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Contextualization in Asia: Theory and Practice

This edition constitutes a small contribution to the discussion on contextualization in Asia that focuses mostly on real examples from various Asian contexts. We begin with Tess Chai's article which explains how the term was coined, how it has been used and what it means. This, then, sets the framework for the rest of our discussion.

Daniel Qin, an MTh student from mainland China here at APTS, delivers a two part article that discusses Christology from two points of view. He contends that scholars throughout the centuries have focused on Christ's divinity (from above), almost to the point of ignoring his humanity (from below). He then contends that, following the Enlightenment in the West, a school of thought arose focusing on Christ's humanity, which clashed with the "From above" school. After explaining the strengths and weaknesses of both positions and dealing with some scholars' search for an alternative approach, he then gives some suggestions as to how Christology could be approached in his native Chinese house church context.

L.J. Custodio's article deals with the concept of grace in Islam. When a Christian mentions God's grace to a Muslim, how would that concept be understood, given that the Quran also teaches the grace of Allah? Is grace here the same as God's grace as revealed in the Bible? If not, can the Quran's concept of grace be used as a springboard to teach the biblical concept of the term? Why or why not?

The last two articles take theology to the streets, demonstrating the vitality of the Word of God in the regular, everyday lives of regular, everyday people. From where I sit, orthodoxy without orthopraxis offers little concrete hope to Asia's teeming millions, even those who migrate elsewhere. Thus the need for reflections like these.

Kimberly Snider opens her article with an honest question as to whether Christianity has transforming power. Looking around at her situation living in Manila, the corruption-filled capital of the "Christian" Philippines, one doesn't need to think long to understand the validity of her question. Fortunately, she was not happy to sit back and wait for someone else's answer. Devoting her Ph.D dissertation to this very topic, she interviewed more than twenty Filipino women, who

had come from a Roman Catholic background and who had long since stopped attending that church and who claimed to have had a born-again experience with Jesus. Their answers were not the ones she was looking for and they totally changed her view of the transformation process.

Matthew Todd then takes us on an excellent journey through the world of Chinese immigrants to Canada, his native land, and explores their struggles to retain their ethnic identity or assimilate. He then explores how churches can face the challenge to be missional within the Chinese culture and language. Thus, should they retain their cultural ethnicity or become multi-cultural through the use of English languages services? Then, he also confronts the issue that having English language services does not automatically enable them to become multi-cultural. Theologically, the issue is how to understand the Great Commission, the challenge to take the gospel to the "*Panta ta ethne*," (all the nations) while, at the same time, being sensitive to those who legitimately wish to retain their cultural and language heritage. As with many other issues, asking the questions is much simpler than asking them.

As always, feel free to write me through the APTS website, www.pts.edu. Those wishing to submit articles should do the same. Or, you can communicate with me directly through my personal email address, dave.johnson@agmd.org.

Warm Regards in Christ,

Dave Johnson, D.Miss
Managing Editor

A LOOK AT CONTEXTUALIZATION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, DEFINITION, FUNCTION, SCOPE AND MODELS

By Teresa Chai, PhD

Introduction

Many Evangelicals use the word “contextualization,” but they may not be aware of the specific circumstances under which the term was coined. In reality, different scholars can mean different things when they discuss contextualization, depending on their theological starting points. This article will examine various definitions of contextualization and review how the term came about. It will discuss the functions of contextualization, and the specific areas that the term covers.

Earlier Terms, “Contextualization” and Definitions

As a precursor to looking at actual models and methods of contextualization, it is important to understand the historical background of the term. When scrutinizing the relationship between the Gospel and culture, one discovers different words are used to explain the process of what happens when the Gospel moves from one culture to another. Here are some of the terms that have been employed:

- Accommodation
- Adaptation
- Indigenization
- Incarnation
- Translation
- Transposition
- Rereading of Scripture
- Communication
- Conceptualization

- Incarnation
- Inculturation¹

Harvie Conn notes that there is a progression of terms and ideas starting with “indigenous church” proceeding to “indigenization” and finally to “contextualization. He raises the question as to whether these new terms solve any of the old problems.”²

Hesselgrave and Rommen used the term *contextualization* in its expanded understanding of context and culture. It was their opinion that “A new word was needed to denote the ways in which we adjust messages to cultural contexts and go about the doing of theology itself.”³

When discussing contextualization, it is assumed that people in the discussion agree as to the meaning of the term. However, there are several different ways of understanding contextualization and each definition is tied to theological presuppositions. Actually, the term “contextualization” was introduced in specific historical circumstances within the World Council of Churches (WCC) and was only later taken up by Evangelicals and used in a different way.

Here are some definitions of contextualization used by Evangelicals:

- Contextualization is an effort to express the never changing Word of God in ever-changing modes for relevance. According to Bruce Fleming, “Since the Gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary.”⁴
- According to Von Allmen, contextualization is new terminology developed to “express the fact that the situation of theology in a process of self-adaptation to a new or changing context is the same in Europe as in Asia or in Africa.”

¹Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 18; David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989), ix.

²Harvie Conn, *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), xvi.

³Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 28.

⁴Bruce C.E. Fleming, *Contextualization of Theology: An Evangelical Assessment* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1980), 62.

Therefore he adds, “The problem of the birth of theology in a new context remains unchanged.”⁵

- Taber uses indigenization, accommodation, and contextualization as synonyms and defines these terms as “a process, sometimes intentional and sometimes unintentional, by which a message which is initially alien takes on a shape more congenial to the total receptor context.”⁶ On the one hand, his view of good indigenization is that which makes the message intelligible in terms of receptor categories of thought and imagery and relevant to the existential concerns of the receptor people and sharpens the focus of the Gospel. Bad indigenization on the other hand “blunts and emasculates the Gospel by denying or concealing those parts of the Gospel which contradict basic cultural values or by focusing on non-essential or illegitimate issues.”⁷
- Bruce J. Nicolls defines contextualization as “. . . the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations.”⁸

Although all these definitions have different nuances, the main point of each one is the description of how to express the message of the Gospel, supreme over all cultures, in new cultural contexts. It is the process that makes the message intelligible in the thought of the receptor people. Hesselgrave and Rommen argue that contextualization is a necessity. Their thesis rests on the following premise: if the Gospel is to be understood, then contextualization must be true to the full message of the Bible and related to the cultural, linguistic and religious background of the listeners.⁹

The concept of contextualization raises three concerns for missions. The first concern is that missionaries tend to introduce their cultural heritage as an integral part of the Gospel. Thus missionaries

⁵Daniel Von Allmen, *The Birth of Theology*, in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 325-348.

⁶Charles R. Taber, “The Limits of Indigenization in Theology,” in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 372-399.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 33.

⁹Ibid., xi.

should *decontextualize* the message of the Gospel from their own cultural background. The second concern is the necessity of putting the Gospel into the new context so that the Gospel and the resulting church will not seem foreign in its new setting. The third concern is that converts may include elements of their culture, which alters or eliminates aspects of the Gospel, upon which the integrity of the Gospel depends.¹⁰

Development of the Term Contextualization

Just before 1900, the “Three-Self” approach to church maturity was developed to help national churches become independent from their foreign sponsoring churches. This was primarily attributed to the work of Henry Venn, John Nevius, Rufus Anderson and Roland Allen. However, theology was still largely imported from the spiritual parents, the foreign missionaries, and it was foreign in application as well as in structure.¹¹ There were few local theological works, primarily because writing was not the primary means of communication for nationals. Fleming notes that there was a sense of need for something deeper, but that most people only knew the imported Christianity of the missionaries. The pursuit of something deeper in the 1970s was in two areas: evangelism, that is, how to reach the unsaved in their own countries; and, the ethical dilemma of Christian honesty in corrupt societies. Thus, “Various practical areas that need to become nationalized or ethnicized, have been discerned within these two major emphases.”¹² The suggestions for these areas included: modes of worship, hymnody, prayer, the Bible, evangelistic terms, preaching style and theology.¹³

The term “contextualization” was first mentioned in the publication *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-1977)*.¹⁴ The Theological Education Fund (TEF) was launched by the International Missionary Council (IMC) at its Ghana meeting in 1957-58.¹⁵ The TEF was a funding agency that related to the WCC. The purpose of this agency was to evaluate requests for funding according to how contextualized they

¹⁰Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 1.

¹¹Flemming, 2-3.

¹²*Ibid.*, 3.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 28.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

were in four areas: missiology, theological application, educational methods, and educational structure.¹⁶ In 1961, in New Delhi, the IMC joined the WCC and became the Division of World Mission and Evangelism (DWME).¹⁷ The commission worked on reforming the training of national Christians for the Christian ministry. They worked within the context that the Gospel should be expressed and ministry undertaken in response to widespread crisis of faith, and issues of social and human development. There should be a dialectic between local cultural and religion situations with a universal technological civilization.¹⁸

The situation involved more than just dissatisfaction with traditional theological models.¹⁹ In fact, the context of the work of TEF within WCC was with issues related to the unity, authority and relevance of Scripture.²⁰ There were two key WCC meetings in 1971 where questions were raised as to whether or not Scripture could be the starting point for theology. The new idea was that the experiential realm of thought and action should serve as the basis for theological work. With this in mind, “The distance between the biblical text and the modern interpreter is to be overcome dynamically by allowing the Bible to pose questions which the interpreter must answer in accordance with his understanding of the biblical witness and of the ways in which God is working today.”²¹

Hesselgrave and Rommen see the originators of the term as finding “a new point of departure and a new approach to theologizing and to theological education: namely, praxis or involvement in the struggle for justice within the existential situation in which men and women find themselves today.”²² This went beyond the notions of indigenization proposed by Venn and Anderson that defined an autonomous church, or the Roman Catholic view of accommodation by Louis Luzbetak that had to do with the church adjusting its theology in mission to fit the local culture.²³ The TEF saw indigenization as communicating the gospel and fitting it to culture. They saw contextualization as utilizing patterns of indigenization but wrestling with the new influences on

¹⁶Fleming, xi.

¹⁷Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 28.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 29; Fleming, 4.

²⁰Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 29.

²¹*Ibid.*, 31.

²²*Ibid.*, 32.

²³*Ibid.*

culture.²⁴ Indigenization was seen as a narrower historical concept that dealt with static traditional patterns and religions.²⁵ Contextualization was to press beyond these and to deal with contemporary life and deep-seated cultural patterns as well as cultural overlays such as post-modernity, humanism and any other new trends.²⁶ Thus, in the TEF view, both technical and popular contextualization become part of the content. An analysis of the situation is used to support radical theologies and ideologies.²⁷ It was a type of situational theology and ethics. The process of contextualization, in the WCC view, was to take the Bible and dogmatic theology viewed through the higher-critical lens of modern confessional grids. Then, to subject it to a dialectical process of interaction weighted with socio-political analysis. Thus the thesis was dogmatic theology, the antithesis was the context informed by these other sources such as radical and neo-orthodox hermeneutic influenced theology.²⁸ In a nutshell, it was a liberal approach that put the Bible in second place to the conditions surrounding the propagation of the Gospel.

As such, Evangelicals reacted to the theological agenda within the WCC that shaped the views and practices of contextualization. In the late 1970s James O. Buswell III and Bruce Fleming both opposed the WCC meanings of contextualization, proposing and using different terms. However, their suggestions for other terms as more appropriate for Evangelicals were not picked up.²⁹ Harvie Conn criticized Evangelicals for confining contextualization to matters related to the effective communication of the gospel to peoples of other cultures while ignoring their own culture-boundedness. He argued that they needed to wrestle with their relationship between the biblical text and their own cultural context. He suggested the term “conscientization,” meaning that Scripture is allowed to judge the enculturated interpretations and lifestyles. Another term for this process is decontextualization.³⁰

Following the debate, the Evangelical world began to stake out its own ground on issues regarding the Gospel and Culture. Fleming notes that the TEF view of indigenization was the Gospel responding to

²⁴Fleming, 52.

²⁵Ibid., 53.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 58-59.

²⁹Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 33.

³⁰Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 34.

traditional culture.³¹ However, Evangelicals saw Indigenization as “putting the Gospel into” and not “responding to” culture.³² In Fleming’s view the TEF failed to distinguish content from form, and thus allowed culture and context to manipulate the text.³³ So at the 1975 meeting of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) contextualization and indigenization were given the same meaning. According to those at this meeting, there were two categories to contextualize or indigenize: correct theology and application to current situations.³⁴ There was a big difference from the TEF view, because in their understanding, true contextualized theology did not need applying.³⁵ This reversed the emphasis back to the Bible being above anything else.

