship with Jesus Christ. The spiritual growth framework that emerged from the survey data from Willow Creek and our findings about the key drivers of spiritual growth have been validated in survey results from more than 400,000 individuals in over 1,500 churches to date. These findings are summarized briefly in this chapter, with special attention given to what we’ve learned about the role of Bible engagement.<sup>2</sup>

### The REVEAL Spiritual Growth Continuum

After we determined that participation in church activities didn’t lead to growth in love for God and others, we discovered a four-stage continuum of spiritual maturity that did predict this growth. The stages are based on

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the content of this chapter summarizes previous work authored by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson.

<sup>2</sup> For a more in-depth and comprehensive look at the results of our research, see G. Hawkins and C. Parkinson *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

how someone describes the closeness of their relationship with Christ. People in the *Exploring Christ* stage have a basic belief in God, but they are unsure about Christ and his role in their lives. Those in the *Growing in Christ* stage have made a commitment to trust Christ for salvation, but are just beginning to learn what it means to have a relationship with him. In the *Close to Christ* stage, people depend on Christ as someone who assists them in life, providing help and guidance for the issues they face. People in the *Christ-Centered* stage have made a shift from asking Christ to help them with their wants and needs to fully surrendering to his agenda, subordinating everything to his will and his desires. People in this segment identify their relationship with Christ as their most important relationship.

Unlike a continuum based on involvement in church activities, this continuum of stages of spiritual maturity did predict growth in love of God and love of others. Those in the more mature *Close to Christ* and *Christ-Centered* stages have higher rates of serving, giving, and evangelism than those in the earlier stages. They express high levels of belief in core Christian doctrines and engage in personal spiritual practices like prayer and reflection on Scripture on a frequent or daily basis. People in these more mature segments participate in church activities, but these activities are not significant drivers of their spiritual growth.

### Spiritual Catalysts

If church activities don't drive spiritual growth, what does? In other words, what helps people move from *Exploring Christ* to *Growing in Christ*, from *Growing in Christ* to *Close to Christ*, and from *Close to Christ* to *Christ-Centered*? To find out, we examined the key differences between people in each group, while acknowledging that spiritual growth is not a strictly linear process and that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who brings growth. We discovered differences in the key catalysts that promote movement toward greater spiritual maturity for people in each stage. The top five catalysts for each movement are:

- *Exploring Christ* to *Growing in Christ*: belief in the Trinity and salvation by grace; serving the church; practice of prayer to seek guidance; reflection on Scripture.
- *Growing in Christ* to *Close to Christ*: belief in a personal God; practice of prayer to seek guidance; reflection on Scripture; practice of solitude; evangelism.
- *Close to Christ* to *Christ-Centered*: attitude of willingness to surrender everything to Christ and of desiring Jesus to be first in my life; belief in identity in Christ and in the authority of the Bible; reflection on Scripture.

Taken together, the key factors promoting growth in each movement show a clear progression. In the first movement, the focus is on Christian fundamentals. In the second movement, building on this foundation

through spiritual practices is critically important. In the third movement, surrender to Christ and his will is predominant.

Notice one constant across the key catalysts for spiritual movement: *reflection on Scripture*. Reflection on Scripture is the only catalyst of spiritual growth that appears in the top-five list for each of the three movements. Nothing else even comes close to having the same impact as the Bible when it comes to spiritual growth. For those in the Close to Christ and Christ-Centered stages, reflection on Scripture is twice as impactful as any other catalyst. The key difference in the impact of reflection on Scripture across the spiritual continuum is frequency. For someone in the Exploring Christ stage, shifting from reflecting on Scripture rarely (a few times per year) to frequently (several times per week) speeds the movement to the Growing in Christ stage. For the later movements, increasing from frequent to daily reflection on Scripture plays a significant role in spiritual growth.

In our more recent research, we have begun to explore how and why people in each stage on the continuum engage with Scripture. This research is still in an early stage, so we share our findings with the *caveat* that we don't yet have enough data to make conclusive statements about the ways Bible engagement changes as one matures in Christ. Using a set of survey items, we looked at two aspects of Bible engagement: how people are affected by their exposure to Scripture and what motivates people to engage with Scripture. We then looked for differences in both aspects of Bible engagement between people in each stage of spiritual growth. Here are the key differences we found:

- People in the Exploring Christ stage who are moving toward the Growing in Christ stage tend to say they come away from their encounters with Scripture with new information, such as learning how to be like Christ and learning truth from God. Their motivation for spending time in Scripture is to be close to God.
- People in the Growing in Christ stage who are moving toward the Close to Christ stage tend to experience Scripture as formational in their lives, finding hope in God and experiencing unity with other believers through their time in God's Word. They spend time in Scripture because they see it as a vital spiritual discipline for followers of Christ.
- People in the Close to Christ stage who are moving toward the Christ-Centered stage tend to experience Scripture as transformational, giving authoritative guidance for their lives and aligning their lives with God's plan for the world. They are motivated to spend time in Scripture because they know it is essential for their spiritual growth.

## Learning about Bible Engagement from Best Practice Churches

Research using the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey has provided insights into the best practices of churches that are highly effective in promoting spiritual growth among their congregants. We compute a Spiritual Vitality Index (SVI) for every church that fields the survey with their congregation. The SVI is a way of summarizing three aspects of a church's survey results: the level of congregants' participation in personal spiritual practices, congregants' degree of satisfaction with key aspects of the church's role in promoting their spiritual growth, and the extent to which congregants are putting their faith into action through serving, evangelism, and an attitude of full surrender to Christ. Churches receive a score that is benchmarked against a database of 1,000 churches. A score of 70 is average. Churches with scores of 85 or above are in the top 5 percent of all churches we've surveyed.

In 2008, the REVEAL team brought together a group of pastors of churches in the top 5 percent to see what best practices we could learn from them about what makes a church spiritually vibrant. After several days of listening to them share their stories and strategies, four best practices emerged as consistent themes. For the sake of brevity, we will describe just one of these strategies in this chapter: *Embed the Bible in Everything*.<sup>3</sup>

The pastors of the spiritually vibrant churches uniformly made Scripture central to every aspect of church life. The Bible was held up as more than just a resource for study in Bible classes or a topic for devotionals. Engaging with Scripture was an identifying characteristic deeply embedded in the heart of the church. The disparity in the survey results for spiritually vibrant churches and average churches is evidence for the difference this approach to Bible engagement makes in the day-to-day lives of congregants. Across the REVEAL database of churches, the average percentage of congregants who say they reflect on Scripture daily is 21 percent. The average for spiritually vibrant, best-practice churches is 34 percent. Remember that reflection on Scripture is the most influential catalyst of spiritual growth. The high rates of Bible engagement seen in best-practice churches pay dividends by generating spiritual movement for congregants.

As someone who is reading a book on the Bible in mission, you probably don't need to be convinced of the importance of getting congregants into God's Word. However, finding ways to get them to embrace Scripture for themselves can be more challenging. One of the key differentiating factors of our best-practice church leaders is their ability to transition their love of Scripture to their congregants. Our conversations with them yielded three strategies they use for effectively embedding the Bible in everything they do.

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<sup>3</sup> Detailed information on all four practices is available in Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 210-255.

1. *Make the Bible the main course of the message.* Whether taking an expository or topical approach to preaching, our best-practice pastors start their message preparation in Scripture so that all of the life applications they provide are rooted in God's Word. Showing congregants how to draw life application from Scripture is among their goals. In this way, congregants learn how to find God's wisdom during their time alone reflecting on Scripture. Best-practice pastors also effectively communicate their passion for God's Word in their preaching in a way that congregants can experience and internalize.

2. *Take away the excuses.* With so many demands competing for the attention of their people, best-practice pastors have to be creative in coming up with ways to help congregants grow in their ability and confidence to engage with Scripture on their own. In addition to Bible classes and weeknight course offerings, they've developed a variety of methods for making daily Scripture engagement accessible and enticing. For example, one best-practice church asks people to sign a '10/10' covenant, where they commit to 10 minutes of Bible reading and 10 minutes of prayer each day, in addition to connecting weekly with 10 people in a small group and praying for 10 people to accept Christ. Another church takes a high-tech approach and provides a web-based daily Bible reading plan developed by congregants. Volunteers are given a Scripture passage and asked to provide a reflection on it and its importance in their lives. These reflections are emailed to congregants who sign up to receive them. Other churches distribute quarterly devotional magazines or journals to their congregations. No matter the method, the message is the same: spending time each day engaged with Scripture is an essential life-transforming discipline for every follower of Jesus Christ.

3. *Model Scripture as the church's foundation.* The habit of turning to Scripture for guidance is as much caught as it is taught. When congregants see the church's leadership constantly holding up the Bible as the authoritative source for wisdom in making decisions, developing vision, and providing a foundation for the church's direction, they are more likely to turn to Scripture for guidance in how to live their day-to-day lives. Opportunities to model Scripture as foundational to church leadership range from beginning leadership meetings with members sharing what they are learning from the Bible, to tackling thorny issues in leadership development groups by seeking guidance from Scripture, to taking congregants to God's Word when they come to you with questions or problems. The question 'What does the Bible say about that?' should be heard from the lips of church leaders as often as possible.

The lessons provided by our best-practice churches show what it looks like to have a church where embedding the Bible has become second nature. In the following section, we provide a look at some churches that aren't yet best-practice churches. They are churches that have participated in the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey, wrestled with the results, taken

action to increase Bible engagement in their churches, and then taken the survey a second time to measure their progress. The glimpses provided by these work-in-progress churches show how simple, intentional efforts to embed the Bible in everything can make a real difference in the spiritual vitality of a congregation.

### Case Study #1: Southwest Church of Christ

REVEAL survey results for Southwest Church of Christ indicated that a large percentage of the congregation remained in the early stages of spiritual growth despite a decade or more of church involvement. Church members were weak in their spiritual practices and wanted more help from the church in understanding the Bible. Preaching Minister Jimmy Adcox knew the church leadership needed to act. ‘It wasn’t a matter of saying, “We want to encourage everybody to read their Bible,”’ Jimmy explains. ‘Instead, we planned a way to engage the church and do it together.’

They tapped what they considered the ideal resource to guide that process – *The Story*,<sup>4</sup> originated in San Antonio’s Oak Hills Church by pastors Randy Frazee and Max Lucado.

This chronological journey through the Bible became a church-wide experience that involved not only Sunday services, but also the church’s small groups, Bible classes, and children’s ministry. Beginning in the fall of 2009 and lasting for 31 weeks, Southwest’s congregation read an average of 15 pages of Scripture a week. Jimmy preached on that material each Sunday morning. Classes discussed it.

The following fall, the church repeated the process with *The Jesus Creed*,<sup>5</sup> which focuses on the Gospels. This time, shorter reading assignments were combined with more time devoted to prayer and reflection on Scripture. Where *The Story* had gotten Southwest’s people into the Word, *The Jesus Creed* not only built on that involvement but also inspired attenders’ commitment to the needs of those outside the church.

The results of these efforts were seen in a 2011 follow-up REVEAL survey. By then, attendance was growing and categories across the board – from personal spiritual practices, to Christian beliefs and attitudes, to small group serving, to satisfaction with weekend services – all experienced upward movement. ‘Our people have grown in terms of being in the Word on their own’, Jimmy says, ‘which in turn has impacted their spiritual life, which in turn has impacted their sense of mission and ministry.’

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<sup>4</sup> *The Story: Encounter the Story of Scripture in a Whole New Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> S. McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005).

### **Case Study #2: The Church at Osage Hills**

When the Church at Osage Hills took the REVEAL survey, they were in the midst of a re-launch that included hiring new pastoral staff and putting a season of struggle and internal strife behind them. Church leaders were looking for a benchmark of the congregation's spiritual health at that time. There were some positives in their results, but they also discovered some sobering information. Satisfaction with the church's role in spiritual growth was at a very low 25 percent and just 6 percent of the congregation engaged in daily Bible reading. The team was determined to increase the church's interaction with the Bible, but they faced a challenge.

Located on Lake of the Ozarks, the church co-exists with each summer's half-million visitors. For Osage Hills attenders, summer means either long work hours or leaving the area to escape the crowds. As summer approached, Osage Hills launched 'The Summer Challenge', a season-long combination of Bible reading and physical workouts that culminated in August with a 5 kilometer run. "We encouraged everyone to read through the New Testament and we encouraged them to do some sort of physical exercise", Ken explains. "We told them, "While you guys are traveling, out of town, on vacation, go. Have a great time. We love you. And while you're gone, let's be reading the Bible together and let's be working out."