Thus Fleming suggested context-indigenization as the term for Evangelicals to use.³⁶ He describes the process in six steps:

1. Begin with the inerrant authoritative Word of God,
2. Use historic-grammatical exegesis,
3. Develop biblical theology from the Old and New Testaments,
4. Derive systematic theology from Step 3,
5. Cultivate specialized theologies such as theology of mission,
6. Formulate material on mission principles and practices.³⁷

Functionality and Scope of Contextualization to Models of Contextualization

This section expounds on the functionality and scope of contextualization leading to different models of it. Darrell Whiteman has suggested three major functions of contextualization. He captures the method and perspective of the challenge of relating the Gospel to culture. First, it is to communicate the Gospel in word and deed, establishing the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, as well as presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture. Second, the Gospel offends. When the Gospel is presented in

³¹Fleming, 61.

³²Ibid., 66.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 53.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 59.

word and deed, and the fellowship of believers called the church is organized in appropriate cultural patterns, people will more likely be confronted with the offense of the Gospel, exposing sinfulness, the tendency toward evil, oppressive structures and behavior patterns within their culture. Thirdly, it is to develop contextualized expressions of the Gospel that expand the understanding of the kingdom of God for the universal church.³⁸

Fleming says, "The gospel must be recognizable to people within their cultural matrices."³⁹ In Bible translations, translators use dynamic equivalence in the languages they work in. The late Eugene Nida, a translation consultant for the United Bible Societies, believed that "dynamic equivalence translation meant the closest natural equivalence to the source language message."⁴⁰ So, the scope of contextualization is to search for dynamic equivalence in all the areas of church life such as creative ministries.⁴¹ Harvey Talman argues for a minimum of seven critical areas to work on in contextualization: Bible translation, language, evangelism, church planting, worship, music, theology and leadership training.⁴² With the function and scope of contextualization mapped out, the following are some models of contextualization.

Model # 1 Authentic/Relevant Contextualization by Hesselgrave and Rommen

Hesselgrave and Rommen defined Christian contextualization as,

. . . The attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation . . . and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts. It is both verbal and nonverbal and has to do with theologizing, Bible translation, interpretation and application, incarnational lifestyle, evangelism, Christian instruction, church planting and growth, church organization, worship style etc. The notion of authenticity deals with God's revelation. It means to be

³⁸Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualization: The theory, the gap, the challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 1 (1997): 2-7.

³⁹Fleming, 64.

⁴⁰Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 62.

⁴¹Fleming, 64.

⁴²Harvey Talman, "Comprehensive Contextualization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 1 (2004): 6.

faithful to the authority and content of the will of God as revealed in creation, conscience and Scripture. Authenticity itself does not assure us that the message will be meaningful and persuasive to our respondents.⁴³

This refers to authenticity. Relevance also speaks of effectiveness. It is communication that grows out of understanding the respondents in their particular context and the work of the Holy Spirit in both messengers and recipients.

The Hesselgrave-Rommen model of contextualization involves two major tasks:

Task 1: Interpretation and Decontextualization (Revelation, Interpretation, Application)

1. The first element is the process of interpretation and decontextualization which begins with God's revelation of His truth in language. The Spirit has used human authors who in turn have to use linguistic symbols to convey the meaning of that revelation and produce a text. From the interpreter's vantage point, it must be recognized that the range of possible interpretations, which legitimately can be ascribed to the text, is limited. Clues to that range of meaning are provided by the generally accepted use of the linguistic symbols at that time (latitude of correctness), by the author's particular use of linguistic conventions, and by the original audience's response, that is, the publicly observable aspect of language of which the author was certainly aware. These factors do not themselves generate meaning. However, they do indicate and limit the specific meaning assigned to the text by the author.⁴⁴
2. The second element is the recipient's interpretation of the intended meaning. The perceived meaning is affected by the recipient's own culture and the culture of biblical times.⁴⁵
3. The third element involves two possible options. In the first choice, the recipient forms the possible implications of his or her understanding of the biblical text for the culture in which it is to be lived out. In the second choice, the recipient may

⁴³Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 199.

⁴⁴Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 201.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 202.

decide whether or not to accept the validity of the text's implication, or to superimpose another meaning. "If he rejects the claims of the text, the continuity of meaning is broken, and he loses touch with the truth embodied in the text. An acceptable contextualization is rendered impossible."⁴⁶ If the recipient accepts the claims of the text, he or she will apply its meaning to his or her own sociocultural environment. This does not mean the biblical content becomes true, but rather because it is true and, if properly understood, it can be applied to specific contexts in an ever changing, multicultural world. The recipient may now distinguish between culture-bound aspects of the Christian message that are open to modification from revelatory content that has non-negotiable supracultural validity.⁴⁷

Task 2: Contextualize Message to Communicate Effectively to the Target Audience

The Hesselgrave-Rommen model of contextualization shows seven dimensions used to effectively communicate with the target audience. This model involves taking the results of Task one, which are the supracultural elements of the message, and applying them to:

1. Worldviews-ways of viewing the world
2. Cognitive processes-ways of thinking
3. Linguistic forms-way of expressing ideas
4. Behavioral patterns-ways of acting
5. Communication media-ways of channeling the message
6. Social structures-ways of interacting
7. Motivational sources-ways of deciding.⁴⁸

Model #2 Critical Contextualization by Hiebert

This model proposed by the late Paul Hiebert, professor at Fuller Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, strikes a balance between a view of culture that is either too ethnocentric and one that is overtly pluralistic leading to a cultural relativity with no absolute truth. Hiebert recommends that people in one culture should seek to

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., 203.

understand messages and ritual practices from another culture with little distortion.

Hiebert presents contextualization as an ongoing process that engages local Christians in these five steps:

1. Exegete the culture – uncritically gather information.
2. Exegete Scripture and build the hermeneutical bridge – this means to first find out what the biblical text meant to its original author and audience, then to translate the Biblical message into the cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of another culture. Without the bridge, people of one culture can have a distorted view of the Gospel because they are seeing it through local categories rather than grasping the message as originally intended.
3. Critical Response – evaluate local customs in light of the new biblical understanding and make a decision.
4. Develop new contextualized practices.
5. Guard against syncretism – this means that the church acts together, as a hermeneutical community, in order to come to understanding of what is faithful to the gospel.⁴⁹

Model #3 Synthesis of Pluralism-Biblical Contradiction- Transformation by Lingenfelter

Sherwood Lingenfelter's book *Transforming Culture* written in 1992, is not offering a formal model of contextualization, but it acknowledges the value of contextualized indigenous churches, and defines contextualization as the framing of "the gospel message in language and communication forms appropriate and meaningful to the local culture, and to focus the message upon crucial issues in the lives of the people."⁵⁰ He also gives warnings about some of the dangers and weaknesses of contextualized indigenous churches if they are so bound to their own culture and values, that they lose their spiritual vitality as a Christian witness.⁵¹ Lingenfelter says that there are forces that pressure the church to compromise which are rooted in cultural systems that

⁴⁹Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 88-92.

⁵⁰Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 15.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 16.

contaminate.⁵² The Gospel liberates people from these cultural systems and transforms communities so people can live their lives as God's people within their social system.⁵³ The Gospel plays a contradictory role, challenging the values, and power structures of the social system, and thus, can "become a significant powerful force in the continuous restructuring of any social environment and worldview."⁵⁴

Although not a formal system of contextualization, the synthesis that Lingenfelter offers contains values and practices that follow a logical progression that can help national Christians make the Gospel meaningful in their own setting. A summary of Lingenfelter's main ideas can be categorized as values and actual practices that stem from value commitments:

1. In value – a person with a pluralist perspective on the world with its distinctive social environments and worldviews should maintain a respectful stance, seeking to understand how others see and interpret their world. However, this person should also acknowledge that all sociocultural systems are tainted by sin. In practice – this person should seek to understand the local worldview as it relates to the social environment as well as how issues of economy and society create these faith communities.
2. In value – Biblical absolutism is a total commitment to the truth and authority of Scripture. In practice – it is discerning what the Scripture says about issues in the local culture.
3. In value – it deals with Biblical contradiction by asking the question: "How does the Gospel contradict what I think, what I believe and how I live?" It entails thinking theologically about the local worldview. In practice – it is bringing local issues to the light of Scripture to see how the Gospel challenges them.
4. In value – it is seeking transformation within cultural environments. In practice – it is finding ways the Bible speaks into the local context building new lifestyle patterns that are informed by a biblical worldview.⁵⁵

⁵²Ibid., 17-18.

⁵³Ibid., 19.

⁵⁴Lingenfelter, 20.

⁵⁵Ibid., 20-23.

Model #4 Transculturation by Kraft

Charles Kraft, a retired professor from Fuller Theological Seminary, is one of leading thinkers and innovators in the area of contextualization. His books *Christianity in Culture* and *Appropriate Christianity* were groundbreaking in the field of missionary anthropology and stimulated controversy among Evangelicals who tried to work through the implications of his assumptions. Kraft's work is a transculturation model that aims to communicate God's word into receptor cultures.⁵⁶ Eugene Nida, the Bible translator consultant who came up with the concept of dynamic equivalence, was one of his mentors. For Kraft, transculturation is similar to Bible translation but in the context of culture. The goal of transculturation is the same as Bible translation, that is, to find the dynamic equivalence.⁵⁷

Hesselgrave and Rommen show that Kraft's work flows from his assumptions that are quite complex. Kraft's key assumptions are:

1. Culture is neutral, a tool through which all reality is filtered. He believes that God made culture as a starting point for people.
2. Meaning is constructed in the minds of the receptors. It is dependent on the extent of shared symbols between sender and receiver.
3. Revelation is where divine truth is understood by general or specific revelation. When God is revealed, people respond.
4. Kraft does believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, but inspiration is attached to meanings and not words. The Bible contains a supracultural message.⁵⁸

Hesselgrave and Rommen as well as other Evangelicals find Kraft's core ideas problematic because he does not seem to hold to an errorless Scripture.⁵⁹ They think he is saying that words have no meanings outside of what the receptors give those words. However, his work is innovative and thought provoking, raising many issues of importance.⁶⁰ Kraft's model should result in dynamic equivalence in areas such as "translations, transculturations, ethnotheologies,

⁵⁶Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 64.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 60.

⁵⁹Ibid., 194-95.

⁶⁰Ibid., 65.

conversions, churches and the transformation of culture.”⁶¹ The following is a summary of his material from Chapter 4 in *Christianity in Culture*.

1. The *forms* of a culture are the observable parts of which it is made up. These are the customs, arranged in patterns, or the products of those customs. Many cultural forms are conceptualizations of material items; most are conceptualizations of non-material items.
2. Each of the forms of a culture is used by the people of that culture to serve particular *functions*. Certain of these functions are general, universal functions, relating to basic human needs that every culture must meet. Others are more specifically related to non-universal, individual, and group concerns.
3. One of the most important functions served by every cultural form is to convey *meaning* to the participants of a culture. Not everyone understands the meaning of a cultural form in the same way, so its meaning within the social setting is the sum of all the subjective associations people make about it. One of Kraft’s foundational assumptions is that forms are basically neutral in the sense that the forms and functions of culture act “as a kind of road map made up of various forms designed to get people where they need to go.” Thus they are not inherently good or evil in themselves. Where sin comes in with Kraft’s model is at the level of meaning; where meanings intended and received are always tainted by sin. Thus no aspect of human culture can be used with completely pure intent.
4. Closely interrelated to function and meaning is the matter of how a cultural form is used. This consideration, more than others, makes explicit the active part human beings take in the operation of culture. The forms of culture are relatively passive in and of themselves.⁶²

In terms of Kraft’s point regarding dynamic equivalence transculturation, the goal is to find forms and functions that can express the same meanings and usages as in Scripture and the first-century church. Kraft has been misunderstood by Evangelicals who find him

⁶¹Ibid., 68.

⁶²Ibid., 64-66.

liberal in his stance about the Bible. His model of contextualization has validity in Christian mission application.

Model #5 Context-Indigenization by Bushwell and Fleming

This model has three layers that build upon one another, and which reflect the situation of the gospel coming into a new cultural setting via missionaries. In the initial stages the missionaries make decisions, but later in the process local believers can modify these decisions.

1. The first layer is called inculturation. On this level there is a disengaging of the supracultural elements of the Gospel from one culture to another, and the “contextualizing” of these elements within the cultural forms and social institutions of another. This includes translation, evangelism, apologetics and preaching. Judgments are made on what is good, bad and neutral in each culture.
2. The next layer is indigenization. This follows the lines established by Venn, Nevius, Anderson and Allen that emphasized the church and leadership. The inculturation becomes natural enculturation done by national Christians. The patterns, forms and institutions of Christianity include church buildings, order of service, ministers’ dress, songs, art and how to celebrate festivals. These aspects can be contextualized. Dynamic equivalence should be sought where the same meaning and function within the culture is the same as in the early church.
3. The third and final layer is ethno-theology. This is doing theology inside the new system. The absolute supracultural elements are applied to specific forms in the culture. In Kraft’s terms ethno-theology is a combination of systematic theology and anthropology. However for Bushwell and Fleming, ethno-theology is systematic theology developed within the culture.⁶³

⁶³Fleming, 67.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many differences in these models, but there is also an overall pattern that emerges. There are three main points that form the basis for contextualization. The first is the Scriptures. There is a need to establish what the Bible says in its own context. This is a process of decontextualization ensuring that the Bible is not read using contemporary settings to understand the text. The second point is to understand, as well as to accept local culture, rather than reject it. Finally, the third point is to relate the Bible to issues in the local culture with the purpose of creating a dynamic equivalence impact. This means not taking the forms from existing Christian settings, and superimposing them on the new culture.

In the contextualization process there is a change in activity. In the pioneering stage, missionaries bring the Gospel and are forced to make some early judgments about what to include or exclude in terms of local forms and functions. Also early in the process local Christians should identify the issues that are relevant to them and start to work on the process of relating Scripture to them. There is a big difference between telling new Christians what they are to do and engaging them in the process of using local forms with Scriptural functions, meanings and usages. When national Christians are engaged in decision-making, there is ownership. When they are told what to do, this is a form of imperialism on the part of the missionaries.

The challenge is to deal with non-neutral cultural forms. There are some neutral local forms that are biblically permissible because they are similar to the cultures of the Bible and are not immoral. Including these forms into the life of the church is not difficult. But, missionaries have forbidden forms that are not neutral, which carry functions and meanings that are against the Bible. This created a perception that Christianity was just a foreign religion. However, the danger in trying to create new meanings with such existing forms is that the old meanings are still attached, and it could result in the people having syncretized understanding and practice rather than one rooted in Scriptures. So the models are helpful in providing guidance for working through those kinds of issues.

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THE STARTING POINT OF CHRISTOLOGY:
FROM BELOW OR FROM ABOVE?
Part I

By Daniel Qin

Introduction

For centuries, the Church has held the Christ of faith as the starting point of Christology. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, “from above” came down to earth. During the medieval period, people rarely debated whether the Jesus depicted in the New Testament is exactly the Jesus who walked in the land of Palestine or whether the Christ of faith is identical to the historical Jesus who walked along the Sea of Galilee. People were content with the truth as claimed to be revealed in the Bible.

In our time, also, the Christ of faith is preached much more than the earthly man Jesus depicted in the New Testament. Even in the process of evangelization, the effort and focus is not on describing how Jesus lived his earthly life and then leading people into acknowledging Jesus’ divinity. Rather, Jesus’ divinity is proclaimed to unbelievers who may not have any background in Christianity at all. As time goes on, the image of the earthly man Jesus is dimmed or even ignored. This dimming or ignoring of Jesus’ humanity has become a part of Christian tradition for many churches worldwide. Today, however, “we no longer live in an age which takes the need for salvation for granted.”¹ After the Enlightenment, some scholars who carried on the quest for the historical Jesus brought challenges to the Church. This quest, often divided into three separate quests, has caused some conservative scholars and church ministers to turn their focus on the earthly man Jesus and start trying to describe Jesus Christ from below. The results of the historical Jesus quests are diverse and indicate some strengths and weaknesses of Christology from below. As the historical Jesus

¹William M. Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 49.

quests and the from below approach arose, traditional scholars defended the from above approach. Thus, the debates on the starting point of Christology emerged and developed.

Jesus' first disciples initially knew the earthly man Jesus, and only after some time acknowledged him as the Son of God. Historically, the earthly man Jesus was the starting point of Christology. However, when both the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith were discovered and acknowledged, people were able to move between them from both directions. Both approaches, from below and the from above, have strengths and weaknesses, and they are not inherently contradictory. The search for an alternative approach indicates that integration of the two approaches is needed. Each approach has its own role and cannot be replaced by the other. Thus, in the contemporary context we can and we should use both approaches.

This paper's aim is to discuss the issue of the starting point of Christology: from below or from above. Part I of this paper will discuss both the arguments for and weaknesses of these two starting points. The historical Jesus quests are included due to their intertwined relationship with a genuine search for the historical Jesus. In Part II, I will explore and discuss scholars' searches for an alternative approach. After that, I will propose my solution for constructing Christology in the contemporary context and give a suggestion for the Christology of Chinese house churches.

The From Below Approach

The from below approach has been advocated by scholars like Jon Sobrino and backed up by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology. They emphasize the practical benefits of this approach. Wolfhart Pannenberg upholds this approach by inputting cognitive insight. The quests for the historical Jesus heat up this approach by exerting great efforts toward discovering the historical Jesus.

The Quests for the Historical Jesus

The quests for the historical Jesus were launched and carried on mainly by liberal scholars.² Results of these quests triggered some historical issues worth studying, pondering and responding to and in

²Evangelicals insisted on the historicity of Jesus, therefore, they were involved in the quests for the historical Jesus, and on many occasions, in reactions against the results of the liberals' studies.

some way reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the from below approach.

A Brief Overview of the Historical Jesus Quests

Scholars engaged in the quests for the historical Jesus hold a suspicion about the difference between the identity of the historical Jesus and the Jesus Christ narrated in the New Testament and described by church doctrines. It is generally believed that so far there are three quests for the historical Jesus.

The first quest was initiated by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) who claimed that the New Testament view of Jesus is not historical; rather, it is the false dogmatic interpretation of Jesus created by the early disciples and later church.³ Considering miracles unacceptable, the early modern historical researchers including Reimarus proposed naturalism and rationalism against supernaturalism. Gregory W. Dawes elaborates David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74), whose famous book *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* was firstly published in 1835, stating, “much of what we find in the Gospel is neither history nor deception but ‘myth’ and needed to be interpreted accordingly The new message about Jesus was the product of the disciples’ religious imagination, an imagination which clothed spiritual truths in narrative form.”⁴

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), well-known for his book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906), is considered the person who ended the first quest. He claimed, “The historical investigation of the life of Jesus did not take its rise from a purely historical interest; it turned to the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma.”⁵

William M. Thompson noted the skepticism at the end of the first quest (early 20th century). A number of factors converged and indicated that “a historical quest was neither possible nor desirable.”⁶ Thompson further stated that redaction criticism and form criticism were two of the factors that undermined the possibility of reconstructing an accurate

³Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Wolfenbuttel Fragments* (G. E. Lessing, 1774-78). Paraphrased in Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis*, 91.

⁴Gregory W. Dawes, ed., *The Historical Jesus Quest* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 87, 89. Dawes in his own words elaborates Strauss’s opinion. Cf. David Friedrich Strauss’ *Apology*, n.p. and *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, n.p.

⁵Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), 4.

⁶*Ibid.*, 96.

historical Jesus. Ernst Käsemann (1906-98) is generally considered the initiator of the second quest which was begun when Käsemann delivered a lecture to a conference in 1953. Against the extreme downplaying of the historical dimension, Käsemann claimed, “[Primitive Christianity] is not minded to allow myth to take the place of history nor a heavenly being to take the place of the Man of Nazareth.”⁷ Käsemann invented the criterion of double dissimilarity, which says that a tradition ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament may be authentic if it is dissimilar to the typical tradition of first century Judaism or the early Christian Church because Jesus was unique in himself.

It is generally believed that from the 1950s we can see some works that are considered part of the third quest, although whether the third quest exists is open to dispute.⁸ The results of the third quest are diverse. Clive Marsh summarizes in his own words Craig Evans’ point on the presuppositions of the third quest: “a more positive assessment of the miracle traditions, a less negatively critical approach to the historical reliability of the canonical Gospels, and an absence of ideological interests.”⁹ Charles Wanamaker states,

While the Second Quest, begun by Käsemann, sought to provide a basis for connecting the teaching and activity of the historical Jesus to the figure of Christ as believed in the earliest Christian community, a number of recent studies have focused on the rediscovery of Jesus as a human figure within the social, economic, and political world of first century colonial Palestine.¹⁰

⁷Ernst. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Naperville, IL: Alec R Allenson, 1964), 25. Quoted in Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis*, 99.

⁸Clive Marsh, “Quests of the Historical Jesus in New Historicist Perspective,” *Biblical Interpretation* 5, no. 4 (1997): 403.

⁹*Ibid.*, 405. Cf. Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Leiden: Brill Fiorenza, E. S. 1995), 8-12, 46.

¹⁰Charles Wanamaker, “The Historical Jesus Today: A Reconsideration of the Foundation of Christology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 94 (1996): 4.

These social, economic and political concerns are the main foci of the third quest.¹¹ However, the first two of the three presuppositions mentioned by Craig Evans favor the possibility of discovering a reliable account of the historical Jesus.

A Brief Reflection on the Historical Jesus Quests

Although some of the results of the historical Jesus quests are famous at least in academic circles, they are criticized in many ways. The first quest “leads to the kind of violent misreading so amply documented in the liberal ‘Quest for the Jesus of History’: in a Jesus made after the image of the researcher himself.”¹² Schweitzer stated plainly, “What it (the period of the older rationalism) is looking for is not the past, but itself in the past.”¹³ The historical Jesus does not receive a genuine search in the first quest.

In the second quest, the famous double dissimilarity “presuppose that [Jesus’] ‘authentic’ teaching must be ‘unique,’ ” however, Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and his teaching would have touched his native religion Judaism, and the church’s teaching would have related to his memory since the church grew up with it.¹⁴ Although the principle of double dissimilarity is problematic, the genuine attitude toward the historicity of Jesus is a strength that offers to the from below approach.

The third quest has resulted in more objective portraits of Jesus, even though the portraits remain fragmentary and inadequate.¹⁵ However, on the other hand, the possibility of having a reliable account of the historical Jesus enhances the approach of Christology from below. The third quest shows no ideological interests; rather, it looks for a Jesus as a social reformer. This indicates one of the weaknesses of the from below approach: the discovery of historical fact does not naturally lead to the Christ of faith.

¹¹Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen in his book *Christology: A Global Introduction* (106-107) summarizes the third quest into three main varieties: the radical like the Jesus Seminar, the conservative tradition represented by C. F. D. Moule who wrote *The Origin of Christology*, and the new perspective which seeks to place Jesus in the context of the religious, social, economic and political world of Judaism.

¹²Rock Kereszty, “Toward A Contemporary Christology,” *Crisis in Christology: Essays in Quest of Resolution*. ed. William R. Farmer (Livonia, MI: Truth, Inc., 1995), 337.

¹³Schweitzer, 28.

¹⁴Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 6.

¹⁵Kereszty, 348.

Arguments for Christology From Below

Generally speaking, in our contemporary atmosphere, the earthly Jesus as the starting point of Christology is preferred. This is mainly because: first, Christology from above goes hand in hand with the presupposition of Jesus' divinity and it is expressed in an abstract, concise way, which does not fit well in the contemporary world; second, Christology from below starts from the concrete Jesus and moves toward the Christ of faith, which is a logical and beneficial procedure.¹⁶ In contrast, Robert A. Krieg describes the approach of Christology from above:

Christology from above begins with the second Person of the Trinity, with the preexisting divine Word in relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit. This methodology then proceeds "downward" to the Incarnation, to the event in which the Word or Logos became man in Jesus Christ. Finally, this approach to Christology draws our attention to how the Word made flesh suffered and died for our sins, and then rose from the dead and return to God's "right hand."¹⁷

According to Erickson, James D. G. Dunn, addressing Philippians 2:6-11, which describes the preexistence of Christ, "argues that this straightforward interpretation rests on the assumption that Christ's preexistence was taken for granted by Paul's readers; it was, then, not a conclusion from the available data, but a presupposition already accepted."¹⁸ Although Paul's readers might presume Christ's preexistence, many, if not most, people in our contemporary world do not have that presupposition. Therefore, taking the second person of the

¹⁶This is my summary from many scholars' opinion. These two reasons are so general that it is difficult to credit them under a specific scholar. According to Erickson, Wolfhart Pannenberg gives three reasons of not doing Christology from above. Two of them are similar to what I summarize here. Pannenberg's third reason is that Christology from above is possible for God but not for human beings because of human limitations. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 684-685.