Participants signed commitment cards that were hung from the lobby ceiling. They focused on 1Timothy 4:7-8. The church provided 75-day study guides, basing Sunday sermons on each week's readings. And they passed out T-shirts that said 'The Summer Challenge: I'm In. Are You?' Everyone came back together in August having read their Scripture, eager to interact with fellow congregants, and ready to run their race. That success was followed by additional Scripture-reading incentives and Bible-based sermon series.

Osage Hills' follow-up REVEAL survey documented the difference these efforts made. Congregant satisfaction with weekend services increased from 61 to 82 percent. Both overall attendance and attendance frequency also increased, as did satisfaction with the senior pastor. The Growing in Christ segment, which represented 43 percent of the congregation in the first survey, was noticeably smaller and the two more mature categories, Close to Christ and Christ-Centered, had grown considerably.

### **Case Study #3: Legacy Church**

The leaders of Legacy Church in Plano, Texas, heard about REVEAL while attending the 2008 Willow Creek Leadership Summit. Senior Pastor Gene Wilkes said, 'We hadn't assessed our spiritual growth for years, so we needed kind of a baseline of where we were.' Results indicated that less than half of those responding were satisfied with the church's role in their spiritual growth. Just 15 percent engaged in daily Bible reading. Thirteen

percent acknowledged that when it came to their spiritual growth, they were stalled. The pastoral staff had suspected that the congregation needed to grow in Scripture engagement, and the survey results confirmed that work was needed.

Legacy created a Spiritual Growth Team, made up of the pastoral team and a leadership team of congregants and staff. The team defined the church's four key objectives, one of which was to promote understanding the Bible in depth. As part of this objective, Legacy was determined to make daily Bible engagement a fundamental practice throughout the church – for everyone from pre-schoolers to adults and across activities ranging from life groups to Sunday sermons. Common to all of these audiences and initiatives would be *The Story*. The pastoral staff divided the book into segments to cover all 12 months, and then broke the material down into six daily reading assignments per week. Congregants who didn't want to carry a book around could get the material in a daily email or listen to it on their smartphones.

To keep the children engaged in the Word alongside their parents, the children's director created a Family Notebook covering the entire year. For each week, it provided the Scripture being discussed in Sunday's service as well as a story synopsis, the story's main point, and the best ways to enter into a discussion of the story. It included questions appropriate for different age groups – pre-schoolers, elementary, and youth – to launch family-wide discussions.

Legacy checked their progress with a follow-up survey in March 2012. The results were encouraging across the board. Satisfaction with the church's role in spiritual growth rose from 49 to 65 percent. Levels of small group participation and serving at the church were far above average. Most importantly, the percentage of congregants in the Growing in Christ segment dropped from 47 percent to 41 percent, while the percentage in the more mature segments rose significantly.

### **It Starts With You**

We have conducted the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey project with the intention of providing church leaders with strategies and insights that will help them to lead their congregations to deeper and deeper levels of growth in Christ-likeness. As we've discussed in this chapter, getting your congregants to engage with Scripture is a critical part of encouraging their spiritual growth. But it is even more critical that you tend to your own heart. Spiritually vibrant churches have spiritually vibrant leaders. No strategy can succeed unless it is pursued by leaders whose hearts are surrendered fully to Christ and his agenda. The strategies we've found through our best-practice churches and our work-in-progress churches come from the overflow of the hearts of Christ-Centered leaders who are pursuing spiritual transformation with single-minded devotion. Where are

you in your engagement with Scripture? Do you take time to reflect on Scripture for yourself, apart from preparing to teach a class, lead a group, or preach a sermon? Are you cultivating a passion for God's Word that is contagious? We hope that the first place you will take the strategies we've presented here is into your personal time of prayer and reflection on Scripture and that you'll move forward from there in the way that seems best to you and the Holy Spirit.



# GLAZED EYES AND DISBELIEF

Adrian Blenkinsop and Naomi Swindon

## Part 1: Getting Over the Guilt (by Adrian Blenkinsop)

His awkward silence and embarrassed sideways glance at his friend said it all. I'd asked a simple question, 'Do you read the Bible much?' and now waited for him to reply as honestly as he felt comfortable with. 'Umm...well, not as much as I should – I guess,' came the reply. I wanted to find out just what constituted 'as much as I should', as well as how and by whom that was determined, so I asked, 'How much do you think you should be reading the Bible then?' 'Well, probably every day,' he replied. 'Why do you think it's important to read the Bible every day?' 'Cause that's what my youth leader says,' he responded. I pressed more, and asked, 'So...what *is* the Bible do you think?' Another young person in the group spoke up: 'Well, I think of the Bible as God's love letter to me. I mostly read it when I'm feeling unhappy, and it reminds me that everything's going to be OK.'

The conversation continued for about an hour, as I chatted with a group of young people connected to a youth group in a mainline church in a large Australian city. It was one of a series of cross-country conversations I was having in order to gain a picture of how Christian young people understand the Bible, how they engage with it (or don't) and whether it actually influences them and their communities at all. In much of my Bible engagement work with 'churched' young people, I encounter 'glazed eyes'.<sup>1</sup> That is, they know the answers before you've asked the question, they're familiar with most of the Bible stories, and generally see any sort of Bible reading as something they're obliged to do. It's like homework for the soul – something to be endured because their parents, youth leader or pastor says they need to do it. When they do read Scripture, it's often seen as another self-help manual – its purpose is to make them feel 'happy' again.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A 'churched' young person may or may not be a Christian, but have a connection with a church, either through attending a Christian school, or a church/youth group.

<sup>2</sup> Much of our youth Bible engagement methods and approaches have been influenced by research done by Christian Research Australia in 2010/2011 for Bible Society Australia and Scripture Union Australia, titled 'Bible Engagement among Young Australians', as well as a series of Bible engagement forums conducted across Australia by Bible Society throughout 2011/2012.

What stops young people engaging deeply with God's word? Not reading it out of a sense of guilt or duty, or in order to have an emotional pick-me-up, but truly interacting with God's word, wrestling with it, asking questions of it, arguing about it and prayerfully inviting God to speak through it so that it begins to transform them?

One of our great challenges as we seek to encourage young people as disciples of Jesus is to resist being 'keepers of knowledge' whose task it is to transfer biblical information to them. Rather, our role is that of a companion who walks alongside them and encourages them to explore the intriguing world of the Bible. We are to 'create the itch', not scratch it for them.<sup>3</sup>

As I speak with youth leaders I encourage them to develop the skill of asking good questions. This may seem pretty obvious – but it can be difficult. Our default position as leaders can be to ask questions to which we already know the answers. It's certainly safer than asking 'open' questions of a Bible story or passage of Scripture. But open questions – questions that seek to provoke further inquiry, to prompt discussion and disagreement (i.e., create an itch) – enable a young person to think for her or himself, to think through their own opinion or response, as opposed to being told what the 'right' answer or response is from the leader. These are also the questions Jesus most often used – open, probing questions like, 'Who do you say I am?' (Mark 8:29) or 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' (Luke 24:17).

Let's look at some options that face us as we meet with young people to explore a Bible text. I love the account in Luke 7 of how Jesus brought back from the dead the only son of a widow. After reading the Bible passage, usually more than once, there are a couple of different approaches I could take. I might ask factual, information-based questions, like, 'What did Jesus say to the widow?' and, 'What happened as a result of Jesus healing the boy?' These questions require information gleaned from the story – the 'correct' answer is there in the text, the young people just need to find it. This kind of question doesn't require them to place themselves inside the story, or to use their imagination. There are no 'surprises' with these questions.

We need something different, something that demands time spent reading and meditating on the story, so as to be able to explain something of its cultural context. I'd invite the young people to think about what the turning point is in this event, or what's the 'twist' in this story, and what things changed at that point. Was it when Jesus noticed the funeral, or when he touched the coffin, or when the boy sat up? As people in the group contribute their ideas, I ask them to identify the powerful people in the story, the people in control, first at the beginning, and then at the end of the

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<sup>3</sup> The 'itch' is a desire to dig deeper into the Bible, to be intrigued by it and want to go deeper into it and to continue to ask questions.

story. What about the powerless people – who are they at the beginning and at the end of the story? What changed? People in the group naturally identify with different characters in the story, and as they do, I ask them what draws them to that character, and if there's anything they can relate to, or that they react to emotionally within that character.

'What sort of Facebook status updates can you imagine people in the story would be writing?' I ask. We read through the story again, and pause as people in the group call out possible status updates from the different characters. This simple exercise engages the group with the story at a whole new level, and enables them to respond to the story and its characters in a way that they are familiar and comfortable with.

'Does anything surprise you in this story?' I ask. 'Why? And what about the question of miracles? Have you ever seen a miracle for yourself? Have you known a situation that needed a miracle?' By now group members are comfortable with each other and with the Bible story, and begin to share a little from their own lives. The story of Jesus returning the widow's son to life is no longer an old story that doesn't relate to the young people – it's a story about people with whom they discover they can identify at many levels. One girl told how she'd recently been to the funeral of a school friend: 'Just seeing all that grief around me, and realising that life had changed so much for my friend's family really made me feel sad for them, and then reading this story today I can actually imagine being one of the people in the crowd – watching the woman and feeling her grief and then watching Jesus do that miracle. It makes me kinda wonder if miracles like that happen today.'

This approach works well with small groups of young people, but how might it play out in a larger setting? It was a pretty boisterous group of high school students I stood in front of – all 300 of them. With microphone in hand I launched into my re-telling of a Bible story some of them were familiar with.

'Welcome to the job interview,' I began. 'There's a lot of you applying for this one job – but only one of you will be successful I'm afraid. This is a job that can make you incredibly wealthy – and really quickly too. But there's a down side; it'll probably make you really unpopular with everyone' (my voice drops dramatically). 'You might even have people who hate you so much they'll try to kill you.' The students were listening, intrigued. This was a different sort of Religious Education seminar from what they'd heard before.

'This job will be awarded to the person among you who can promise to raise the most amount of money in one year. So, start yelling out amounts of money you think you can raise from your friends and local community in one year – off you go.' Being given license to stand and yell in school was gold for them! In half a minute around 40 of them had shouted out numbers – and others had out-bid them. I encouraged them: 'Forty-five thousand dollars! You can do better than that! A hundred and fifty thousand

dollars...that's better!' When someone called out a million dollars I stopped the bidding and declared him the winner. Inviting a round of raucous applause from his fellow students I called him down the front next to me and asked if he'd like to know some more details about this 'job' he'd won.

I outlined what was involved in getting the money he had pledged to gather from his friends and local community. He had at his disposal a small army, he was able to enter anyone's private house and take things of value if they had no money, he could impose on-the-spot fines on people for the most ridiculous of reasons, and whatever he raised above the one million dollars he had pledged, he could keep for himself. His schoolmates cheered. 'There is a down side to the job though,' I added. 'This job is going to make you really unpopular – you won't have many friends.' 'No way!' he exclaimed, as the realisation of having no friends struck him, and his friends laughed and heckled him.

Maybe you've recognized Zaccheus the tax collector. Some of the students are familiar with his story, but I'm trying to engage their imagination, to approach the narrative from a different angle, to enable them really to enter into the story by unpacking some of its cultural context – the reality of life under oppressive Roman occupation and why those who collaborated with the Romans were so hated. This is what good storytelling can do.

Well-told stories have the capacity to engage the imagination of young people much more than reading words on a page. If we have explored the story, asked questions of the text and read some commentaries on it, it can serve to strengthen our ability to help young people 'enter' a particular story. When it comes to Bible stories that may be familiar, I try to explore what life was like back then, what was happening in that time and place, what was shaping their culture, why were things the way they were? As the story starts to come to life in my imagination, I'm able to re-tell it imaginatively in the hope that young people can enter into it in new and fresh ways so that some of their assumptions about the story may be challenged and it begins to make sense and even to challenge them. This process requires me to know about the attitudes, experiences and context of the young people, too. This is how to find points of connection and dissonance between the culture and context of Bible times and ours.<sup>4</sup>

With some of the context behind the story clearer for them (thanks to some research and creative storytelling), I talk about the significance of Jesus having a meal with Zaccheus and of the radical change in his life. I invite the students to imagine what happened over the meal. Did Jesus and Zac talk lots? What might they have talked about that would cause Zac to change? What might have taken place over that meal? There are some

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<sup>4</sup> This approach is put really succinctly in a quotation from theologian Karl Barth, in a *Time* magazine piece published on Friday, May 31, 1963. "[Barth] recalls that 40 years ago he advised young theologians 'to take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.'"

crazy suggestions – but the students are thinking, discovering new things about an old and familiar story and imagining actually being there. For many of them this is a new experience of the Bible.

I suggest that Luke's story of the encounter between Jesus and Zaccheus actually mirrors the bigger story of what the Bible is all about. Jesus enters Zac's world, turns his priorities upside down and restores him to his community and to God. The Bible's continuing story is about God restoring his broken creation to relationship with him. I see a few puzzled expressions on the faces of the students and suspect many of them have never thought of the Bible like this.

### **Part 2: From Disbelief to Disciples** (by Naomi Swindon)

Can the Bible speak to young people *outside* the church or faith community? Many people assume our approach with them must be very different from the way we interact with our 'glazed eyes' church youth. But I have found similar strategies to be just as effective.

Yes, we need to assume little or no knowledge of biblical material and not take for granted a respect for Scripture. But encouraging interaction with God's word so that real change occurs in the hearers can look very similar. Rather than arguing for relevance or asserting its authority, we *show* them how Scripture relates to their lives, and encourage them to hear it address their life issues – be they work, family, identity, relationships, satisfaction, purpose, hope, justice or war, to name just a few.

The keys to engaging both church and un-church young people with the Bible are the ability to identify significant issues and experiences of young people, to understand their world, their concerns and reality and to be familiar with the narrative and context of Scripture. Then the Bible passages we choose and the angle we take will emerge from the overlap between these – God's story (Scripture), our story (community/culture/world) and my story (the individuals or group being engaged). In the case of the encounter between Jesus and Zaccheus these three stories would look something like this:

**God's story:** What do we know about tax collectors in first-century Palestine? About the political and economic landscape, the religious impact of collaboration, the likely social scenario for Zaccheus? What has been happening around Jesus in the lead-up to this event? Who will be watching closely? What are the implications of Zaccheus's about-turn for himself, his community and those he had been involved in oppressing?

**Our story:** What might be the contemporary equivalents? Corruption in institutions? Who holds financial sway? Who is powerful but not popular? What are the value systems of the powerful regarding justice, taxation, etc? Do we agree with these dominant values? Do we benefit from them?

**My story:** Where do I fit in? How do I hold/use power or aspire to power? What would I do for the sake of wealth? What are my priorities, my loyalties, values?<sup>5</sup>



As we saw earlier, a key connection suggested between the Bible story and the experience of young people was their future work and particularly the focus on money. They, like Zaccheus, may be attracted to wealth and status. Our culture affirms these values – ‘winners are grinners’. The Bible challenges these values as young people are drawn into the story and its central conflict between wealth and power, and relationships with the community, themselves and with God. Soon they are likely to be asking themselves the question, ‘What ultimately satisfies?’ This is a crucial question and one for which the story points to radical answers. Too often traditional Bible study approaches with young people have left them planning to be ‘good Christians’ *and* rich *and* comfortable, untroubled by the conflicts between these goals – conflicts that Zaccheus faced. (No wonder non-Christians don’t see enough distinctive difference in their Christian friends to be curious about, let alone attracted to, their faith.) We have tamed the Bible, limiting its message to one of personal piety rather than a message of radical transformation.

As well as the types of questions we use, there are other tools that we have found helpful. One is utilising multi-sensory learning. When we involve our whole body in the process of exploring the Bible, many more people ‘get it’ than when we use only auditory (speaking/listening) or visual methods. Western education has underestimated the importance of physical interaction and so has disadvantaged kinesthetic learners, those who need to move, handle and *do* in order to learn. I’ve found the level of connection and transformation (changed values and actions) increase significantly the more we get people out of seats when opening the Bible.

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<sup>5</sup> This approach is helpfully expounded throughout the study of Mark’s Gospel in Ched Myers’ *Say to this Mountain* and in some books in our suggested reading list.

This movement can be as simple as going for a run before reading a New Testament letter about understanding life as a race (1 Cor 9; Hebrews 12) or taking young people to a beach or lake shore to introduce any of the stories about Jesus, his disciples and their boats. With the breeze in our faces and waves lapping our feet, the ancient stories can surprise us and take on new life.

Exploring Scripture in a literally equivalent space (e.g. at the beach) is only one such example. In Mark 4:35, Jesus and his disciples were travelling from the 'safe' Jewish area to the region of the Gerasenes (Gentile 'Decapolis' was Hellenic territory), going from known and safe territory to the 'unclean side' as highlighted by the pigs and the demon-possessed man among the graves. You might read this passage in a boat! But you might even more effectively ask young people about the 'unclean' or dangerous part of town or school and then read the passage en route from one to the other, on foot or by train or bus. During your trip you might discuss what opposition (storm) needs to be calmed to take this path. The radical challenging of power, prejudice and evil is a key part of the call to follow Jesus. The 'storm' may be within us or external to us.

We once walked around a school campus identifying where the rough kids tended to hang out, the youngest, the ones most likely to be picked on and so on. We talked about ways that students judge one another as more worthy or popular (contemporary experiences of 'clean and unclean'). Two students decided that from then on they would go to the 'wrong' places at lunchtime and eat lunch with different groups, choosing also to wear their uniform in 'uncool' ways. Both these actions had their peers in uproar because they challenged stereotypes in the school ground. It was a formative discipling experience for them all. They discovered Jesus as their example as well as friend and saviour and they disturbed the status quo just like he does. To adults that might seem a trivial thing, but for school students it is the stuff of real life.

The most important thing is to find equivalent spaces that help young people to recognise their own experiences and their world in the Bible and so respond to the challenge to follow Jesus in life-changing ways.<sup>6</sup> This kind of Bible engagement takes imagination, planning and flexibility. A camp or similar residential opportunity can be a good place to start. It offers more time and a wider range of physical situations to explore.

A very different but powerful multi-sensory tool that has been used in many countries is to gather a collection of pictures of Jesus – from Celtic stained glass windows to black baby-in-a-manger, contemporary portraits and simple line drawings of Jesus with the children like those from the Good News Bible. Then invite a mixed group (churched, un-churched,

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<sup>6</sup> Do, however, beware of being too literal in this pursuit of places to read Scripture in. For example, finding a space that genuinely mirrors the political, economic and religious significance of the Temple is a challenge.

seekers, not-yet-believers) surrounded by these colourful diverse pictures of Jesus, to stand by the one that means the most to them at this point in their life and to share the reasons for their choice of image. What do they see of Jesus in this picture? Some might share a story or passage they are reminded of and why that aspect of Jesus attracts them. Because you are looking for points of connection this is not about 'right' answers, but authentic ones. Christians have insights to share, as do others. Careful, respectful debriefing can make this a moving invitation to meet Christ. This same strategy – visual and interactive – could be used for exploring diverse biblical images of salvation or for getting to know more about the twelve disciples.<sup>7</sup> It's another way for people to find themselves and find Jesus and perhaps to follow him.

A young man who'd been connected into a Bible study group through outreach from a local church used to tell everyone that his goals in life were to wear expensive clothes, drive a fancy car and eat good food. He was known for using his fists to get what he wanted. The study group worked through Mark's Gospel using the three circles approach. They discussed the city's power structures and identified today's equivalents of Mark's characters. This young man began to 'find himself' in the narrative and slowly discovered the untamed message about following Jesus and its inescapable implications. His values changed. He trained as a non-violent crowd controller, learning how to defuse aggression and create peace in volatile situations. Eventually he became a youth worker, wore unremarkable clothes, drove a beat-up car and ate simple fare with Melbourne's 'least'. He is now the CEO of an organisation that advocates for the marginalised, challenges corruption and hosts a daily meal where substance abusers and the wealthy and privileged eat together, sharing life and finding solutions together. The Bible shapes this organisation as it shapes every aspect of its CEO's life. These are the goals we work for, the transformations that God's word brings about.

### Recommended Reading

Kenneth E Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1983. Bailey's Middle Eastern experience provides useful and accessible historical and cultural insights for interpreting parables in Luke.

Ched Myers, *Say to this Mountain*, Orbis Books, 1996. This is the single most useful book I know for getting to grips with identifying key material for the 3 circles approach. It takes you through Mark's Gospel using

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<sup>7</sup> There are more activities in this resource ('Images of Jesus' kit) at SU Victoria (visit [www.suvic.org.au](http://www.suvic.org.au)) for continuing to explore who Jesus is historically, personally and theologically, including a tool for reading through the book of Mark in one sitting, aloud and dramatically.

approaches and developing skills for interpretation, especially from a social and political perspective.

Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, Zondervan, 2005. Hipps explores how the church is trying new ways to communicate in a postmodern culture. It challenges the way we view and use media, and how often ‘the medium is the message’, as Marshal McLuhan said in the 1960s. Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. This book opens our eyes to the art of engaging people ‘on the margins’ of society with the Bible, by asking good questions of the text and enabling people to identify themselves within it and hear what God might be saying to them through it.

David Smith, *Moving Toward Emmaus*. SPCK London, 2007. David Smith draws parallels between Luke’s account of Jesus’ encounter with his downcast disciples and today’s post-Christian world. He presents a clear and understandable vision of how God continues to be active in the world today as he has throughout history.

N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, SPCK London, 2005. This book explores what it means to talk of the ‘authority’ of the Bible in a post-modern age. N.T. Wright tracks through biblical history and explores cultural changes to shape an understanding for today of the authority of the Bible.

Craig Bartholomew, Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, Baker Academic: Michigan, 2004. Understanding the biblical narrative and sharing it in ways that young people can understand can be a real challenge. This book does that well: it journeys through Scripture and explains the larger story of the Bible, and where all the different ‘parts’ of the Bible fit into that overarching narrative.

Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians. Following Jesus in a Post-Christian Culture*, Zondervan, 2010. Another book that has shifted our thinking around how we engage culture in life-giving ways that reflect Jesus’ teachings and actions. It’s full of real-life stories of Christians living out Kingdom values so that whole communities are being transformed.

Marcus Curnow is based in Melbourne and is an innovative thinker as well as a great practitioner of Bible engagement. You can find out more at: <http://maruscurnow.wordpress.com/>

Visit **Facebook.com/Epicbibleproject** and join a community of ministry leaders seeking to engage young people with the Bible. Initiated by Bible Society Australia and headed up by Adrian Blenkinsop, the project offers videos and other resources to support and equip leaders and help them learn from their peers.

# INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY OF THE BIBLE

Paul A Soukup

In the Bible, God definitely works through human means, with all their characteristics and even with all their limitations. From the perspective of human communication, the ideas of 'delivery systems' or media for the Bible give only a part of the picture. The larger story describes how God's word in the Scriptures moves from generation to generation in a variety of forms. And that story (looked at as communication) concerns information management: the discovery, preservation, recall, and expression of information. This case study of the delivery system of the Bible in mission will draw on the media ecology approach to communication study. After introducing that, the essay will examine the idea of information management as it appears in communication in general and in the Bible in particular. Next it will review some transformations in Bible delivery and finally examine some of the consequences.

## Media Ecology

Media ecology, as the name suggests, approaches communication as the study of environments: the environments in which communication occurs and the environments created by human communication. The environments described here include both physical ones (books, radios, digital displays, and so on) and cognitive ones. A key media ecology principle holds that all the components of these environments interact, creating complex ecosystems, much as one finds in the biological world, from which the metaphor of media ecology comes. A brief example will serve to clarify the idea: If we add a new communication medium (a smart phone, say) to the communication ecology, it affects all the other parts, much as adding a new frog to a pond will affect all the other life of that pond. In the case of the smart phone, people eventually change the way that they send messages (texting instead of email), make phone calls (more or less frequently, from anywhere), entertain themselves (playing games on the phone), watch television (again, on the phone, from a video on demand service), think about the world, manage their information (online calendars, phone books, and even searches), and so on. More than that, the new technologies affect how people think. Postman notes, 'Media ecology looks into the matter of

how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival.<sup>1</sup> As an approach to communication study, media ecology describes this complex system and tracks how it changes.

An examination of delivery systems shows them as part of an information management system. Classical rhetoric illustrates this since it shaped the patterns of knowledge and communication that prevail in the West. Ancient rhetoric described not merely how to deliver a speech, but a wider practice that defined education and knowledge. Developed in a predominantly oral culture, rhetoric describes practices that evolved to help cultures preserve those things essential to their identity and survival. Without the technology of writing, people had to manage key cultural information (how to grow or find food, how to make weapons or build ships, religious practices, key points of history, and so on) through memory, recitation, and communal participation. These activities of rhetoric include finding arguments and discovering knowledge; the presentation of knowledge in ways that the hearers could understand; the arrangement of knowledge in pleasing and memorable ways; techniques to recall what the speaker had learned; and the actual performance and delivery of the message. From a media ecology perspective these describe a way of thinking, learning and communicating based on the delivery system. Though not discussing the evolution of rhetoric in these terms, Ong calls attention to its power of organization as classical rhetoric shaped and defined education and culture until and beyond the Renaissance.<sup>2</sup>

In his better known work on orality and literacy,<sup>3</sup> Ong outlines some of the ways that a proto-rhetoric worked in oral cultures to manage key information: the use of ‘heavy’ characters to anchor ideas, the use of proverbs to frame wisdom, the use of repetition to aid memory, the use of narrative and family relationships to organize information, and so on. Kelber<sup>4</sup> shows how some of these practices apply in the Scriptures as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Postman. ‘The reformed English curriculum’, in Alvin C. Eurich (ed), *High School 1980: The Shape of the Future in American Secondary Education* (New York: Pitman, 1970), 160-168. (Quoted in ‘What is media ecology’ (Neil Postman), retrieved December 24, 2012 from [http://www.media-ecology.org/media\\_ecology/index.html](http://www.media-ecology.org/media_ecology/index.html)),

<sup>2</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue; From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 53-91.