¹⁷Robert A. Krieg, "Who Do You Say I Am? Christology: What it is & why it matters," *Commonweal* 129, no. 6 (2002): 12-13.

¹⁸James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 114. Quoted in Millard J. Erickson, *The World Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 474.

Trinity as the starting point of Christology is not adequate in the contemporary context.

Many times Christology stays at the form of dogma, which is the fundamental but abstract doctrine of the Christian faith. G. C. Berkouwer discusses whether the Chalcedonian Creed is the terminal point of Christology. According to Berkouwer, Honig says, “the doctrine of the Person of the Mediator, as it has been formulated by the church, is incapable of further development.”¹⁹ Berkouwer responds to the issue, “For the Scriptures are richer than any pronouncement of the church, no matter how excellent it be and how faithfully it has been formulated in subjection to the Word of God.”²⁰ In other words, church dogma lacks the riches found in the Scriptures. A dogma “can only be adequate in its adjustment of certain abstract concepts.”²¹ If the focus is on abstract dogma, the concrete contents in the Scriptures may be underestimated. When the concrete contents of the Scriptures are somewhat underestimated or even ignored, the riches of the Scriptures are actually lost. In our contemporary world, due to modern developments and lifestyles, people are inclined to work and understand in concrete and analytic forms rather than in a compositive manner. Abstract dogma, therefore, cannot be easily grasped by modern people. This discussion does not depreciate or deny the presupposition of Christ’s preexistence and the abstract language of dogma but points out their inadequacy in constructing Christology in the contemporary world. The formula was not wrong but limited to its own sphere of thought; therefore it needs to find new expression to suit new circumstances.²²

Christology from below is in opposition to Christology from above: it starts from the earthly Jesus and moves toward the Christ of faith.²³ The from below approach has been advocated primarily due to an understanding of human experience. Thompson offers a reasonable statement, “For better or worse we exist in a present moving into the future, and the only way in which the Christian past can become

¹⁹A. G. Honig, *De person van den Middelaar in de nieuwere Deutsche dogmatiek*, 1910, 74. Quoted in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 87.

²⁰G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 91.

²¹Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Evelyn Whitehead, 1954), 126.

²²*Ibid.*, 131.

²³Whether starting from the earthly Jesus can arrive at the Christ of faith is another question.

contemporary for us is if it finds an echo within our own experience.”²⁴ Through our Christian experience today we may understand better the experiences of Jesus and his first disciples. In the other direction, the experiences of Jesus and his disciples may shed great light on our Christian understanding today – they tell us the past and what we can expect and experience today. The from below approach, which pays primary attention to the narratives of the historical Jesus, provides human beings a better understanding of Jesus.

Wolfhart Pannenberg makes a significant contribution to the from below approach in his book *Jesus - God and man*. For Pannenberg, the obvious reason of starting Christology from the earthly man Jesus, as Tokiyuki Nobuhara summarizes, is that “through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God the Father has confirmed, legitimated, and verified Jesus' earthly claim to authority.”²⁵ In other words, we can arrive at Jesus' divinity only when we have seen the Easter event. As human beings, we observe God's revelation in the process of human history.

Instead of emphasizing the legitimacy of a historical approach as Pannenberg does, Jon Sobrino, in his work *Christology at the Crossroad*, emphasizes the practical reasons of Christology from below: 1) starting from the historical Jesus maintains the concrete Christian faith and prevents it from turning into religion,²⁶ 2) the earthly Jesus revealed a very concrete path of “filiation”; human beings have been shown that path therefore can follow Jesus and become children of God.²⁷ Namely, people can become Jesus' disciples when they can observe the vivid picture of how Jesus obeyed the Father rather than observe abstract and static dogmas. Dietrich Bonhoeffer highly valued the man Jesus as an example for Christian discipleship, “Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion.”²⁸ While suffering and rejection is only

²⁴Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis*, 53.

²⁵Tokiyuki Nobuhara, “Analogia Actionis: A New Proposal for Christology ‘From Below,’” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 39, no. 4 (1984): 269.

²⁶Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 275.

²⁷Ibid., 340. Although Sobrino uses “become children of God” here, in many other places of the book he emphasizes “become Jesus' good disciples.”

²⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated from the German *Nachfolge* first published by Chr. Kaiser Verlag Munchen by R. H. Fuller, with some revision by Irmgard Booth. London: SCM Press, 1959. First Touchstone edition, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 87.

part of Jesus' experience, the whole picture of the earthly Jesus as at least depicted in the New Testament gives people a concrete model and numerous inspirations for Christian living.

Dealing with the issue of the necessity of history for Christology, a scholar like Dale C. Allison downplays the role of history in the Christian faith. Allison emphasizes that faith does not need much history. He explains, "So if meaning is to stay after history has gone, the former cannot inevitably depend on the latter... The Synoptics are not primarily records of what Jesus actually said and did but collections of impressions."²⁹ Allison supports his point, "The larger the generalization and the more data upon which it is based, the greater our confidence; the more specific the detail and the fewer the data supporting it, the more room we have for doubt."³⁰ After trying to do justice to a general and blurred picture of Jesus, Allison casts a proposal saying that New Testament narratives are parables.³¹ Allison somewhat successfully proposes that Jesus' disciples and the New Testament writers were not able to remember every single detail of all events in the New Testament. However, since Jesus' disciples could still record what Jesus said and did, even though this might not be historically accurate, it is not a corollary to claim that New Testament narratives are theological parables, which inherently have no historical basis at all. The gospels were redacted according to theological concerns. However, this does not imply that the gospels are non-historical. Sobrino explains the danger of downplaying history in the Christian faith, "Whenever Christian faith focuses one-sidedly on the Christ of faith and wittingly or unwittingly forgets the historical Jesus, and to the extent it does that, it loses its specific structure as Christian faith and tends to turn into religion."³² By "turn into religion" Sobrino means turning into religion that has no concrete historical basis but is just a product of human reasoning. Christian faith should be "historical and real in the this-worldly sense rather than magical, superstitious, and gnostic."³³ Magical, superstitious and Gnostic belief is often associated with the abuse of imagination. Rational religions at best are just products of human wisdom. They may lead people to some kind of

²⁹Dale C. Allison, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 35, 95.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 62.

³¹*Ibid.*, 66.

³²Sobrino, 275. See Sobrino's explanation of the difference between Christian faith and religion (275-278).

³³William M. Thompson, "'Distinct but Not Separate': Historical Research in the Study of Jesus and Christian Faith," *Horizons* 21, no. 1 (1994): 135.

extreme mental and intellectual satisfaction and depreciate historical basis. The Christian faith has basis in historical events such as Jesus' incarnation, actual resurrection, etc. Since God's revelation occurred in human history, seeking to interfere with the unfolding of historical truth is trying to stop the process of revelation.³⁴ Although we know history through limited available materials that we possess today, the truth of God is indeed revealed in history. The historical basis of faith shall not be downplayed just because we are not living in the past. Today will become tomorrow's past, but by no means will today be depreciated in the future. The from below approach, which pays much attention to the historical Jesus,³⁵ is at a vantage point to maintain the necessity of history for the Christian faith.

Weaknesses of Christology From Below

Christology from below has certain limitations when it is tied to historical study and history. Limitation is not necessarily weakness, but it can be considered a disadvantage. Allison elaborates how weak historical study is in pursuing the historical Jesus. He makes three strong points: 1) scholars³⁶ never have consensus on the results of their historical study on Jesus; 2) nobody including scholars can actually eliminate their personal predilection while doing historical study; 3) Jesus' disciples were not able to remember and then record what exactly Jesus said and did due to human limitation, therefore, the New Testament account of Jesus is not historically accurate.³⁷ The limitations of historical study can be seen in the quests for the historical Jesus.

The first limitation is the lack of a suitable standard for historical study. Explaining the modern method of gaining knowledge, Joseph Ratzinger says,

³⁴Paul Johnson, "An Historian Looks at Jesus" ed. Farmer, 28.

³⁵The historical Jesus and the gospels as historical records are not exactly the same thing. No matter the historical Jesus is studied based on the gospels or plus something else, it does not affect the point here: focus on the earthly man Jesus (as recorded in the gospels, if you may confine), therefore maintain the necessity of historical basis of the Christian faith.

³⁶Allison does not explain whether all scholars or scholars from certain branches do not have consensus.

³⁷Allison, 8-21, 53-78.

In the final analysis all that man could really know was what was repeatable, what he could put before his eyes at any time in an experiment. Everything that he can see only at second hand remains the past and, whatever proofs may be adduced, is not completely knowable. Thus the scientific method, which consists of a combination of mathematics (Descartes!) and devotion to the facts in the form of the repeatable experiment, appears to be the one real vehicle of reliable certainty.³⁸

Here Ratzinger addresses the modern methodology of gaining certain knowledge. Because history is unrepeatable and is not subject to experimentation, gaining any certain historical knowledge through the modern method is hopeless. However, because history is unrepeatable, it is a soft science and thus should not be proved according to the standard of modern hard science. Even so, it is not easy to define by what standard history should be proved. Not addressing the issue of what standard historical studies should employ, Martin Kahler states startlingly, “we have no sources for a biography of Jesus of Nazareth which measure up to the standard of contemporary historical science.”³⁹ Normally speaking, an active claim bears the burden of proof while a simply passive denial does not.⁴⁰ Introspectively, I would say that this saying of Kahler does not bear the burden of proof. Because the New Testament is not a historical document that mainly intends to record historical facts we do not see the whole picture of the historical Jesus. Jesus’ first disciples saw a larger picture of the historical Jesus.

This gives way to the question of how much history do we need and how much do we want. From a conservative standpoint, it is correct to say that the New Testament narratives on Jesus are sufficient for the Christian faith. However, if we saw a bigger picture of the historical Jesus, would we still understand Jesus Christ in the same way or to the same level as we do now? Even Today we come to different understandings and theologies based on the same New Testament

³⁸Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 27.

³⁹Martin Kahler, *The so-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, Translated and ed. Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 48.

⁴⁰This is better considered to be a legal principle rather than an academic opinion that I learned when I was in law school. Even as an academic opinion, it is already well-known to be adopted as legal principle. The situation does not allow me to trace the source, which is my legal textbook in Chinese version and in China.

narratives of Jesus. Thus, there is always an impetus to discover a larger or more authentic picture of the historical Jesus, or a deeper understanding based on the New Testament narratives. Martin Kahler and C. F. D. Moule, through their works *The so-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Kahler) and *The Origin of Christology* (Moule) indicate the conservatives' interest in an authentic account of the historical Jesus. The result of their and other conservatives' work on the historical Jesus may be endless debates.⁴¹

The third historical Jesus quest has no ideological interest but this can result in a trap because this quest is only interested in the human figure Jesus without paying heed to the fact that he was and is proclaimed as Christ. In response to this, Martin Kahler states, "The truly historic element in any great figure is the discernible personal influence which he exercises upon later generations," and for Jesus, his influence is the faith of his disciples.⁴² In other words, if the historical Jesus has nothing to do with the Christ of faith who has impacted history for centuries, if Jesus was just, at best, a social reformer (and a failed one) in the first century Palestinian world, why bother to study such an insignificant figure? Jesus impacts history as someone who was and is believed to be the only Lord and Savior of mankind. Historical study will be caught in a meaningless trap when it looks only for historical facts.

A further limitation of historical study is its failure to connect the Jesus of history to faith. Although I discussed earlier that faith must have a basis in history, history in itself does not naturally lead to faith. Ratzinger distinguishes belief (faith) from fact (history) and says that belief cannot be laid on the table as fact.⁴³ Ratzinger goes further to say,

Belief or faith is not knowledge in the sense of practical knowledge and its particular kind of calculability. It can never become that, and in the last analysis it can only make itself ridiculous if it tries to adopt its methods. But the reverse is true too: calculable practical knowledge is limited by its very nature to the apparent, to what functions, and does not

⁴¹Debates can be among the liberals, among the conservatives even though they share many basic consensuses, and between the liberals and the conservatives.

⁴²Kahler, 63.