<sup>3</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word* (New York and London: Methuen, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. Rpt. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); Werner H. Kelber, ‘The Work of Walter Ong and Biblical Scholarship’, in Sara van

The Hebrew culture and the early Christians had to manage religious information; both employed the cultural tools that fit into the broad patterns described above, though the specific oral tools varied. Less remarked, but present in most cultures, is the use of images, architecture, or other aides-memoire to supplement or prompt oral recall. The patterns form an ecology of information storage, education, communication and delivery systems that find a place in the spread of the Bible.

### Transforming Memory and Delivery

Four of the modes of the Bible, and the transformations from one to another, illustrate the link between the Bible itself, systems of preservation, delivery, and other aspects of communication. As a collection of religious materials, the Bible begins in a combination of oral and written forms (as well as hybrid forms like dictation in which the speaker creates an oral discourse for writing). The oral forms existed in an ecology of memory, live performance, communal interaction, and variation with remarkable consistency, as Dunn<sup>5</sup> points out. As such, the Bible existed only in what Dunn terms 'oral memory', that is, in performance or in communal recollection. The delivery of the oral Bible was in many ways the Bible. Such an ecology includes the context of worship, interpretation, homiletics, discussion, and the various roles within the community taken on by those who recall the material or apply it. The wisdom of the wise, for example, consists in knowing which proverb to apply in a given situation.<sup>6</sup> The faith of the community comes by hearing.

The first transformation, from oral discourse to writing, actually creates the Bible, as the sacred materials become *biblia*, 'the writings' or 'the books'. The earliest forms consisted of scrolls of papyrus or parchment. Because of their limited capacity, their cost, and the limited number of those who could read them, the scrolls did not replace the oral techniques, but added elements to the information management of ancient cultures. Later, people used the codex as a storage format. It had greater information storage capacity than a scroll and allowed easier access to material (a reader could page through it quickly). In a smaller format than a scroll, the codex gained in portability as well.<sup>7</sup> In either format, writing supplemented memory and enabled the recorded words to travel and to move through time separated from the oral memory. As items separable from a

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den Berg and Thomas M. Walsh (eds), *Language, Culture, and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S. J.* (New York: Hampton Press, Inc., 2011), 49-67.

<sup>5</sup> James D. G. Dunn, 'Jesus in Oral Memory: The Initial Stages of the Jesus tradition', in Dorothy Donnelly (ed), *Jesus: A Colloquium in the Holy Land* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 84-145.

<sup>6</sup> Ong, *Orality*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 113-116.

community, these writings often required translation, especially as they found their way to other cultures.

Over time, an ecology of a text developed: texts required papyri or parchment, inks, and the skilled workers to prepare them. Texts required scribes to record oral performance or dictation, copyists to reproduce them, and readers who mastered the interpretation of writing. These in turn required norms of writing and schools to teach the norms to students. Texts created a market of sellers and traders. Eventually, texts also acquired decoration – whether to help a reader find a page or to make the text more valuable, even to those who could not read.<sup>8</sup> Within this ecology of the text, the Bible existed as a book among books, for the same industry that created, decorated, sold and read the Bible also did the same for Greek and Latin writings of all sorts. The ecology took centuries to develop, as did the settling of the canon – the selection of writings that the Christian church accepted.<sup>9</sup> As in any ecosystem, the participating groups affected each other: the information management of the Bible became part of the information management of classical culture just as the latter informed the Bible. As writing became normative in cultures, it changed aspects of information management. People no longer depended on rhetoric for finding information or recalling it. Expression became more concise; formal logic increased in importance over narrative.<sup>10</sup> Writing implied a fixity not just of form but of content; writing also lent importance to spatial arrangement, to the appearance of the page and the placement of information on each page. And writing intensified particular kinds of linear thinking, words or concepts following one another on a page.<sup>11</sup>

The next significant transformation in the information management of the Bible had less to do with information storage (writing) than with book production (automation). Printing automated the production of books and thus increased the reach of the book and more or less amplified each of the characteristics of writing. Printing lowered the cost of books, which led to an increased production. The increased production and availability of books led to a rise in literacy along with the greater development of a book trade and a wider variety of available reading materials. Among other things, that wider set of materials included ancient texts, biblical editions and contemporary writings. The ancient texts honed the language skills of translators; the biblical editions improved the quality of the works available; and the contemporary writings fostered a desire to read the

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<sup>8</sup> Carl Nordenfalk, *Book Illumination: Early Middle Ages* (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira SA, 1995 [1957]), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Beal, *Rise*, 106-07.

<sup>10</sup> Ong, *Orality*, 103ff.

<sup>11</sup> Shane Hipsps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 58ff.

Bible.<sup>12</sup> Booksellers and church reformers in the early days of print produced vernacular language editions of the Bible, but also commentaries and annotated editions, combining interpretation with the text of the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

The printed page also contributed to the ecology of information management. With identical copies, printers and editors introduced reference systems – chapter and verse and pagination, but also tables of contents and indices. Rather than trusting in memory, people referred to a printed location. In the larger scheme of things, the French educational reformer Peter Ramus used the print system to hasten the reconfiguration that classical rhetoric had begun several centuries earlier.<sup>14</sup> In the centuries after printing and Ramus, the information management system of the West underwent dramatic changes: books replaced memory systems; alphabetical order replaced rhetorical arrangement; the essay replaced the disputation; abstract analysis supplemented narrative; scientific empiricism grew up alongside of traditional learning; the Bible became an object of scientific study.<sup>15</sup> While each of these affects the Bible – from the publication of recovered manuscripts to the tradition of higher criticism – the emergence of a book trade in the Bible had an equally powerful impact, both benefitting from and fuelling the growth of churches. Bible publishing emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries along with expanded efforts in translation into European languages.<sup>16</sup> But a more distant part of the ecosystem of the West coincided with the advent of printing: the voyages of discovery that put Western Europe into contact with Asia, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere. For the Christian missionary movement, the printed Bible took on huge significance, with missionaries carrying and distributing copies and collaborating with indigenous peoples to translate the Bible.<sup>17</sup>

The third transformation in information management that affected the Bible began only in the last century: the move into what people call ‘new media’. Depending on how one draws the line, such new media could include visual media like film and television, expanded aural media like

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<sup>12</sup> Paul A. Soukup, ‘The King James Version: A Media Ecology Analysis’, paper presented to the 46th Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Francisco, CA, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Beal, *Rise*, 120-31.

<sup>14</sup> Ong, *Ramus*, 171ff.

<sup>15</sup> Ong, *Ramus*, 225ff; Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Soukup, *King James*.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Noss (ed), *A History of Bible Translation* (Manchester, UK: St. Jerome/Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007); John David K. Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana)* (Manchester, UK: St. Jerome/Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2011).

radio and recording technologies, and digital media including electronic storage and distribution systems. All of them have added to the ways that people understand, recall, and manipulate knowledge. The aural media, for example, returned in some ways to the older rhetorical tradition, recalling ways that people processed information orally, even though these media retain many of the characteristics learned from writing and print (a phenomenon that Ong terms ‘secondary orality’<sup>18</sup>). Alongside these, the visual media present information in a seemingly more naturalistic way, in the images and sounds of daily life. In these media in particular, the information storage, presentation, and retrieval take on a predominantly narrative form. That form spills over into gaming, for example, where the viewer becomes a participant in an artificial world that presents and manages knowledge in predictable ways. Supported by a massive industry of creative artists and writers, production companies, delivery networks, sales and marketing groups, schools and training facilities, data warehouses, and much more, the new media have their own ecology within the larger communication ecology. The sheer volume of material overwhelms any given user and many indexing systems. However, older information patterns have not disappeared: the new media take their place alongside books and writing, art, music, oral discourse, and storytelling and incorporate them in new ways. To borrow the biological metaphor, this newer ecosystem involves an evolution of the older ones: it retains some aspects, transforms others, and leaves some behind.

This world affects the Bible as well. Churches, artists, and translators have brought the Bible into the new media, beginning with filmmakers in the earliest days of film<sup>19</sup> and continuing to contemporary amateur YouTube Bible videos. People have recorded audio Bibles, drawn animated Bibles, created graphic novel versions, coded online Bibles for smart phones and tablet computers, and even created Bible games. Bible publishers continue to print Bibles, but since the overall ecosystem has changed, people look to the newer formats in which they already receive other information. In some ways the oral tradition of the Bible has evolved and re-emerged into these new media.

### **Consequences of a Changing Ecology**

As this summary suggests, each change in the communication environment affects the Bible, its delivery and distribution, but also people’s experience of the Bible, their use of the Bible, their knowledge of the Bible, their

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<sup>18</sup> Walter J. Ong, ‘The Literate Orality of Popular Culture Today’, in Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), 284-303).

<sup>19</sup> Terry Lindvall, ‘Religion and Film: Part I: History and Criticism’, *Communication Research Trends*, 23:4 (December 2004), 1-44.

understanding of the Bible, their recall of the Bible, and so on. In the early centuries of Christianity, with written scrolls and codices, perhaps only 10% of the population could read. Most experienced the Bible by hearing, whether during worship or in performances, or by Bible stories illustrated in mosaics, sculpture, or art. People knew the Bible not as a book but as narratives of Jesus, as letters from St. Paul, as recited passages from the prophets, psalms, or other parts of the Hebrew Bible. Most people never saw the Bible as a book and, for the most part, a Bible in today's terms – as a collection of Old and New Testament books – did not exist<sup>20</sup>: 'book' technology could not publish something of the size of today's Bible, nor could groups afford the copies. People lived the Bible in sermons, stories, representations, and oral memory. The delivery was the narrative.

As literacy spread, those who could read (often monks and nuns) produced manuscript books. Those who could not read began to see a Bible: books highly decorated with illustrations and adorned with precious inks, metals, and jewels and displayed in churches. The available communication technology focused on showing the value of the Bible, but almost as an icon rather than something for reading. Churches became 'Bibles in stone'<sup>21</sup> where Christians saw biblical narratives rather than read them. Literacy demanded too much time and too much education and too many copies – all things beyond what medieval people could afford. Only the advent of printing changed the situation enough for people to afford books, learn to read, have a desire to read. Now people could hold a Bible, own a Bible, read a Bible. The very experience of the Bible changed. The fixity of print – every page in each edition identical, each word locked into place – helped make the Bible something unchanging, something that stayed the same not as oral memory but as words that one could check on a page. Such a Bible lived less in the community's preaching and discussion and more on the page, with fixed notes and interpretations and often separate from a community. The delivery of the Bible became the delivery or shipping of a book.

These few observations highlight some aspects of the ecology of the Bible:

- From the advent of writing to our own day, the Bible depends increasingly on technology: first the technology of writing and paper making, then the technology of printing, and now the various digital technologies. Without technology, the Bible as we know it would not exist.
- The technologized Bible exists separately from a community. Those who produce the Bible as an artefact may never know those who read or study it. And, beginning with private reading, the reader needs silence and a certain measure of isolation. The printed Bible

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<sup>20</sup> Beal, *Rise*, 114.

<sup>21</sup> Barr Ferree, 'Bibles in Stone', *New England Magazine*, 24:3 (1898), 162-177.

and even the YouTube Bible provide a solitary experience. In an ecological analysis such an experience correlates with shifting understandings of the Church and a shifting sense of what constitutes the Bible. What people ‘deliver’ when they deliver the Bible has changed over the years.

- New forms of the Bible, beginning with printed books, increased the distribution of the Bible, with more people having Bibles. But the Bible, so widely distributed, also became a commodity in the publishing industry, complete with marketing, branding, and other aspects inherited from the wider communication context.
- The very multiplicity of forms and marketing of the Bible led to a loss of ‘aura’.<sup>22</sup> The more familiar the form – plainly bound, widely available, a click away, given away as a portion, not so dissimilar from other mediated content – the less special. God’s word appears like so many other elements in the communication ecosystem.