⁴³Ratzinger, 40.

represent the way in which to find truth itself, which by its very method it has renounced.⁴⁴

So history does not inherently generate faith. In fact, people commonly come to different conclusions based on the same phenomenon. When Jesus cast out demons, the Pharisees said, “he casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons” (Mat. 9:34 NASB). When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Son of the living God, Jesus replied, “flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Mat. 16:17b NASB). Christology from below, while focusing on historical fact as the starting point, may not pay enough attention to explaining the leap from historical fact to faith.⁴⁵ While historical study aids us in looking for the earthly Jesus, Christology from below is in need of a divine aid for the leap of faith.⁴⁶ Actually, even Jesus’ first believers did not encounter the earthly Jesus with a blank mind; because of their background in Judaic dogma and the Old Testament, when they saw Jesus claimed to forgive sin, they connected it with God as the only One who forgives sin.⁴⁷ Those using the modern from below approach do not normally have a Judaic background. Thus, if the from below approach does not take Jesus’ divinity as a presupposition and if modern people cannot rely on divine inspiration, they are greatly disadvantaged compared to Jesus’ first believers and unable to connect their knowledge of history to faith.

A final weakness of historical study is that no one can actually eliminate personal presupposition while doing it.⁴⁸ One’s presupposition may predetermine the result of the study: Christology from below will move to conclude either Jesus was a mere man or that he was the God and man Jesus Christ. As mentioned earlier, the nature of historical study and history is the objective limitation in Christology from below, but personal presupposition may become the subjective weakness. For example, personal presupposition determines how one perceives the miracle narratives in the New Testament. Since there is

⁴⁴Ibid., 46.

⁴⁵For example, Nobuhara Tokiyuki points out that Pannenberg “does not analyze the content of the Easter event itself in relation to the disciples’ confession of Jesus as the Christ.” In other words, Pannenberg does not explain what made the disciples’ leap from the historical Easter event to faith. See Tokiyuki Nobuhara, “Analogía Actionis: A New Proposal for Christology ‘From Below’” 273.

⁴⁶Surely, besides divine aid (God’s initial work), man’s choice of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior is needed.

⁴⁷Kay Fountain, *Asia Pacific Theological Seminary*, 2012.

⁴⁸Allison, 8-21, 53-78.

no way to prove the miracles scientifically, even though they were witnessed by multiple eyewitnesses, one's presupposition determines whether he/she accepts these multiple eyewitness accounts.

The From Above Approach

Arguments for Christology From Above

Christology from above was the dominant approach in the Church for a long time in the past when the question of the historical Jesus was not in hot debate. Emil Brunner plays an important role in supporting Christology from above in modern times. He claims, "Christian faith springs only out of the witness to Christ of the preached message and the written word of the Scriptures. The historical picture is indeed included in the latter ...; but this picture itself is not the basis of knowledge."⁴⁹ With this as the prior point, "inevitably the preference for the Synoptic Gospels and for the actual words of Jesus, which was the usual position of the last generation, will disappear."⁵⁰ Erickson summarizes another point made by Brunner: to know "Christ in the flesh" (God incarnate) is to know something more than "Christ after the flesh" (the Christ known by the historiographer with the method of research).⁵¹ In other words, faith is beyond observation of facts. To Brunner, Christian faith is not based on historical facts. Faith does not come from the historical Jesus event. Rather, faith comes from the image of Jesus Christ preached by the Church. Therefore, starting Christology from the second person of the Trinity is preferred.

Ratzinger advocates the from above approach from an "ontological" perspective:

The real being of the man Jesus remains static behind the event of "being-God" and "being-Lord", like the being of any man, fundamentally untouched by the event and only the chance kindling-point at which it comes to pass that for some one as he hears the Word an actual encounter with God himself becomes reality.⁵²

⁴⁹Brunner, 158.

⁵⁰Ibid., 172.

⁵¹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 683.

⁵²Ratzinger, 169.

Ratzinger goes further, “Phenomenology and existential analysis, helpful as they are, cannot suffice for Christology.”⁵³ In other words, although historical facts and studies are helpful, they are not sufficient for Christology. The from below approach does not appreciate the “ontological” identity of Jesus as Christ from the very beginning. Because Jesus’ “ontological” identity exists from the very outset, the from above approach advocates starting Christology from Jesus’ divinity. Since Jesus’ divinity is accepted as a presupposition, the from above approach is committed to a genuine supernaturalism, which is sometimes missing in Christology from below.⁵⁴

Besides Brunner and Ratzinger, some other scholars define or argue for the from above approach from other angles. Starting Christology from above needs a doctrine or dogma to start with since Christ’s divinity is expressed in a form of doctrine or dogma. Sobrino says, “A dogma is a doxological formulation that marks the culmination of a whole process of Christian living and Christian reflective thinking.”⁵⁵ In the early church history, dogmas emerged due to the living and reflective thinking of the church fathers, and the dogmas were based on the living and reflective thinking of Jesus’ first disciples. When a dogma emerges, it plays a role that cannot be replaced by specific Christian experience and thinking. In the biblical context, a dogma plays a role that cannot be replaced by specific narratives in the Bible. When a dogma functions, it does not appear in a form of process such as historical stories. Concrete stories, or thinking, do not formulate and systematize the Christian belief into rational or confessional concepts that bring certain benefits like “vivid realization, effectiveness, apprehension of width of scope, and survival.”⁵⁶ For example, the doctrine of Trinity is the result of systematizing many concrete narratives concerning Jesus and many sayings about God and the Holy Spirit. Once the doctrine of Trinity is formed, it gives a rational understanding of the triune God that cannot be concluded from a specific narrative of Jesus or a specific saying regarding God or the Holy Spirit. By the same token, the doctrine that Jesus was both fully God and fully man is the result of systematizing many narratives concerning Jesus, and specific narratives do not plainly state this doctrine. Therefore, dogma can function in its own way and definitely

⁵³Ibid., 170.

⁵⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 688.

⁵⁵Sobrino, 324. Although pointing out some benefits of the from above approach, Sobrino in the book argues for a from below approach.

⁵⁶Whitehead, 57, 122.

bring certain benefits. The Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Creed are the examples of dogma that make Christ the second person of the Trinity as the starting point of Christology. If we look into only concrete stories about Jesus without consulting dogma or creed, we lose certain benefits. Since Christology from above starts with dogma, the advantage of dogma is used by the from above approach.

Sobrino explains that some Christian doctrines are the products of early Christian apologists' combat against Hellenistic philosophers.⁵⁷ Likewise, doctrines and dogmas are the products as well as the weapons of the Church in defending its belief against heresy throughout history. When doctrines and dogmas are used as weapons for defending the Christian faith, they do not focus on the concrete stories of Jesus the earthly man. Rather, they take on the form of philosophy in order to function effectively for certain purposes.

Weaknesses of the From Above Approach

Erickson points out two weaknesses of Christology from above: 1) the substantiality of the belief is not clear and not highly valued; 2) "without an empirical referent, the Christ of faith is somewhat unreal and vague"⁵⁸ To elaborate his first point, Christology from above often does not make clear and highly value who Jesus was and what he said and did in the past. We can have faith without being an eye witness of the earthly Jesus. People may obtain faith through the preached message of the Church and the Scriptures today. However, we have the preached message and the Scriptures today because there was a historical Jesus event. If there was no historical Jesus event, in order words, no God incarnate, we would not have Jesus Christ the Mediator today. To Erickson's second point, Sobrino states a similar opinion which says that central dogmas "deal with realities such as God, creation, and grace, which are not comprehensible in themselves and which cannot be adequately grasped by human understanding, even if the human being in question is a believer."⁵⁹ Without a vivid example of the earthly Jesus, people cannot explain why some dogmas and doctrines are what they are. What is more, the presupposition of Jesus' divinity is not taken for granted in our contemporary context.

⁵⁷Sobrino, 287.

⁵⁸Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 688.

⁵⁹Sobrino, 321.

“Access to the Christ of faith comes through our following of the historical Jesus.”⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer states, “Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”⁶¹ This means that to be true believers we must obey and follow Jesus. However, unless we know how Jesus lived his earthly life, we cannot really obey and follow him and become true believers. The from above approach is not sufficient for identifying common people with the man Jesus because it does not pay much attention to what the historical Jesus said and did. It cannot remind people that Jesus is our high priest “who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15 NASB). Without being identified with the man Jesus, people can hardly appreciate that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8 NASB). Thus, the from above approach does not provide a sufficient account of an earthly Jesus for Christian discipleship, which was commanded by Jesus (Mat. 28:19). Because of these deficiencies, the from above approach cannot provide the passion that a dynamic Christian community and individuals as well should have.

In Part I of this article, both the From Below and the From Above Christological views have been discussed, including the arguments for each view as well as some of the weaknesses of these two perspectives. The quests for the historical Jesus were also included in the From Below discussion. In Part II, alternatives to each of these two views will be presented along with my solution for constructing Christology in the contemporary context and a suggestion for the Christology of Chinese house churches. Final thoughts for both Parts I and II will be presented in the Conclusion.

⁶⁰Ibid., 305.

⁶¹Bonhoeffer, 63.

THE STARTING POINT OF CHRISTOLOGY:
FROM BELOW OR FROM ABOVE?
Part II

By Daniel Qin

The Search for an Alternative

Besides the two approaches discussed above, some scholars argue for an alternative approach. It is commonly known that the “from below” approach stresses a “functional” process while the “from above” approach is an “ontological” perspective, which views Jesus Christ according to his “ontological” identity despite what he said and did.¹ According to Erickson, Reginald H. Fuller insists that in the early Jewish stage the reference to Jesus was primarily “functional”; only in the Gentile mission an “ontic” statement began to emerge.² However, the “functional” language assumes “ontological” realities.³ Ratzinger states explicitly, “The person of Jesus is his teaching, and his teaching is he himself.”⁴ This suggests that we cannot divide Jesus’ work and his person, or divide his function and his identity. Regardless of what Jesus said and did, Jesus’ “ontological” identity implies that he was God incarnate even though mankind might not know this from the beginning. Thompson makes a point that reveals the intertwined relationship between the functional and ontological:

¹The idea and the terms “functional” and “ontological” are shared by many scholars. For example, Maurice Casey says, “John saw an ontological rather than merely functional difference between Jesus and other people, and its significance is brought out particularly well at John 5.17ff” Maurice, Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd.; Louisville: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1991), 23. See more examples of “functional” and “ontological” below.

²Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 247-48. Quoted in Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 509.

³William R. Baker, “The Chalcedon Definition, Pauline Christology, and the Postmodern Challenge of ‘From Below’ Christology,” *Stone- Campbell Journal* 9, no. 1 (2006): 77.

⁴Ratzinger, 151.

Incidentally, one major objection to the use of the categories of the “Jesus of history” and the “Christ of faith” is precisely that it can foster the kind of separationism that Chalcedon wants to avoid. The categories of “christology from below” and “from above” can suffer from the same deficit. One can all too easily gain the impression that the Jesus of history is not in union with the incarnate Word.⁵

While realizing the unity of the Jesus of history and the incarnate Word, Ratzinger elaborates the tension between them:

The two fundamental structural forms of “incarnation” and “cross” theology reveal polarities which cannot be surmounted and combined in a neat-looking synthesis without the loss of the crucial points in each; they must remain present as polarities which mutually correct each other and only by complementing each other point towards the whole.⁶

The above-mentioned statements both explain the complicated relationship between the “functional” and the “ontological” and provide insights for constructing a Christology that tries to consult both the “functional” and the “ontological.” However, in trying to harmonize both approaches, the “ontological” actually gains the upper hand because the result of a steady combination is usually ontological since the functional process can be absorbed into the ontological end. On the other hand, in a from below process, without Jesus’ divinity as presupposition, any combination of the functional and the ontological is impossible. Therefore, the effort of trying to combine both approaches cannot do justice to those who insist on doing Christology from below and do not take Jesus’ divinity as presupposition from the outset.

Erickson cogently explains an alternative approach: “The content of the kerygma serves as a hypothesis to interpret and integrate the data supplied by inquiry into the historical Jesus.” This model follows “neither faith alone nor historical reason alone, but both together in an intertwined, mutually dependent, simultaneously progressing fashion.”⁷ In this model, the kerygmatic Christ is the key that unlocks the historical Jesus, and Jesus’ earthly life supports the claim that he is the

⁵Thompson, “‘Distinct but Not Separate’: Historical Research in the Study of Jesus and Christian Faith,” 134.

⁶Ratzinger, 171.

⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 690.