The changing information management systems, as manifest in communication media and practices, highlight changes in the ways in which people experience the Bible. In the contemporary world, we tend to think of Bible delivery or distribution, ideas based on the practices of the printing press. Such practices inadvertently separate the word of God from oral practices, making it appear as a ‘thing’ rather than as a living word. (The same thinking separated sender, message, medium, and receiver in early communication study.) Even though new media challenge this object-centred way of thinking, people still unconsciously think of ‘something’ digital, for example, rather than an experience created in the media. What may be a contemporary version of oral memory becomes a ‘digital thing’.

As believers, we remain confident that the word of God remains the word of God, but the changing information management and communication systems challenge us to let the word of God encounter our world in its freedom.

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<sup>22</sup>Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations* (trans. Harry Zohn; ed. Hannah Arendt; New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 217–51.

# CONCLUSION

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# THE BIBLE AS THE CORE OF MISSION: '...FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO'

Knud Jørgensen

It happened at the UBS assembly in Addis Ababa in 1973. I was there as a radio producer for Radio Voice of the Gospel (situated in Addis Ababa) and was hi-jacked into one of the working groups. We were to deliberate and report on the role of the Bible in society. This was at a time when liberation theology was spreading around the world and into Southern Africa as 'black theology'. Our presentation was explosive: "The Bible is a bomb!" – dramatically illustrated with 'bombs' thrown from the gallery in Africa Hall.

The metaphor resonates with a number of biblical texts about how "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword..." (Hebr. 4:12). The word of God is indeed the source of divine power (cf. Gen 1:3ff; Jn 1:3; Rom 1:16). The Spirit and the Word can overtake us as in the case of the Apostles and empower us. The Word of God can be the source of energy in the heart of the Church and world, as Thomas Osborne says.<sup>1</sup> In the same way the reformer Martin Luther talked about how "The Bible is alive – it has hands and grabs hold of me, it has feet and runs after me". My years in Ethiopia and East Africa brought home to me, the academic theologian from Denmark, that the Scriptures are alive! My colleagues believed the power of the Word; sometimes to the extent that it encouraged the use of proof texts. Philip Jenkins illustrates how the Bible can become almost a super fetish in its own right or a tool for divination.<sup>2</sup>

Today I would propose a different metaphor from the bomb. For me and for others our relation to Scripture has become *a love affair*. In the stories of Scripture I meet the God and Father who, bending down, holds me in the hollow of his hand. The meta-narrative to the biblical stories is God searching for us that we may be saved. I find in Scripture God's 'downward

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Osborne, "Ignorantia Scripturae ignorantia Christi est" (St. Jerome): Reflections on the knowledge of Scripture and the New Evangelization'. This is one of the chapters in this volume. *When I in the following refer only to author and title, I am referring to a chapter in this volume. Such reference in the footnotes will only be made the first time I refer to the author.*

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity. Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36f.

movement', as Kvarme expresses it.<sup>3</sup> Van der Meer quotes the Cape Town Commitment: "We love the word of God. The Bible tells the universal story of creation, fall, redemption in history, and new creation... At the center of this story are the climactic saving events of the cross and resurrection of Christ which constitute the heart of the gospel. This story of God's mission defines our identity, drives our mission..."<sup>4</sup> In the chapters of this volume on Bible in Mission I meet people who in various ways reflect the same love affair – the word of God has, so to speak, entered my blood stream, it is the place where I find who I am, it is the door to my Lord and it is the design for living.

By way of conclusion let me highlight a few of the perspectives and leitmotifs I have found in this book. The first perspective relates to how the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* speaks about "a symphony of the word" expressed in multiple ways. The Bible is the book of God but certainly also the book of man, bringing together a chorus of voices. In the same manner the contributors to this book play a *contemporary symphony* of how the biblical message takes shape in manifold ways around the world, in different settings and among various audiences. Here is the contrast between modernity and the biblical narrative and how this encounter is played out in a post-modern context when human mastery and meaningless randomness are confronted by the freedom and purpose of God and the freedom of humans to obey or to resist God and his purpose.<sup>5</sup> Here are illustrations of the Bible as a text and tool for mission, including the central role of Bible translation in mission.<sup>6</sup> Simon Crisp takes us on a fascinating, and for many, unknown journey into an Orthodox landscape where the local language in the translation of biblical and liturgical texts was already in use when Cyril and Methodios brought the gospel to the Slavs.<sup>7</sup> Suee Yan Yu tells the story of how translation into Miao has resulted in "vibrant churches in almost every village, with hymns and choruses radiating out of the hills and mountains, blending in with the chirping of birds and the sounds of rustling leaves in pristine nature. For the Miao, the Bible and the hymn book are the only literature they have, made available after decades of hard work, and they treasure these books".<sup>8</sup>

From Kenya we learn about the role of Scripture in being a Good Samaritan among victims of HIV/AIDS.<sup>9</sup> From Cameroon comes the voice of oral communication and of 'biblical performance criticism' and the

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<sup>3</sup> Ole Christian Kvarme, 'The Bible in Mission – and the Surprising Ways of God'.

<sup>4</sup> Antonia van der Meer, 'The Bible in Mission: Evangelical/Pentecostal View'.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Bauckham, 'The Modern/Postmodern West'.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Carriker, 'The Bible as Text for Mission'.

<sup>7</sup> Simon Crisp, 'Orthodox Perspectives on Bible and Mission'.

<sup>8</sup> Suee Yan Yu, 'The Impact and Role of the Bible in Big Flowerly Miao Community'.

<sup>9</sup> David Hammond & Immanuel Kofi Agamah, 'The Bible in Mission: The United Bible Societies HIV Good Samaritan Program'.

importance for oral style translation to build upon traditional narratives. The steps in this type of translation process are also relevant for other types of translation.<sup>10</sup> Both here and in Mitchell's case study about the Quechua people<sup>11</sup> are illustrations of how Scripture finds expression in song and hymnody. Mitchell adds another voice to the symphony, the use of radio to give a voice to the voiceless. Both here and in Tamez' chapter about how the Bible message can empower women<sup>12</sup> are stories of biblical texts helping to give dignity and self-respect to people and, in the case of women, to re-establish equitable relationships.

A fresh perspective on the role of biblical texts and a biblical worldview comes from two case studies (Zimbabwe and Kenya) which, in different ways, illustrate how the Bible and care of creation are essential facets of God's mission.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of biblical storytelling keeps emerging, perhaps especially when sharing Scripture with Muslims.<sup>14</sup> In the same context we hear about how the Bible plays an essential part in conversation and dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Lalsingkima sings the same song as he describes the conversation with Hindus.<sup>15</sup> There is a longing to join Christian scriptures among many Hindus; the primacy of scripture applies to both Hindus and Christians, while there are major hermeneutical differences between a cyclical and a linear worldview and between a faith with no prophets and a faith with a strong prophetic voice. 'Dialogue and mission' remains a central leitmotif. Kisskalt uses the term 'hermeneutical dialogue', involving the Bible, the missionary, the (ecumenical) churches, and the addressees.<sup>16</sup> The Bible is placed in the midst of a dialogue triangle, where the three sides are the mission agent, the churches and the addressees. This hermeneutical model of reading the Bible contains, he says, a huge dynamic from which all parts of the mission process can profit.

*The voices and instruments in this contemporary symphony of the biblical message are, in my view, the most essential contribution of this volume.* Playing out this symphony in our shifting societies and cultures must also remind us, as Soukup says,<sup>17</sup> that each change in the

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<sup>10</sup> Dan Fitzgerald, 'Baka Bible Translation and Oral Biblical Narrative Performance'.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Mitchell, 'Bible Translation, the Quechua People and Protestant Church Growth in the Andes'.

<sup>12</sup> Elsa Tamez, 'The Bible in Mission: Women Facing the Word'.

<sup>13</sup> Allison M. Howell, 'The Bible and Care of Creation'.

<sup>14</sup> K. Thomas, 'Bible in Mission in the Islamic Context'.

<sup>15</sup> Lalsingkima Pachuau, 'The Bible in Christian Missions among the Hindus: The Communicability and Reception of the Bible in the Hindu Context'.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Kisskalt, 'Bible Hermeneutics in Mission – a Western Protestant Perspective'.

<sup>17</sup> Paul A. Soukup, 'Information Management and Delivery of the Bible'.

communication environment affects the Bible, its delivery and distribution, but also people's experience of the Bible, their use of the Bible, their knowledge of the Bible, their understanding of the Bible, their recall of the Bible, and so on. This has been the case all the way through history, from the Early Church via Gutenberg and to today's social media. This reminder is therefore even more important in our contemporary information-oriented society.

A second leitmotif or perspective has to do with *the importance of hermeneutics*. Inspired by Paul Ricoeur, Carriker focuses on three hermeneutical planes or perspectives: the meaning "within" the text, the meaning "behind" the text, and the meaning "in front of" the text. Mission behind the text has to do with the mission of the authors or editors: the Bible as a product of God's mission, including the historical origins of the Bible, the resurgences of Scripture (Law, Nehemiah, synagogues, early Christianity, Protestant Reformation), and new translations. Mission within the text focuses on mission as the biblical plot, including both the mission of God (the Bible as the story of God's mission, the narrative of God's plan for the world) and the mission of the church (the Bible as the history of missions: biblical foundations for the missionary ministry of the church, and the missional place of the readers). And mission in front of the text has to do with mission in the perception of the readers: The Bible as a missionary tool, including publication and distribution of the Bible, preaching and hearing of the Bible, special needs of audiences, and new translations. Each of the three perspectives makes its own important contribution and helps us to make more explicit the missionary motives and intentions of the authors and the communities that contributed to the production of the various biblical documents; it clarifies the missional plot "within" the text that runs through Scripture. And that in turn is the basis for reflection on the missional location of the readers of these texts throughout history to this day and in each social and ethnic context.

Michael Kisskalt outlines another hermeneutical model which demands that we respect firstly the historical context of the Bible and secondly the context of the whole of the Bible. A third aspect of understanding biblical texts correctly is to look at their impact in the history ("Wirkungsgeschichte" in German) of Christendom and in Christian systematic theology. This helps us recognise the narrative context of the text and it helps us not to use the Bible like a quarry where you dig out single stones. Every single biblical narrative is part of the overarching biblical narrative.

Kisskalt also refers to the Protestant key to understand Scripture: "ob sie Christum treiben oder nicht" (whether the texts point to Christ or not). The Reformers emphasized the necessary balance between a Christ-centered faith (*solus Christus*) and a faith based on the totality and unity of the biblical canon (*sola scriptura*). Kvarme suggests that we, in line with both early Church Fathers and Reformers, today add the necessary balance

between God as Creator and God as Savior. It is the biblical canon in its entirety which reveals to us who God is, how he acts and what the purpose and goal of his mission are. It also opens our eyes with renewed awe and wonder at what he has done and does in creation, in history and for our salvation.

A similar Christological focus is expressed by St. Jerome: Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. In Osborne's opinion this implies that an in-depth knowledge of Jesus Christ can only occur through an in-depth knowledge of the Scriptures. It is Jesus who announced the Good News (the Gospel), and the basic way of knowing Jesus and his ministry passes by way of the Gospel narratives and, more largely, by way of the Scriptures, both New and Old Testament. One may here note that there is agreement about the hermeneutical key among the Protestant Kiskalt and Kvarme and the Catholic Osborne. This agreement would probably also include what Osborne refers to as a necessary 'self-critique of our way of reading Scripture'.

I might add that in the Scriptures I encounter a linear view of history and not the cyclical understanding that we may find in e.g. Hinduism (as described by Lalsingkimā Pachuau). In fact, 'history' as a process of events towards a final goal only comes into being when Yahweh enters the human scene and acts in the world and with his people. That is why the Israelite credo expresses faith in the Lord by describing what he has done to them and where they have met him – in Egypt, at the Red Sea, in the desert and the Holy Land (Deut 26:4ff). In this way history – what the Lord has done in the big and the small 'histories' – is a key to understanding the Bible in mission, both yesterday and tomorrow.

A third perspective is how the Bible is read through *the eyes of children and youth and the eyes of the poor*. Illustrations and case studies on this leitmotif are found in a fair number of chapters in this book – which is a sign and a signal of our concern that the Bible also is a book of the future and a book for the marginalized. Wendy Strachan's treatment of the theme of children and the Bible is particularly illuminating, and often what she says about children would be equally true of adults. Let me illustrate with a quote from Strachan:

As children experience God's story in the Bible, they will begin to ask fundamental Big Questions: What is God like? How can I expect him to act? How does he expect me to act? They will begin to make connections with other parts of God's story and ponder: Why does God act in this way? Why is it important for God that we know this story? And then they will begin to make connections from the story in the Bible to the story of their own life. Who am I like in this story? How would I have acted in the same circumstances? Does this story remind me of something that has happened to me? Would I like this story to be true for me?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Wendy Strachan, 'Children, Mission and The Bible: A Global Perspective'.