Son of God.⁸ Erickson's alternative is helpful because it somewhat avoids the two approaches' weaknesses and absorbs their strengths. However, his alternative is Christology from above. It is a from above approach which remembers to include some ingredients of the from below approach, in contrast to the usual from above approach which forgets some from below ingredients. Tilley insists that we need both approaches. The problem is not where "Christologists" start; rather, the real issue is mutually working out the plots of Jesus' "ascending stories" and "descending stories."⁹ Only by combining them can we properly describe the real Jesus Christ. Tilley brings great insight in this issue. However, he does not elaborate sufficiently his point in his two-page article. I will describe this insight with my own words and understanding in the following section.

A Solution for Constructing Christology in the Contemporary Context

The debate of the starting point of Christology is concerned with which approach we can and should choose today. Tilley states, the distinction of from below/from above "describes the plots of the Christological stories as we tell them, but not the genesis or the source of those stories."¹⁰ There was a time in history that no one on earth knew that Jesus was Christ the divine Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. Jesus' first disciples came to acknowledge his divinity only after they knew the man Jesus for some time. The starting point of Christology becomes an option-issue only when we discuss it in our contemporary perspective. Jesus' first disciples did not have the options of choosing the starting point of Christology that we have today. In light of this, the earthly Jesus was the starting point of Christology historically and logically. It is like a civil airplane that flies between two airports A and B. It had a historical starting terminal A during its maiden flight. After that, it keeps flying between A and B. Either A or B can be considered the starting point of a specific flight. This is the case in our contemporary perspective. Integration of the two approaches is needed because both have strengths and weaknesses. However, integration does not mean one approach replaces the other

⁸Ibid., 691.

⁹Terrence Tilley, "Why We Need Both Stories," *Commonweal* 129, no. 6 (March 22, 2002): 16.

¹⁰Ibid.

like Erickson suggests.¹¹ Each approach has its legitimate role.¹² Because the maiden Christology from below was done, and the New Testament and the Christian faith have been handed down through generations, we are able to inherit a Christian legacy; therefore, Christology from above is available and valuable today. Regardless of the diverse versions of the historical Jesus, the authenticity of the New Testament and a sufficient account of the historical Jesus are at least held by conservatives. Therefore, Christology from below is available today.

The analogy of civil airplane indicates that except for the maiden flight, each flight's starting point is established by the airplane's last flight. Whenever we start Christology either from the historical Jesus or from the Christ of faith, we always need to consider the other terminal as the place where we come from. We should not forget the process that establishes our present starting point. They are correlated and neither can replace the other. Starting from the Christ of faith needs the earthly man Jesus to be comprehensive, and starting from the earthly man Jesus needs divine aid to reach the Christ of faith.¹³ Under certain situations, we may choose one of them as the starting point just because of the specific needs of that situation. At the same time, we are free and able to move from the other direction to support our situational needs.

When doing Christology from below, we are not doing the "maiden flight" as Jesus' first disciples once did. The presupposition of Jesus' divinity may already be there when we start with the historical Jesus. According to Erickson, Norman Perrin claims the idea that "Early Christian preaching . . . was interested in historical reminiscence [is an assumption] for which we have absolutely no evidence. The opposite view, that it was theologically motivated, is the one for which we have evidence."¹⁴ This judgment can be backed up by Wilhelm Wrede's work *The Messianic Secret in the Gospels*, in which Wrede argues, according to Thompson, "that Mark, far from being a direct link with the historical Jesus, represented an elaborate theological interpretation of Jesus."¹⁵ In light of this, even if we do not take Jesus' divinity as a presupposition, the New Testament narratives of the

¹¹See footnotes 7 and 8.

¹²Cf. Ratzinger's statement at footnote 6.

¹³This is my additional description on Tilley's point. See footnote 9.

¹⁴Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 24. Quoted in Erickson, *The World Became Flesh*, 387.

¹⁵Wilhelm Wrede, *The Messianic Secret in the Gospels* (Cambridge: T. and T. Clark, 1971). Paraphrased in Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis*, 96.

historical Jesus were written by authors who already had Jesus' divinity in mind and wrote the narratives accordingly.

Our presupposition may determine what kind of from below approach we exercise: in order to find out whether we can move from the historical Jesus to the divine Christ, or just to develop the benefits of the from below approach. Without Jesus' divinity as a presupposition, one is tempted to find more historical materials beyond the New Testament narratives, or to distort the New Testament narratives in order to demythologize them.¹⁶ Different presuppositions and motivations can result in different versions of the historical Jesus. The results of the debate on the authenticity of the New Testament narratives can lead to totally different conclusions: Christian faith, no faith or another faith. Those who have genuine belief in the authenticity of the New Testament narratives, like Pannenberg, need to explain sufficiently the divine aid in the leap from historical fact to faith. For those who take Jesus' divinity as a presupposition, the purpose of the from below approach is to develop the benefits of it: being identified with the historical man Jesus and cultivating Christian discipleship. This is the greatest benefit for the Church and therefore should be employed frequently.

To sum up the above statements, Jesus' first disciples witnessed the historical starting point of Christology, i.e. the earthly man Jesus, and in the contemporary context we can and we should do both Christology from above and from below.

A Suggestion for Christology in the Chinese Context

As stated earlier, the starting point of Christology became an issue when the quests for the historical Jesus emerged and developed, and some conservative scholars responded with a positive view toward a from below approach. It is noted that the issue is mainly discussed in countries where Christian scholarship has developed to a high level. It has not become a concern in China, where the churches do not have the available scholarship and ability to participate in a sophisticated theological discussion. However, this does not mean that the issue is irrelevant to the churches in China. Rather, the issue might come as an opportunity for the Chinese churches to develop their Christology.

¹⁶For example, Rudolf Bultmann is famous for his demythologization of the Bible.

While we have not seen Christians, especially in house churches in China, thinking about Christology in the framework of Western scholars, they do have their understanding and emphasis on Christology. Chinese house churches have gone through decades of religious persecution. Although the level of this persecution has shifted time after time, generally speaking, it has been a constant struggle which in one way or another affects house church Christians' understanding of faith. While house churches have been Christocentric, they mostly identify themselves with Jesus in His suffering for the kingdom of God. In their long experience of suffering which includes being forced to leave home, difficult living conditions, imprisonment, physical torture and even martyrdom, they understand Jesus as the suffering servant who was persecuted and killed but now inspires and strengthens them. They consider themselves blessed to partake in Jesus' suffering for the kingdom of God.¹⁷ In this sense, house church Christians might be considered as having a from below mindset. At the same time, this from below mindset comes with a presupposition of Jesus' divinity and His relation to the Father since in their experience of persecution and suffering they confess "Jesus is Lord," and they claim to have power from the Holy Spirit in their suffering.¹⁸

Although house churches are still illegal, the situation has gradually changed since around the year 2000. Religious persecution has generally declined as the Communist government gains a more positive understanding about house churches and now holds a relatively lenient religious policy. This is more obvious in some urban areas since city government officials are more open-minded than rural government officials. The situation of house churches now in urban areas is a new situation. Their church members usually have better education, a relatively open mind, more social contact, greater aspiration and much less persecution than rural house church Christians have. In such a relatively favorable time, urban house churches grow fast.

However, house churches face new challenges in urban areas. While the good news of salvation has not been widely heard and accepted by the massive Chinese population, wickedness has dramatically increased. The market economy entices people into materialism and the Communist ideology has actually been abandoned in people's daily lives. Urban people are living in moral deterioration

¹⁷Wen-jie Xie and Zhi-ming Yuan, *The Cross: Jesus in China* (Rohnert Park, CA: China Soul for Christ Foundation, 2003), the Third Episode: the Bitter Cup.

¹⁸Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal, and Powerful* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004), 42.

and social corruption, having no committed faith or religion. In the contrast between hopeless moral deterioration and the power of salvation, Jesus could be portrayed as a great redeemer who comes and cures the long lasting and hopeless moral disease of the people. It would be the great task of urban house churches to introduce Jesus as the redeemer who redeems the people from their sin. Since personal redemption does not deal with the massive effect and destruction of social sin in urban areas, it would be an imperative but difficult task for house churches to provide an understanding of how Jesus would redeem and cure the people from their personal sin and social corruption. When Jesus is emphasized as the redeemer, the Christology of house churches no longer just reflects a mainly “from below” mindset. Jesus, as the redeemer of mankind, suffered and died on the cross on sinner’s behalf, and this redemption is efficacious because Jesus is the Son of God rather than any mere man. When house church Christians perceive Jesus primarily as the redeemer, they have moved from an emphasis on the suffering servant, a vivid from-below figure, to a combination both human and divine.

Besides Jesus the redeemer, house churches are increasingly concerned about the Christ of faith which has led to a focus on Church unity, evangelism and missions. The Christ of faith could also be called the cosmic Christ in the sense that this Christ of faith, or cosmic Christ, is understood as for all people, all churches and all nations in all areas. The movement in this direction can be seen from some of the top house church network leaders’ meetings, as house churches start to realize a cosmic Christ who also has concern for other churches.¹⁹ Besides church unity, house churches have a great concern for the people of China as they believe that Jesus shed His blood for the Chinese. After years of itinerant ministry throughout the vast areas of China, house church leaders realize that it is God’s good will for them to scatter in order to spread the Gospel, and they cite “Jesus is Lord” as a common confession for themselves and for the millions of unbelievers in China.²⁰ Another impetus that drives house churches’ understanding of a cosmic Christ is their zeal for missions. The Back to Jerusalem Movement is a well-known vision proclaimed by house churches as

¹⁹A house church network meeting in 1998 is mentioned by Luke Wesley in *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal, and Powerful*, 48.

²⁰Wen-jie Xie and Zhi-ming Yuan, *The Cross: Jesus in China*, the Third Episode: the Bitter Cup.

their common vision.²¹ This vision expresses the idea that Chinese people will take the responsibility of bringing the gospel back to Jerusalem, which would be the last journey of the gospel on the earth. House churches want to focus on a cosmic Christ who intends for the gospel, after moving around Europe, North America, Latin America and Africa, to reach its birthplace in Asia.

However, there are unsolved problems in house churches' understanding of a cosmic Christ. House churches, having more connections with one another, have not had reconciliation with three-self churches nor have they yet formed a clear and strategic understanding of whether or not and how the Church of Christ would include three-self churches. With the passion of evangelizing urban Chinese, house churches have to explain how the redemptive Jesus, and the cosmic Christ, actually redeems people from their personal sin and social corruption. However, being influenced by the past experience of severe persecution, many house church Christians hold a generally passive attitude towards social involvement and cultural transformation. They do not appear to understand how the cosmic Christ, i.e. the Christ of faith, would dialogue with their Chinese culture and society. Reflecting on the passive attitude, the Back to Jerusalem Movement, though indicating house churches' kingdom mindset, is limited in the realm of spreading the gospel to more peoples and has not resulted in a Christology which would tell how the cosmic Christ deals with other cultures and religions.

For these reasons, house churches are facing unsolved problems in their understanding of the cosmic Christ. Despite these problems, it is likely that increased numbers of educated and open-minded Christians and resources in a more open environment will help enable house church Christians to deal with the unsolved problems. In this way, in due time, the cosmic Christ, i.e., the Christ of faith, may become their frequent starting point of Christology. By frequently addressing the Christ of faith, house churches would have a better starting point to dialogue with other religions, philosophy, ideology and social groups and therefore have a stronger impact on culture and society. Meanwhile, house churches should continue the emphasis of being identified with the suffering Jesus. This emphasis would help house churches to maintain the beneficial element of the from below approach: edifying the church by learning from the suffering Jesus.

²¹David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003), 192.

Conclusion

The current Christological debates pay major attention to which approach should replace the other, or which approach should be dominant, or how to integrate the two approaches. If the discussion is limited to “what we teach today,” we may never convincingly solve the issue. Tilley points to “the genesis of those stories.”²² The man Jesus, initially known by his first disciples, was the historical starting point of all stories and doctrines that we have today. This does justice to the historical beginning of Jesus Christ and at the same time leaves the issue of what we teach today open for discussion. Thus, the historically legitimate starting point is settled, and what we do about Christology today does not affect that historical starting point.

Today we start Christology either from the Christ of faith or the earthly Jesus. However, we do not have to exclusively stay with one of them for long. In preaching or oral conversation, the earthly Jesus may follow the Christ of faith within a minute and vice versa. Thus, starting from one or the other bears little significance in Christian practice. In academic work, in some cases we may need to elucidate one of them (Christ or the earthly Jesus) sufficiently before going into the other. However, in the whole framework, the most important issue is how we integrally describe the “ascending and descending”²³ Jesus Christ. Which one to start with becomes less important. In any case, we can start with one and decide how long we need to stay there before moving to the other, but the goal is to describe Jesus Christ well in order to meet the needs in specific situation.