As adults we may learn how children come to God's word with their emotions, able to feel the joy of celebration, the despair of betrayal, anger at injustice, how they come to it with their curiosity and with a sense of expectation that anything might happen. And how they come with their intellect, ready to discover and ponder new things.

Illustrations of this are found in Edesio Sanchez' case study on *The Bible and Children in Mission*,<sup>19</sup> focusing on Latin America. Here he paints the picture of a biblical theology from the child's perspective – a theology filled with “God's surprises”, full of the imagination and creativity that enable children to dream and build a world of solidarity, social justice, concern for the other, especially for the weakest and most vulnerable.

The case studies on youth also belong under this perspective, such as Philip Hughes' story from Australia where he tries to discover ways in which young people personally engage with the Bible – their curiosity and the key role of group practice as the best way for engaging with Scripture.<sup>20</sup> Steve Bird<sup>21</sup> tells the story about a campus research project and asks whether the way Christians engage with their holy text affects the degree to which they live their life as an intentional message to others? A message meant to persuade others to adopt the biblical worldview. Blenkinsop's and Swindon's studies on postmodern youth also fall within this category – how Scripture may relate to young people in the church and how it may speak to youngsters outside the church.<sup>22</sup>

Several case studies illustrate how the Bible is read through *the eyes of the poor and the marginalized*. A colleague and friend of mine, Wonsuk Ma, has argued that presenting the Bible in a way suitable for American Christians means forfeiting its potential relevance for those peoples who today constitute the vast majority of believers:

If we put much emphasis on Israel's history [as salvation history separate from secular history], but neglect issues surrounding us, such as poverty, corruption, street children, the sex industry, oppressive rules, human rights issues, devastating environmental concerns, rising prices, etc., are we doing our job right?<sup>23</sup>

In a case study from South Africa Gerald West tells about contextual Bible study among the poor, using the liberation theology model of 'see-judge-act' and employing the Emmaus story as methodology.<sup>24</sup> A key concern that emerges from this study process is the need to provide a safe

<sup>19</sup> Edesio Sanchez, 'The Bible and Children in Mission'.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Hughes, 'Bible Engagement among Australian Young People'.

<sup>21</sup> Steve Bird, 'Scripture Engagement and Living Life as a Message: A Case Study of Students at Two Christian Colleges'.

<sup>22</sup> Adrian Blenkinsop and Naomi Swindon, 'Glazed Eyes and Disbelief'.

<sup>23</sup> Wonsuk Ma, 'Towards an Asian Pentecostal Theology', Cyberjournal for Pentecostal Charismatic Research, at <http://www.pctii.org/cyber/cyberjr/wonsuk.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Gerald West, 'Bible and Poor'.

and sacred space within which Scripture adds its voice to people's engagement with God's call to mission.

Bob Ekblad invites us to visit Tierra Nueva which is a ministry to migrant farm workers from Mexico, inmates, ex-offenders and gang members, a ministry that includes a Family Support Center, gang ministry, recovery house, farm and English and Spanish congregations.<sup>25</sup>

Peniel Rufus takes us into the Dalit landscape<sup>26</sup> and illustrates how the Bible becomes a text of life and a text for life – a text of life which resonates with the Dalits' own stories and where the Dalits may read their own stories into the biblical texts to affirm their own identity and thereby recover dignity; a text for life because it opens the door to fullness of life and provides holistic relevance. Elsa Tamez tells a similar story in her chapter about 'Women facing the Word': The Bible message may empower women, it may give them dignity and self-respect and thereby reestablish equitable relations. At the same time we must deal squarely with texts that seem to oppress women.

The poor are the first addressees of the Good News (Lk 4:18-19; Mt 5:3). This fact demands that Christian communities read the Bible from the perspective of the poor. Reading the Bible in such a way will lead us to taking an option for the poor. Or to say it even more strongly: the meaning of the Good News for the poor defines the meaning of the good news for all. As the poor are called, the real nature of the gospel becomes evident to others. Thus, the Gospel has to be mediated through what it means to be poor. In the same manner as it must be mediated through what it means to be a child. Without the poor and the children we shall not be able to comprehend the Good News.

The fourth leitmotif I want to point to is how the contributors in various ways talk about how *the Bible is reading me*. In theological terms one may point to the continued revelation through the history of the church, a revelation where I by faith appropriate anew what the Apostles appropriated directly from the Lord. In that sense the biblical story is not "a closed metanarrative", but open – in various ways. Every day we stand on the threshold of promise where God opens the horizon and calls us to join in. And he does so by letting the Bible read me, by showing me that "I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts and sanctified and kept me in true faith". This is how Martin Luther explained the third article of the Apostles' Creed – an explanation which I had to learn by heart as preparation for confirmation and which since then has been part of my blood stream. Faith is a gift and comes as a result of the Bible reading me.

<sup>25</sup> Bob Ekblad, 'Reading the Bible with Today's Jephthahs: Scripture and Mission at Tierra Nueva'.

<sup>26</sup> Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, ' "Text of Life" and "Text For Life": The Bible as the Living and Life-Giving Word of God for the Dalits'.

Nancy Lewis<sup>27</sup> describes how the best predictor of spiritual growth is a person's self-described relationship with Jesus Christ. Here prayer and reflection are the key components in a process in which Scripture is reading me. Reflection on Scripture is the only catalyst of spiritual growth that appears in the top-five list described by Lewis. Nothing else even comes close to having the same impact as the Bible when it comes to spiritual growth. Kisskalt calls it 'impact history' – the impact Scripture has had on human beings down through history and still has today. Something profound may happen to me every day as I meet my Lord through his word: the Lord uses his word as a lens for his focus on my life; he judges me and raises me up, he gives me back my true identity as a child of the Father – and he sends me out to be salt and light and to whisper the Good News in the alleys and shout it from the roof tops.

Therefore it is so essential that we do not 'close the Bible down'. That is what we do, says Wendy Strachan, when we sanitise it, when we trivialise it, when we sentimentalise it, when we treat it as a book of rules without understanding that those rules only make sense within the context of relationship, or when we treat it as a book of stories about flawless heroes. Or to lift up a perspective dealing with the same concern, but from a quite different setting and with a different tone: Simon Crisp<sup>28</sup> reminds us of the Orthodox understanding of mission as 'liturgy after the liturgy' – our lives should be the same: liturgy and mission after the Bible has read us.

This brings us to the end. This volume has once again shown that the Christian faith has a foundational text: the Bible. The reading, interpreting and dissemination of this text lie at the core of the missionary task.<sup>29</sup> Kvarme sums it up in this way:

The Bible is the common heritage of the Church and unites Christians to participate in God's mission with an ecumenical heart and mind. Revealing and sharing with us the compassion of God, it empowers us to witness as well as to diaconia, to evangelism and dialogue. The Bible provides room for cultural diversity, but renounces secular power for a mindset of service. And it opens the horizon before us, calling us as individuals and communities to participate in God's mission "from everywhere to everywhere", Christ-centered and Spirit-driven.

Our missionary and missional commitment – and indeed our whole lives – must be built on the Word of God.

A friend of mine told me this story about the former president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda. Once he was giving a formal speech to a large group of African statesmen. As he reached the end he summarized what he had to say by singing the children's song that many of us grew up with:

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Scammacca Lewis, 'Lessons Learned from the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey'.

<sup>28</sup> Simon Crisp, 'Orthodox Perspectives on Bible and Mission'.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Ross, *Fresh Perspectives on Christian Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2010), 19.

Jesus loves me, this I know  
For the Bible tells me so.  
Little ones to him belong,  
I am weak, but he is strong.

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## APPENDIX

# THE EDINBURGH 2010 COMMON CALL

As we gather for the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, we believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God's mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Trusting in the Triune God and with a renewed sense of urgency, we are called to incarnate and proclaim the good news of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of life in abundance, and of liberation for all poor and oppressed. We are challenged to witness and evangelism in such a way that we are a living demonstration of the love, righteousness and justice that God intends for the whole world.

2. Remembering Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection for the world's salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.

3. Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing authentic life, we are called to become communities of compassion and healing, where young people are actively participating in mission, and women and men share power and responsibilities fairly, where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.

4. Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.

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5. Affirming the importance of the biblical foundations of our missional engagement and valuing the witness of the Apostles and martyrs, we are called to rejoice in the expressions of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions, the way all are equipped for mission by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God's continual calling of children and young people to further the gospel.

6. Recognising the need to shape a new generation of leaders with authenticity for mission in a world of diversities in the twenty-first century,

we are called to work together in new forms of theological education. Because we are all made in the image of God, these will draw on one another's unique charisms, challenge each other to grow in faith and understanding, share resources equitably worldwide, involve the entire human being and the whole family of God, and respect the wisdom of our elders while also fostering the participation of children.

7. Hearing the call of Jesus to make disciples of all people – poor, wealthy, marginalised, ignored, powerful, living with disability, young, and old – we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere. In joy we hear the call to receive from one another in our witness by word and action, in streets, fields, offices, homes, and schools, offering reconciliation, showing love, demonstrating grace and speaking out truth.

8. Recalling Christ, the host at the banquet, and committed to that unity for which he lived and prayed, we are called to ongoing co-operation, to deal with controversial issues and to work towards a common vision. We are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration and networking in mission, so that the world might believe.

9. Remembering Jesus' way of witness and service, we believe we are called by God to follow this way joyfully, inspired, anointed, sent and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and nurtured by Christian disciplines in community. As we look to Christ's coming in glory and judgment, we experience his presence with us in the Holy Spirit, and we invite all to join with us as we participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.

The Edinburgh 2010 Common Call emerged from the Edinburgh 2010 study process and conference to mark the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910. The Common Call was affirmed in the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall in Edinburgh on 6 June 2010 by representatives of world Christianity, including Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant churches. For further information, see [www.edinburgh2010.org](http://www.edinburgh2010.org).

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*Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*

2008 / 978-1-870345-65-1 / 226pp

The Cross reminds us that the sins of the world are not borne through the exercise of power but through Jesus Christ's submission to the will of the Father. The papers in this volume are organised in three parts: scriptural, contextual and theological. The central question being addressed is: how do Christians living in contexts, where Islam is a majority or minority religion, experience, express or think of the Cross?

Sung-wook Hong

**Naming God in Korea**

*The Case of Protestant Christianity*

2008 / 978-1-870345-66-8 / 170pp (hardback)

Since Christianity was introduced to Korea more than a century ago, one of the most controversial issues has been the Korean term for the Christian ‘God’. This issue is not merely about naming the Christian God in Korean language, but it relates to the question of theological contextualization - the relationship between the gospel and culture - and the question of Korean Christian identity. This book demonstrates the nature of the gospel in relation to cultures, i.e., the universality of the gospel expressed in all human cultures.

Hubert van Beek (Ed)

**Revisioning Christian Unity**

*The Global Christian Forum*

2009 / 978-1-870345-74-3 / 288pp (hardback)

This book contains the records of the Global Christian Forum gathering held in Limuru near Nairobi, Kenya, on 6 – 9 November 2007 as well as the papers presented at that historic event. Also included are a summary of the Global Christian Forum process from its inception until the 2007 gathering and the reports of the evaluation of the process that was carried out in 2008.

Young-hoon Lee

**The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea**

*Its Historical and Theological Development*

2009 / 978-1-870345-67-5 / 174pp (hardback)

This book traces the historical and theological development of the Holy Spirit Movement in Korea through six successive periods (from 1900 to the present time). These periods are characterized by repentance and revival (1900-20), persecution and suffering under Japanese

occupation (1920-40), confusion and division (1940-60), explosive revival in which the Pentecostal movement played a major role in the rapid growth of Korean churches (1960-80), the movement reaching out to all denominations (1980-2000), and the new context demanding the Holy Spirit movement to open new horizons in its mission engagement (2000-).

Paul Hang-Sik Cho  
**Eschatology and Ecology**

*Experiences of the Korean Church*

2010 / 978-1-870345-75-0 / 260pp (hardback)

This book raises the question of why Korean people, and Korean Protestant Christians in particular, pay so little attention to ecological issues. The author argues that there is an important connection (or elective affinity) between this lack of attention and the other-worldly eschatology that is so dominant within Korean Protestant Christianity.

Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Joshva Raja (Eds)

**The Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity**

*Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys*

2010 / 978-1-870345-80-0 / 759pp

This major reference work is the first ever comprehensive study of Theological Education in Christianity of its kind. With contributions from over 90 international scholars and church leaders, it aims to be easily accessible across denominational, cultural, educational, and geographic boundaries. The Handbook will aid international dialogue and networking among theological educators, institutions, and agencies.