This is also true for the Chinese context. While an emphasis on the suffering Jesus may give house church Christians a from-below mindset, the Christ of faith is becoming a rising concern as house churches grow and face unsolved problems. By basing the starting point of Christology on specific situations, the from below and from above approach could be integrated. In this way Chinese house churches may work hard on the Christ of faith in dealing with their culture and society and at the same time, maintain their emphasis on the suffering Jesus as a way of edifying the Church.

²²See footnote 10.

²³See footnote 10.

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THE PRESENCE AND INDEFINITENESS
OF ALLAH'S ATTRIBUTES OF GRACE
IN THE QUR'AN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

By LJ Custodio

Introduction

The basic practice of Islam is summed up in its Five Pillars: the recital of the creed (*shahada*), ritual prayers five times a day (*salat*), almsgiving (*zakat*), fasting in the month of Ramadan (*ssawm*) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Haji*). To many evangelical Christians, such religious devotion can often seem to be evidence of an endless striving after the righteous requirements of Allah. As such, Islam can be easily characterised as a religion devoid of grace. This paper will seek to show that the Qur'an speaks of Allah's attributes of grace. However, the Qur'an also speaks openly of the potential for Allah to withhold the expression of his gracious attributes. This project will seek to show that this presence and indefiniteness with regards to Allah's graciousness lead to a unique conception of Allah as a god of justice. The implication for Muslims is seen in their motivating principle and their understanding of the requirements for salvation. For Christians, this project will show how the presence and indefiniteness of grace in the Qur'an can inform and be a framework for understanding how to show the relevance of the offence of the cross to Muslims.

**The Presence and Indefiniteness of Allah's Attributes
of Grace in the Qur'an**

Before beginning the analysis of the relevant Qur'anic data, it is important to note the methodology employed in analyzing Allah's attribute of grace in the Qur'an and to acknowledge known issues which have arisen as part of the research.

This project has employed various English translations of the Qur'an, but relies predominantly on an English translation based on Abdullah Yusuf Ali's revised translation (eleventh edition) published by Amana.¹ References from Yusuf Ali's translation are given in the format "*Surah: Ayat*."² A comma delineates passages that form a list if the *ayat* is in the same *Surah* otherwise a semi-colon is used. This is distinguished from biblical citations, which contain the name of the book. Furthermore, relevant Arabic words have been transliterated rather than written in Arabic script.

The reliance on an English translation does limit the material available for Qur'anic exegesis. For example, the best resource for exegesis is *al-Tafsir al-kabir* by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (606/1209).³ However, this and many other *tafsirs* (exegetical commentaries) are currently only available in Arabic. As a result, this work has mainly employed what can be characterised as "reading guides" written by scholars from various backgrounds for its analysis of the Qur'an.⁴ The primary commentary employed is by Yusuf Ali, due to its availability in his translation. This comment should not diminish the fact that his comments are highly regarded from a Sunni perspective.⁵ Two other commentaries have also been employed due to their availability in English and to allow for possible interactions: *The Holy Quran: Abridged Commentary* by the Indian Muslim scholar J.M.S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali and *An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Qur'an* (13 volumes and incomplete) by Ayatulla Sayyid Kamal Faghih Iman and "a group of Muslim scholars."

Allah's gracious attributes are expressed as a subset of His various names. Essentially the Qur'an speaks of Allah's "Beautiful Names" (7:180; 17:110; 20:8; 59:24) without listing them. These "Beautiful Names" play a role in Muslim thought and worship and are a useful way of understanding his attributes.⁶ For example, Muslims

¹No Author, "Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Qur'an commentary, the deletion of the merits of Imams Hasan and Husayn, and other changes," April 2000, n.p. Available: <http://www.al-islam.org/tahriif/yusufali/index.htm>. Cited 10th November 2008. This article makes us aware that there are three versions of the translations and this site gives some of the later changes that have been made.

²Different translations of the Qur'an can vary in the numbering of the verses. If using another translation, just look at the verses preceding or following the reference.

³C. Moucarry, *The Search for Forgiveness: Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), 17.

⁴Essentially they provide aids in reading the Qur'an and an awareness of key themes.

⁵No Author, "Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Qur'an commentary," April 2000, n.p.

⁶W.M. Watt, *Companion to the Qur'an: Based on the Arberry Translation*

believe that Allah is Al-Adl (the Just), Al Ali (Mighty and Powerful), Al Alim (all knowing) and Al Bari (the Creator), but also Al-Ghafur (forgiving) and Al-Afuw (Pardoner). Muslims believe that there are 99 names in total, most of which are found in the Qur'an, though they vary by traditions and compilers. This project employed a compilation from Muhammed al-Mandani and Abu Huraira.⁷ Based on these names, the attribute of grace is not just one attribute but rather an aggregate compilation derived from twenty-four names, which reflect Allah's moral attributes and are termed the "Glorious Attributes" (*Isma-ul-Jemaliyah*).⁸ Therefore, I have analyzed the presence and indefiniteness of grace in the Qur'an by assessing a selection of names associated with Allah's gracious attributes.⁹

Jens Christensen, a Lutheran Bishop who served extensively in Pakistan, notes that some Muslim scholars would dispute the validity of analyzing Allah's names, arguing that they do not reflect the thoughts of Mohammed or the Qur'an.¹⁰ This is further complicated by the fact that there are potentially 552 various names of Allah, according to the Qur'an and Hadiths.¹¹ The debate over the proper use of Allah's names cannot be solved here. However we are still justified in accepting the names as "indicative of nearly all orthodox and conservative thinking in Islamic theology."¹²

Furthermore, the Pakistani Muslim scholar Daud Rahbar, warns that the "Significance of the names are found in the context . . . [and] if taken out of context, Allah looks capricious."¹³ James Barr makes a similar note of caution when it comes to word studies on biblical concepts for time and eternity. His point was that it can be problematic to treat words for God's attributes as though they communicate the

(London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1967) 94, 261; A. Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 7th Edition (Maryland: Amana Publications, 2006), 397 note 1154, 766 note 2539.

⁷E.M. Caner and E.F. Caner, *Unveiling Islam: An Insiders Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 111-117.

⁸S. M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God* (New York: American Tract Society, 1905), 48.

⁹The Glorious Names selected are those which are most commonly found.

¹⁰J. Christensen, *A Practical Approach to Muslims* (no place: North Africa Mission, 1977), 474.

¹¹Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 110. Based on the 1880 Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. See also D. Rahbar, *God of Justice: A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 13.

¹²Christensen, *A Practical Approach to Muslims*, 474.

¹³Rahbar, *God of Justice* 12.

concept of the various attributes.¹⁴ This means that we are unlikely to ascertain the concept associated with the word by looking at it in isolation from a specific sentence. This becomes particularly pertinent when one observes the indefiniteness and seeming unreliability of the expression of Allah's gracious attributes, where it can be too easy to characterize Allah as capricious. Therefore, this work has sought to understand the concepts a writer wants to communicate, by understanding his intention, emphasis and use of language in the passages cited.

The Presence of Allah's Attributes of Grace

The Qur'an opens with "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful" (1:1). This formula, referred to as the *Basmalah* (or *Bismillah*), is used to denote the boundaries of two Surahs.¹⁵ The Arabic terms used in the *Basmalah* are the adjectives *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim* respectively.¹⁶ This is paralleled in the Bible, which describes God as merciful and compassionate (רַחוּם and רַחֻם in Exodus 34:6-7).¹⁷ There is no great difference between these adjectives, though a distinction of emphasis is sometimes made.¹⁸ For example, a distinction is made between Allah's general and specific mercy. *Rahman* refers to mercy that is unreserved and shown to all, while *Rahim* refers to mercy shown to those who are faithful as a reward or appreciation from Allah.¹⁹ Alternatively, a distinction is made in terms of quality. *Ar-Rahman* is the more common term and is used almost exclusively to refer to Allah.²⁰ It refers to a type of mercy which goes out before the need arises, that serves to protect Allah's

¹⁴J. Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968), 55, 110-115, 161.

¹⁵The 9th Surah is the exception.

¹⁶L. Gardet, "Basmala" in H.A.R. Gibbs, J.H. Kramers, E. Levi-Provençal, J. Schacht (eds). *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Volume A-B; Brill: Leiden, 1986), 1085. For more information on the Basmalah and its popular uses amongst Muslims.

¹⁷L. Kohler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Student Edition)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 333, 1216-1217.

¹⁸Watt, *Companion to the Qur'an*, 13.

¹⁹S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Holy Quran: Abridged Commentary* (Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1975), 2; Ayatulla Sayyid Kamal Faghieh Imani, et al *An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Qur'an* (13 volumes [incomplete], trans S.A. Sadr-ameli; ed C. Smith; Isfahan: Amir-ul- Mu'mineen Ali Library, 1997), 43-44.

²⁰Moucarry, *The Search for Forgiveness*, 35 note 1; Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 15 note 19.

creatures, preserving them and leading them to a clearer light.²¹ As a result, *Rahman* refers to the “. . . Preventative grace, which saves Allah's servants from sin.”²² It relates Allah's attribute to a mother's care for a child.²³ In contrast, *ar-Rahim* is a more general term that can be attributed to humans as well. It may imply pity, long suffering, patience and forgiveness.²⁴ Regardless of the distinctions, it is not hard to see the presence of grace in the Qur'an. The Qur'an speaks of Allah's mercy and compassion going out to all mankind, especially to those who submit to him.

Ar-Rahman and *ar-Rahim* are just two names which reflect Allah's attributes of grace. A further twenty-two of these names are said to characterize Allah's grace and mercy.²⁵ *Ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim* are often associated with other attributes including Allah's forgiveness, patience, kindness and generosity. Space prevents us from analyzing all these names in detail and not all are found in the Qur'an. A few examples will suffice in further showing the presence of grace in the Qur'an. For example, the name *rahmin* is often used in conjunction with *ghafur*. *Al-ghafur* is the name used to describe Allah as “oft forgiving” or “all forgiving” (2:226; 8:69; 9:99; 12:98; 17:44; 35:5, 28; 42:5; 52:8; 60:7; 66:1). *Ghafur* is related to *ghaffar*, as both are intensive forms of *ghafir* (40:3), which refers to Allah's leniency in being prepared to forgive sin.²⁶ *Al-ghaffar* (e.g. 39:5; 71:10) describes Allah as one who “forgives again and again” or is “ever forgiving”. This is demonstrated in Allah's willingness to forgive his prophets (20:82; 74:56). With the exception of Jesus, Allah is said to have forgiven the sins of Adam and Eve (7:23), Noah (11:47), Abraham (26:82), Moses (7:151; 28:16), David (38:24-25), Solomon (38:35) and Mohammed (4:106; 40:55; 110:3). As we can see, grace is related to Allah's attribute of forgiveness.

Another name which describes Allah's forgiveness is *Al-afuw*, relating to his role as “Pardoner” or in “Blotting out sins” (58:2). Similarly Allah is also referred to as *Al-tawwab* (e.g. 2:37; 2:54; 9:104; 24:10; 49:12). *Tawwab* is the intensive form of *tawbah* (repentance) and thus carries the translation “oft returning.”²⁷ The

²¹Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 15 note 19.

²²Ibid., 705 note 2321.

²³Moucarry, *The Search for Forgiveness*, 25.

²⁴Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 15 note 19.

²⁵Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, 48.

²⁶Moucarry, *The Search for Forgiveness*, 37.