David Emmanuel Singh & Bernard C Farr (Eds)

**Christianity and Education**

*Shaping of Christian Context in Thinking*

2010 / 978-1-870345-81-1 / 374pp

*Christianity and Education* is a collection of papers published in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* over a period of 15 years. The articles represent a spectrum of Christian thinking addressing issues of institutional development for theological education, theological studies in the context of global mission, contextually aware/informed education, and academies which deliver such education, methodologies and personal reflections.

J. Andrew Kirk

**Civilisations in Conflict?**

*Islam, the West and Christian Faith*

2011 / 978-1-870345-87-3 / 205pp

Samuel Huntington's thesis, which argues that there appear to be aspects of Islam that could be on a collision course with the politics and values of Western societies, has provoked much controversy. The purpose of this study is to offer a particular response to Huntington's thesis by making a comparison between the origins of Islam and Christianity.

David Emmanuel Singh (Ed)

**Jesus and the Incarnation**

*Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*

2011 / 978-1-870345-90-3 / 245pp

In the dialogues of Christians with Muslims nothing is more fundamental than the Cross, the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus. Building on the *Jesus and the Cross*, this book contains voices of Christians living in various 'Islamic contexts' and reflecting on the Incarnation of Jesus. The aim and hope of these reflections is that the papers weaved around

the notion of 'the Word' will not only promote dialogue among Christians on the roles of the Person and the Book but, also, create a positive environment for their conversations with Muslim neighbours.

Ivan M Satyavrata  
**God Has Not left Himself Without Witness**  
2011 / 978-1-870345-79-8 / 264pp

Since its earliest inception the Christian Church has had to address the question of what common ground exists between Christian faiths and other religions. This issue is not merely of academic interest but one with critical existential and socio-political consequences. This study presents a case for the revitalization of the fulfillment tradition based on a recovery and assessment of the fulfillment approaches of Indian Christian converts in the pre-independence period.

Bal Krishna Sharma  
**From this World to the Next**  
*Christian Identity and Funerary Rites in Nepal*  
2013 / 978-1-908355-08-9 / 238pp

This book explores and analyses funerary rite struggles in a nation where Christianity is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and many families have multi-faith, who go through traumatic experiences at the death of their family members. The author has used an applied theological approach to explore and analyse the findings in order to address the issue of funerary rites with which the Nepalese church is struggling.

J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyada  
**Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity**  
*Interpretations from an African Context*  
2013 / 978-1-908355-07-2 / 194pp

Pentecostalism is the fastest growing stream of Christianity in the world. The real evidence for the significance of Pentecostalism lies in the actual churches they have built and the numbers they attract. This work interprets key theological and missiological themes in African Pentecostalism by using material from the live experiences of the movement itself.

Isabel Apawo Phiri & Dietrich Werner (Eds)  
**Handbook of Theological Education in Africa**  
2013 / 978-1-908355-19-5 / 1110pp (hardback)

The *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* is a wake-up call for African churches to give proper prominence to theological education institutions and their programmes which serve them. It is unique, comprehensive and ambitious in its aim and scope.

Hope Antone, Wati Longchar, Hyunju Bae, Huang Po Ho, Dietrich Werner (Eds)  
**Asian Handbook for Theological Education and Ecumenism**  
2013 / 978-1-908355-30-0 / 675pp (hardback)

This impressive and comprehensive book focuses on key resources for teaching Christian unity and common witness in Asian contexts. It is a collection of articles that reflects the ongoing 'double wrestle' with the texts of biblical tradition as well as with contemporary contexts. It signals an investment towards the future of the ecumenical movement in Asia.

David Emmanuel Singh and Bernard C Farr (Eds)

**The Bible and Christian Ethics**

2013 / 978-1-908355-20-1 / 217pp

This book contains papers from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies' quarterly journal, Transformation, on the topic of Christian Ethics. Here, Mission Studies is understood in its widest sense to also encompass Christian Ethics. At the very hearts of it lies the Family as the basic unit of society. All the papers together seek to contribute to understanding how Christian thought is shaped in contexts each of which poses its own challenge to Christian living in family and in broader society.

Martin Allaby

**Inequality, Corruption and the Church**

*Challenges & Opportunities in the Global Church*

2013 / 978-1-908355-16-4 / 228pp

Why are economic inequalities greatest in the southern countries where most people are Christians? This book teases out the influences that have created this situation, and concludes that Christians could help reduce economic inequalities by opposing corruption. Interviews in the Philippines, Kenya, Zambia and Peru reveal opportunities and challenges for Christians as they face up to corruption.

Paul Alexander and Al Tizon (Eds)

**Following Jesus**

*Journeys in Radical Discipleship – Essays in Honor of Ronald J Sider*

2013 / 978-1-908355-27-0 / 228pp

Ronald J. Sider and the organization that he founded, *Evangelicals for Social Action*, are most respected for their pioneering work in the area of evangelical social concern. However, Sider's great contribution to social justice is but a part of a larger vision – namely, biblical discipleship. His works, which span more than four decades, have guided the faithful to be authentic gospel-bearers in ecclesial, cultural and political arenas. This book honors Ron Sider, by bringing together a group of scholar-activists, old and young, to reflect upon the gospel and its radical implications for the 21st century.

**REGNUM STUDIES IN MISSION**

Kwame Bediako

**Theology and Identity**

*The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*

1992 / 978-1870345-10-1 / 507pp

The author examines the question of Christian identity in the context of the Graeco-Roman culture of the early Roman Empire. He then addresses the modern African predicament of quests for identity and integration.

Christopher Sugden

**Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus**

*The Practice and Theology of Christian Social Witness*

*in Indonesia and India 1974–1996*

1997 / 1-870345-26-6 / 496pp

This study focuses on contemporary holistic mission with the poor in India and Indonesia combined with the call to transformation of all life in Christ with micro-credit enterprise

schemes. 'The literature on contextual theology now has a new standard to rise to' – Lamin Sanneh (Yale University, USA).

Hwa Yung

**Mangoes or Bananas?**

*The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*

1997 / 1-870345-25-5 / 274pp

Asian Christian thought remains largely captive to Greek dualism and Enlightenment rationalism because of the overwhelming dominance of Western culture. Authentic contextual Christian theologies will emerge within Asian Christianity with a dual recovery of confidence in culture and the gospel.

Keith E. Eitel

**Paradigm Wars**

*The Southern Baptist International Mission Board Faces the Third Millennium*

1999 / 1-870345-12-6 / 140pp

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest denominational mission agency in North America. This volume chronicles the historic and contemporary forces that led to the IMB's recent extensive reorganization, providing the most comprehensive case study to date of a historic mission agency restructuring to continue its mission purpose into the twenty-first century more effectively.

Samuel Jayakumar

**Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion**

*Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*

1999 / 81-7214-497-0 / 434pp

(Published jointly with ISPCK)

The main focus of this historical study is social change and transformation among the Dalit Christian communities in India. Historiography tests the evidence in the light of the conclusions of the modern Dalit liberation theologians.

Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden (Eds)

**Mission as Transformation**

*A Theology of the Whole Gospel*

1999 / 978-18703455-13-2 / 522pp

This book brings together in one volume twenty five years of biblical reflection on mission practice with the poor from around the world. This volume helps anyone understand how evangelicals, struggling to unite evangelism and social action, found their way in the last twenty five years to the biblical view of mission in which God calls all human beings to love God and their neighbour; never creating a separation between the two.

Christopher Sugden

**Gospel, Culture and Transformation**

2000 / 1-870345-32-3 / 152pp

*A Reprint, with a New Introduction,*

*of Part Two of Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus*

*Gospel, Culture and Transformation* explores the practice of mission especially in relation to transforming cultures and communities. - 'Transformation is to enable God's vision of society to be actualised in all relationships: social, economic and spiritual, so that God's will

may be reflected in human society and his love experienced by all communities, especially the poor.’

Bernhard Ott

**Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating Mission and Theological Education**

*A Critical Assessment of some Recent Developments*

*in Evangelical Theological Education*

2001 / 1-870345-14-9 / 382pp

*Beyond Fragmentation* is an enquiry into the development of Mission Studies in evangelical theological education in Germany and German-speaking Switzerland between 1960 and 1995. The author undertakes a detailed examination of the paradigm shifts which have taken place in recent years in both the theology of mission and the understanding of theological education.

Gideon Githiga

**The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism**

*Development of Church and State Relations in Kenya, with Particular Reference to the Years after Political Independence 1963-1992*

2002 / 1-870345-38-x / 218pp

‘All who care for love, peace and unity in Kenyan society will want to read this careful history by Bishop Githiga of how Kenyan Christians, drawing on the Bible, have sought to share the love of God, bring his peace and build up the unity of the nation, often in the face of great difficulties and opposition.’ Canon Dr Chris Sugden, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

Myung Sung-Hoon, Hong Young-Gi (Eds)

**Charis and Charisma**

*David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church*

2003 / 978-1870345-45-3 / 218pp

This book discusses the factors responsible for the growth of the world’s largest church. It expounds the role of the Holy Spirit, the leadership, prayer, preaching, cell groups and creativity in promoting church growth. It focuses on God’s grace (charis) and inspiring leadership (charisma) as the two essential factors and the book’s purpose is to present a model for church growth worldwide.

Samuel Jayakumar

**Mission Reader**

*Historical Models for Wholistic Mission in the Indian Context*

2003 / 1-870345-42-8 / 250pp

(Published jointly with ISPCCK)

This book is written from an evangelical point of view revalidating and reaffirming the Christian commitment to wholistic mission. The roots of the ‘wholistic mission’ combining ‘evangelism and social concerns’ are to be located in the history and tradition of Christian evangelism in the past; and the civilizing purpose of evangelism is compatible with modernity as an instrument in nation building.

Bob Robinson

**Christians Meeting Hindus**

*An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India*

2004 / 987-1870345-39-2 / 392pp

This book focuses on the Hindu-Christian encounter, especially the intentional meeting called dialogue, mainly during the last four decades of the twentieth century, and specifically in India itself.

Gene Early

**Leadership Expectations**

*How Executive Expectations are Created and Used in a Non-Profit Setting*

2005 / 1-870345-30-9 / 276pp

The author creates an Expectation Enactment Analysis to study the role of the Chancellor of the University of the Nations-Kona, Hawaii. This study is grounded in the field of managerial work, jobs, and behaviour and draws on symbolic interactionism, role theory, role identity theory and enactment theory. The result is a conceptual framework for developing an understanding of managerial roles.

Tharcisse Gatwa

**The Churches and Ethnic Ideology in the Rwandan Crises 1900-1994**

2005 / 978-1870345-24-8 / 300pp

(Reprinted 2011)

Since the early years of the twentieth century Christianity has become a new factor in Rwandan society. This book investigates the role Christian churches played in the formulation and development of the racial ideology that culminated in the 1994 genocide.

Julie Ma

**Mission Possible**

*Biblical Strategies for Reaching the Lost*

2005 / 978-1870345-37-8 / 142pp

This is a missiology book for the church which liberates missiology from the specialists for the benefit of every believer. It also serves as a textbook that is simple and friendly, and yet solid in biblical interpretation. This book links the biblical teaching to the actual and contemporary missiological settings with examples, making the Bible come alive to the reader.

I. Mark Beaumont

**Christology in Dialogue with Muslims**

*A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims  
from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*

2005 / 978-1870345-46-0 / 227pp

This book analyses Christian presentations of Christ for Muslims in the most creative periods of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the first half of the ninth century and the second half of the twentieth century. In these two periods, Christians made serious attempts to present their faith in Christ in terms that take into account Muslim perceptions of him, with a view to bridging the gap between Muslim and Christian convictions.

Thomas Czövek,  
**Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership**  
*A Literary-Critical and Theological Interpretation of the Narrative of  
Saul, David and Solomon*  
2006 / 978-1870345-48-4 / 272pp

This book investigates the charismatic leadership of Saul, David and Solomon. It suggests that charismatic leaders emerge in crisis situations in order to resolve the crisis by the charisma granted by God. Czövek argues that Saul proved himself as a charismatic leader as long as he acted resolutely and independently from his mentor Samuel. In the author's eyes, Saul's failure to establish himself as a charismatic leader is caused by his inability to step out from Samuel's shadow.

Richard Burgess  
**Nigeria's Christian Revolution**  
*The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)*  
2008 / 978-1-870345-63-7 / 347pp

This book describes the revival that occurred among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria and the new Pentecostal churches it generated, and documents the changes that have occurred as the movement has responded to global flows and local demands. As such, it explores the nature of revivalist and Pentecostal experience, but does so against the backdrop of local socio-political and economic developments, such as decolonisation and civil war, as well as broader processes, such as modernisation and globalisation.

David Emmanuel Singh & Bernard C Farr (Eds)  
**Christianity and Cultures**  
*Shaping Christian Thinking in Context*  
2008 / 978-1-870345-69-9 / 271pp

This volume marks an important milestone, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS). The papers here have been exclusively sourced from Transformation, a quarterly journal of OCMS, and seek to provide a tripartite view of Christianity's engagement with cultures by focusing on the question: how is Christian thinking being formed or reformed through its interaction with the varied contexts it encounters? The subject matters include different strands of theological-missiological thinking, socio-political engagements and forms of family relationships in interaction with the host cultures.

Tormod Engelsen, Ernst Harbakk, Rolv Olsen, Thor Strandenæs (Eds)  
**Mission to the World**  
*Communicating the Gospel in the 21st Century:  
Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen*  
2008 / 978-1-870345-64-4 / 472pp (hardback)

Knud Jørgensen is Director of Areopagos and Associate Professor of Missiology at MF Norwegian School of Theology. This book reflects on the main areas of Jørgensen's commitment to mission. At the same time it focuses on the main frontier of mission, the world, the content of mission, the Gospel, the fact that the Gospel has to be communicated, and the context of contemporary mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Al Tizon

**Transformation after Lausanne**

*Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*

2008 / 978-1-870345-68-2 / 281pp

After Lausanne '74, a worldwide network of radical evangelical mission theologians and practitioners use the notion of "Mission as Transformation" to integrate evangelism and social concern together, thus lifting theological voices from the Two Thirds World to places of prominence. This book documents the definitive gatherings, theological tensions, and social forces within and without evangelicalism that led up to Mission as Transformation. And it does so through a global-local grid that points the way toward greater holistic mission in the 21st century.

Bambang Budijanto

**Values and Participation**

*Development in Rural Indonesia*

2009 / 978-1-870345-70-4 / 237pp

Socio-religious values and socio-economic development are inter-dependant, inter-related and are constantly changing in the context of macro political structures, economic policy, religious organizations and globalization, and micro influences such as local affinities, identity, politics, leadership and beliefs. The book argues that the comprehensive approach in understanding the socio-religious values of each of the three local Lopait communities in Central Java is essential to accurately describing their respective identity.

Alan R. Johnson

**Leadership in a Slum**

*A Bangkok Case Study*

2009 / 978-1-870345-71-2 / 238pp

This book looks at leadership in the social context of a slum in Bangkok from a different perspective than traditional studies which measure well educated Thais on leadership scales derived in the West. Using both systematic data collection and participant observation, it develops a culturally preferred model as well as a set of models based in Thai concepts that reflect on-the-ground realities. It concludes by looking at the implications of the anthropological approach for those who are involved in leadership training in Thai settings and beyond.

Titre Ande

**Leadership and Authority**

*Bula Matari and Life - Community Ecclesiology in Congo*

2010 / 978-1-870345-72-9 / 189pp

Christian theology in Africa can make significant development if a critical understanding of the socio-political context in contemporary Africa is taken seriously, particularly as Africa's post-colonial Christian leadership based its understanding and use of authority on the Bula Matari model. This has caused many problems and Titre proposes a Life-Community ecclesiology for liberating authority, here leadership is a function, not a status, and 'apostolic succession' belongs to all people of God.

Frank Kwesi Adams

**Odwira and the Gospel**

*A Study of the Asante Odwira Festival and its Significance for Christianity in Ghana*

2010 / 978-1-870345-59-0 / 232pp

The study of the Odwira festival is the key to the understanding of Asante religious and political life in Ghana. The book explores the nature of the Odwira festival longitudinally -

in pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence Ghana - and examines the Odwira ideology and its implications for understanding the Asante self-identity. Also discussed is how some elements of faith portrayed in the Odwira festival can provide a framework for Christianity to engage with Asante culture at a greater depth.

Bruce Carlton

**Strategy Coordinator**

*Changing the Course of Southern Baptist Missions*

2010 / 978-1-870345-78-1 / 273pp

This is an outstanding, one-of-a-kind work addressing the influence of the non-residential missionary/strategy coordinator's role in Southern Baptist missions. This scholarly text examines the twentieth century global missiological currents that influenced the leadership of the International Mission Board, resulting in a new paradigm to assist in taking the gospel to the nations.

Julie Ma & Wonsuk Ma

**Mission in the Spirit:**

*Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*

2010 / 978-1-870345-84-2 / 312pp

The book explores the unique contribution of Pentecostal/Charismatic mission from the beginning of the twentieth century. The first part considers the theological basis of Pentecostal/Charismatic mission thinking and practice. Special attention is paid to the Old Testament, which has been regularly overlooked by the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic movements. The second part discusses major mission topics with contributions and challenges unique to Pentecostal/Charismatic mission. The book concludes with a reflection on the future of this powerful missionary movement. As the authors served as Korean missionaries in Asia, often their missionary experiences in Asia are reflected in their discussions.

Allan Anderson, Edmond Tang (Eds)

**Asian and Pentecostal**

*The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*

2011 / 978-1870345-94-1 / 500pp

(Revised Edition)

This book provides a thematic discussion and pioneering case studies on the history and development of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the countries of South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia.

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S. Hun Kim & Wonsuk Ma (Eds)

**Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission**

2011 / 978-1-870345-89-7 / 301pp (hardback)

As a 'divine conspiracy' for Missio Dei, the global phenomenon of people on the move has shown itself to be invaluable. In 2004 two significant documents concerning Diaspora were introduced, one by the Filipino International Network and the other by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. These have created awareness of the importance of people on the move for Christian mission. Since then, Korean Diaspora has conducted similar research among Korean missions, resulting in this book

Jin Huat Tan

**Planting an Indigenous Church**

*The Case of the Borneo Evangelical Mission*

2011 / 978-1-870345-99-6 / 343pp

Dr Jin Huat Tan has written a pioneering study of the origins and development of Malaysia's most significant indigenous church. This is an amazing story of revival, renewal and transformation of the entire region chronicling the powerful effect of it evident to date! What can we learn from this extensive and careful study of the Borneo Revival, so the global Christianity will become ever more dynamic?

Bill Prevette

**Child, Church and Compassion**

*Towards Child Theology in Romania*

2012 / 978-1-908355-03-4 / 382pp

Bill Prevett comments that "children are like 'canaries in a mine shaft'; they provide a focal point for discovery and encounter of perilous aspects of our world that are often ignored." True, but miners also carried a lamp to see into the subterranean darkness. This book is such a lamp. It lights up the subterranean world of children and youth in danger of exploitation, and as it does so travels deep into their lives and also into the activities of those who seek to help them.

Samuel Cyuma

**Picking up the Pieces**

*The Church and Conflict Resolution in South Africa and Rwanda*

2012 / 978-1-908355-02-7 / 373pp

In the last ten years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world was twice confronted with unbelievable news from Africa. First, there was the end of Apartheid in South Africa, without bloodshed, due to responsible political and Church leaders. The second was the mass killings in Rwanda, which soon escalated into real genocide. Political and Church leaders had been unable to prevent this crime against humanity. In this book, the question is raised: can we compare the situation in South Africa with that in Rwanda? Can Rwandan leaders draw lessons from the peace process in South Africa?

Peter Rowan

**Proclaiming the Peacemaker**

*The Malaysian Church as an Agent of Reconciliation in a Multicultural Society*

2012 / 978-1-908355-05-8 / 268pp

With a history of racial violence and in recent years, low-level ethnic tensions, the themes of peaceful coexistence and social harmony are recurring ones in the discourse of Malaysian society. In such a context, this book looks at the role of the church as a reconciling agent, arguing that a reconciling presence within a divided society necessitates an ethos of peacemaking.

Edward Ontita

**Resources and Opportunity**

*The Architecture of Livelihoods in Rural Kenya*

2012 / 978-1-908355-04-1 / 328pp

Poor people in most rural areas of developing countries often improvise resources in unique ways to enable them make a living. Resources and Opportunity takes the view that resources are dynamic and fluid, arguing that villagers co-produce them through redefinition and renaming in everyday practice and use them in diverse ways. The book focuses on ordinary

social activities to bring out people's creativity in locating, redesigning and embracing livelihood opportunities in processes.

Kathryn Kraft

**Searching for Heaven in the Real World**

*A Sociological Discussion of Conversion in the Arab World*

2012 / 978-1-908355-15-7 / 142pp

Kathryn Kraft explores the breadth of psychological and social issues faced by Arab Muslims after making a decision to adopt a faith in Christ or Christianity, investigating some of the most surprising and significant challenges new believers face.

Wessley Lukose

**Contextual Missiology of the Spirit**

*Pentecostalism in Rajasthan, India*

2013 / 978-1-908355-09-6 / 256pp

This book explores the identity, context and features of Pentecostalism in Rajasthan, India as well as the internal and external issues facing Pentecostals. It aims to suggest 'a contextual missiology of the Spirit,' as a new model of contextual missiology from a Pentecostal perspective. It is presented as a glocal, ecumenical, transformational, and public missiology.

Paul M Miller

**Evangelical Mission in Co-operation with Catholics**

*A Study of Evangelical Tensions*

2013 / 978-1-908355-17-1 / 291pp

This book brings the first thorough examination of the discussions going on within Evangelicalism about the viability of a good conscience dialogue with Roman Catholics. Those who are interested in evangelical world missions and Roman Catholic views of world missions will find this informative.

**REGNUM RESOURCES FOR MISSION**

Knud Jørgensen

**Equipping for Service**

*Christian Leadership in Church and Society*

2012 / 978-1-908355-06-5 / 150pp

This book is written out of decades of experience of leading churches and missions in Ethiopia, Geneva, Norway and Hong Kong. Combining the teaching of Scripture with the insights of contemporary management philosophy, Jørgensen writes in a way which is practical and applicable to anyone in Christian service. "The intention has been to challenge towards a leadership relevant for work in church and mission, and in public and civil society, with special attention to leadership in Church and organisation."

Mary Miller

**What does Love have to do with Leadership?**

2013 / 978-1-908355-10-2 / 100pp

Leadership is a performing art, not a science. It is the art of influencing others, not just to accomplish something together, but to want to accomplish great things together. Mary Miller captures the art of servant leadership in her powerful book. She understands that servant leaders challenge existing processes without manipulating or overpowering people.

Mary Miller (Ed)  
**Faces of Holistic Mission**  
*Stories of the OCMS Family*  
2013 / 978-1-908355-32-4 / 104pp

There is a popular worship song that begins with the refrain, 'look what the Lord has done, look what the Lord has done'. This book does exactly that; it seeks to show what the Lord has done. Fifteen authors from five different continents identify what the Lord has indeed been doing, and continues to do, in their lives. These are their stories.

David Cranston and Ruth Padilla DeBorst (Eds)  
**Mission as Transformation**  
*Learning from Catalysts*  
2013 / 978-1-908355-34-8 / 77pp

This book is the product of the first Stott-Bediako Forum, held in 2012 with the title *Portraits of Catalysts*. Its aim was to learn from the stories of Christian leaders whose lives and work have served as catalysts for transformation as each, in his or her particular way, facilitated the intersection between the Good News of Jesus Christ and the context in which they lived, in particular amongst people who are suffering.

Brian Woolnough (Ed)  
**Good News from Africa**  
Community Transformation Through the Church  
2013 / 978-1-908355-33-1 / 123pp

This book discusses how sustainable, holistic, community development can be, and is being, achieved through the work of the local church. Leading African development practitioners describe different aspects of development through their own experience.

Makonon Getu (Ed)  
**Transforming Microfinance**  
A Christian Approach  
2013 / 978-1-908355-31-7 / 264pp

"This book highlights the important role that Christian-based organisations bring to the delivery of financial services for the poor. It is timely, significant and important and deserves a wide circulation".

Lord Carey of Clifton, former Archbishop of Canterbury

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## GENERAL REGNUM TITLES

Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden (Eds)  
**The Church in Response to Human Need**  
1987 / 1870345045 / xii+268pp

Philip Sampson, Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden (Eds)  
**Faith and Modernity**  
*Essays in modernity and post-modernity*  
1994 / 1870345177 / 352pp

Klaus Fiedler  
**The Story of Faith Missions**  
1994 / 0745926878 / 428pp

Douglas Peterson  
**Not by Might nor by Power**  
*A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America*  
1996 / 1870345207 / xvi+260pp

David Gitari  
**In Season and Out of Season**  
*Sermons to a Nation*  
1996 / 1870345118 / 155pp

David. W. Virtue  
**A Vision of Hope**  
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