²⁷Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, 26 note 55.

intensive form may refer to Allah's willingness to forgive disobedience, or it may refer to Allah's initiative in causing repentance.²⁸ Regardless of the uncertainty, to forgive is understood to be a divine prerogative (3:135). The fact that Allah is "oft-returning" indicates that he wants to mercifully turn to believers who have transgressed his laws (4:26-27; 33:73). This is related to *Al-halim*, which speaks of his "patience" or "forbearance" (2:225, 235; 3:155; 5:101; 17:44; 35:21). Allah is patient and forbearing in the sense that he does not hasten his judgment on those who disobey him and is the consequence of his mercy.²⁹

Moreover Allah is said to be "full of kindness" (*Ar-ra'uf*, in 2:207; 9:117; 16:7; 59:10), is willing to reward even the smallest service (*al-shakir* in 35:30) and is eager to give generously from his bounty (*Al-wahaah*, in 3:8; 38:9, 35). As a result, the Qur'an speaks of Allah's grace as *Al-fadool*, referring to his grace as a "bounty" (e.g. 2:251) or "reward" (e.g. 4:173; 30:45). This bounty is described as being "boundless" (3:174; 4:130; 8:29) and open to all (2:251; 17:20).³⁰ This "bounty" or "reward" is mainly associated with material things, but not exclusively as there is no higher bounty than heaven (42:22-23).³¹

This brief survey of Allah's "Glorious names" shows that in the Qur'an grace is predicated of Allah. This grace embodies an aggregate of other attributes such as mercy, compassion, forgiveness, patience, kindness and generosity. This comprehensive view is preferred to regarding grace as a single attribute of Allah. As a result, he is described as the "Lord of grace abounding" (2:105; 3:174; 8:29; 57:21, 29; 62:4). The Qur'an praises Allah's grace by referring to him as the "best of those who show mercy" (7:151; 23:118), which is attested by Moses (12:64), Jacob (12:92), Joseph (21:83) and Job (23:109). In light of Allah's willingness to forgive and be patient, the Qur'an speaks of *rahmah* or *rahamah* (mercy) when a person is in need or in want of Allah's grace (e.g. 2:218; 3:74; 4:96; 30:50; 33:24; 40:9; 42:8) so as to prevent people from despairing (39:53).³² Moreover, as a result of Allah's willingness to share of his bounty to all and to show mercy to those who need it. The Qur'an commands all to

²⁸Moucarry, *The Search for Forgiveness*, 71-72.

²⁹Ibid., 62. Quoting Fakhr al-Din al-Razi whose commentary is not available in English.

³⁰Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, 103 note 288, 445 note 1319, 679 note 2200.

³¹Ibid., 1252 note 4558, 1468 note 5464.

³²Despairing appears to be a serious sin.

“remember His grace and favour” (*naamah*, for example 5:7,11, 20; 7:69, 74; 14:34; 16:18) and to show gratitude (16:114, 121; 27:019; 46:015) to him for all his “favours.” Yusuf Ali notes that whatever good we do is small; as a result, everyone needs Allah’s grace to “lift us up and blot out our shortcomings.”³³ Therefore, the Qur’an not only speaks of Allah’s many gracious attributes, but also emphasizes our need for Allah’s grace (73:20).

The Indefiniteness of Allah’s Attributes of Grace

The biblical witness also speaks of God’s grace, mercy, patience and great loving- kindness (e.g. Psalm 111:4; Jonah 4:2).³⁴ God’s graciousness is clearly and fully expressed in His Son Jesus who is described as: full of grace (John 1:14), has God’s grace upon him (Luke 2:40) and is the One through whom believers receive multiplied grace (John 1:16). As this section will show, in comparison to the biblical revelation of God’s grace, the Qur’anic expression of Allah’s gracious attributes appears more indefinite and vague. Specifically, the Qur’an clearly shows the potential of Allah withholding the expression of his gracious attributes, particularly for non-believers and those who remain unrepentant. This indefiniteness can be seen in a number of ways. Firstly, it can be observed by the fact that Allah’s mercy seems discriminatory. At one level, divine compassion is shown to all mankind in the provision of livelihood and comforts of life (7:55; 17:68; 16:5-7; 22:64; 25:50-51; 26:6-8; 27:64; 28:73; 30:45, 49; 42:27) and through the provision of guidance to all mankind through messengers (7:50; 10:58; 16:66; 21:107; 31:1-2; 45:19). Yet Allah’s mercy is often preferentially directed to those who believe (2:61; 9:118-119; 24:10, 14, 20).

Secondly, there are limits placed on Allah’s forgiveness. Forgiveness is only granted when it is sought. For example, David had to ask for forgiveness (38:23-24) and likewise Moses (28:14-15). The context where Allah is *Ghafur* and *Ghaffar* tends to be that Allah is forgiving, not arbitrarily, but under specific conditions. Allah forgives only if unbelievers desist from fighting (2:188), if idolaters repent (9:5), if the person repents (4:110; 6:54; 7:152; 16:120; 20:84; 25:68-70; 27:11), if the person obeys Allah (49:14) and fear Him (57:28). Similarly, when we read the verses relating to *al-Afuw*, Allah forgives.

³³Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, 1555 note 5777.

³⁴Space prevents us for giving a full treatment of the biblical witness. For a comprehensive overview please see J.S.

However, the persistent sinner does not escape judgment (4:148; 5:96; 9:67; 42:29, 32). Likewise, Allah is said to relent (*Al Tawwab*) on those who repent and act wisely--specifically if one asks forgiveness (110:3), if one confesses their sins (9:102-103), or if one turns from injustice (5:42-43). The Qur'an essentially places limits and conditions on Allah's forgiveness.³⁵ In fact, Allah's character of grace is totally absent for those who do not submit to him, a fact attested by Abu Hurairi in narrating Mohammed who said, "[N]one will enter Paradise but a Muslim soul." (Al-Bukhari 4:190; 52.182.297).³⁶

Thirdly, the decision to be merciful and forgive rests ultimately with Allah. However, there are also occasions when the reason as to why Allah would forgive is a mystery (e.g. 3:155).³⁷ Consequently, the question arises, "In what sense is Allah merciful and compassionate?"³⁸ One notices that the Qur'an seems to assert that Allah's character of *ghafur* and *rahmin* are only mere possibilities and not certainties:

O ye who believe! Truly the Pagans are unclean; so let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. And if ye fear poverty, soon will Allah enrich you, if He wills, out of His bounty, for Allah is All-knowing, All-wise. (9:28)

Others (there are who) have acknowledged their wrongdoings: they have mixed an act that was good with another that was evil. Perhaps Allah will turn unto them (in Mercy): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (9:102)

Allah may reward the men of Truth for their Truth, and punish the Hypocrites if that be His Will, or turn to them in Mercy: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (33:24)

³⁵*Rahim* is often in the same context as *Ghafur* and *Tawwab*. As such the same could be said of Allah's mercy.

³⁶M. M. Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari. Arabic-English*, Volumes 1-9 (Beirut: Dar Al Arabia, no year), IV, 190.

³⁷Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 168 note 468. Yusuf Ali is not sure why Allah forgives in this particular example.

³⁸K. Cragg, *The Dome and the Rock: Jerusalem Studies in Islam* (London: SPCK, 1964), 92-93.

The net result is that Allah's forgiveness and punishment seems arbitrary and fickle, being entirely subject to his will and plan (see 33:17; 48:14).³⁹

Lastly, a casual reading of the Qur'an will show how often the descriptions of hell and paradise follow each other, and how reward and punishment are mentioned in the same breath. For example,

Behold! thy Lord did declare that He would send against them, to the Day of Judgment, those who would afflict them with grievous penalty. Thy Lord is quick in retribution, but He is also Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (7:167) Say: 'Who can keep you safe by night and by day from (the Wrath of) (Allah) Most Gracious? (21:42)

In fact, mercy is often juxtaposed to Allah's treatment of the unjust (4:33-34; 5:98; 7:166; 15:49-50; 19:46; 42:5-6; 50:31-33; 76:31). Therefore, these passages are too frequent in the Qur'an to be dismissed as cases of spasmodic incongruity. For the casual reader, the presence of contiguous phrases connoting two opposite disposition tends to lead to the conclusion that Allah is possibly unreliable.⁴⁰

Understanding the Presence and Indefiniteness of Allah's Grace

So how are we to understand this indefiniteness or vagueness with regards to Allah's gracious attributes? Christian commentators on the Qur'an tend to depict Allah as capricious.⁴¹ For example, Canner and Canner, who speak as former Muslim believers, point out that Allah's gracious titles are in fact redefined. They note that Allah may be a "Liberal Giver" (Al-Wahab), but only in the sense of "fierce warrior who decides to be merciful in response to victory."⁴² Furthermore, Dr. Kenneth Cragg, a major figure in Christian-Muslim conversation, in noting the stipulations which seem to show Allah's mercy to be only a mere possibility (e.g. 85:14-16) concludes, "one may not, therefore, say that God is necessarily loving, holy, righteous, clement or relenting, in every and all situations."⁴³

³⁹Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 1063 note 3698.

⁴⁰The Muslim response to this will be given shortly.

⁴¹Christensen, *The Practical Approach to Muslims*, 377-378; Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 117-118.

⁴²Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 118.

⁴³K. Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Galaxy Books, 1964), 42.

In contrast, Muslim apologists and scholars note that the Qur'an is not a neutral text but is trying to persuade its readers. Specifically, Daud Rahbar, who treats the Qur'anic text sympathetically and seriously, points out that the literary style and devices the Qur'an employs are suggestive of a highly rhetorical document with an intent and purpose to its style.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Qur'an speaks of itself as a "clear book" (5:15; 12:1; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 44:2) with regards to its message (14:4).⁴⁵ Therefore, before subscribing to such casual conclusions, we need to first ask whether the Qur'an intends to depict Allah as unreliable and capricious. In this case, it follows that when one looks at the previous passages that tend to depict Allah as being capricious, it is important to ask the question, "Where is the emphasis? or what is the intention in the text?" The intention is to better understand why the Qur'an speaks of both a presence of grace and an indefiniteness with regards to the expression of Allah's graciousness to better understand the god depicted by the Qur'an.

Firstly, let us tackle the passages that seem to put Allah's graciousness in doubt. In reference to *Al Razi*, Moucarry notes that passages which contain "may" (*asa*) are not meant to induce doubt as to whether Allah will forgive, but are intended to encourage people to seek Allah's forgiveness intently.⁴⁶ As such, we should not be too quick to describe Allah's mercy as doubtful.

If this is the case, where then is the emphasis in passages that denote doubt with regards to Allah's graciousness? Consider the following examples:

⁴⁴Rahbar, *God of Justice* 68. Various Muslim scholars suggest that the Qur'an employs a variety of literary devices [see F. Esack, *The Quran: A Users Guide* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2005), 69-77; M. Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," 2000, n.p. Available: http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Q_Studies/Mirliter.html. Cited 9th November 2008] and even changes in narrative voice for rhetorical purposes [see M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, "Grammatical Shift For The Rhetorical Purposes: Iltifaat And Related Features In The Qur'an," 1992, n.p. Available: <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Grammar/iltifaat.html>. Cited 9th November 2008]. For an analysis of the literary methods employed in the Qur'an see N. Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A contemporary approach to a veiled text* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996).

⁴⁵M. Mir, "Language" in A. Rippin (ed). *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 89. The Qur'anic claim to clarity is in the message. See also Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 251 note 716. He prefers the translation "perspicuous" instead of "clear" to avoid the sense that the Qur'an is just simple and not beautiful.

⁴⁶C. Moucarry, *Faith to Faith: Christianity and Islam in Dialogue* (Leicester: IVP, 2001) 103, 111 note 2.

If Allah do touch thee with hurt, there is none can remove it but He: if He do [sic] design some benefit for thee, there is none can keep back His favour: He causeth it to reach whomsoever of His servants He pleaseth. And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (10:107)

Thy Lord does create and choose as He pleases: no choice have they (in the matter): Glory to Allah! and far is He above the partners they ascribe (to Him)! (28:68).

(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He

[sic] multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things). To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth: He enlarges and restricts. The Sustenance to whom He will: for He knows full well all things. (42:11-12)

Be ye foremost (in seeking) Forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden (of Bliss), the width whereof is as the width of heaven and earth, prepared for those who believe in Allah and His messengers: that is the Grace of Allah, which He bestows on whom he pleases: and Allah is the Lord of Grace abounding. (57:21)

The frequent use of the third personal masculine pronoun “He,” “Him” and “His” seems to be employed for literary emphasis denoting that Allah is able to do and does what he wills. Therefore the Qur’an is keen to show that Allah is not dependent on others for help or advice but is supreme in wisdom, knowledge and power.⁴⁷ Similarly, according to Daud Rahbar in his exhaustive study of the relevant verses, the proper way of understanding passages which seem to depict Allah as whimsical is that these passages are probably meant to signify Allah’s sovereignty and power.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 979 note 3397.

⁴⁸Rahbar, *God of Justice*, 69-70, 164.

We move now to passages depicting two opposite dispositions of Allah within the same verse. Yusuf Ali asserts that “where the terrible consequences Evil (rejection of God), are mentioned, there is always a stress laid on God's attribute of Grace and Mercy.”⁴⁹ This gives the impression that the contiguous phrases connoting two opposite dispositions of God are a definite feature of the rhetorical style of the Qur'an. Furthermore, in reference to Surah 39:53, the Muslim scholar Mir Ahmed Ali notes that Allah is introduced to the world "as a oft-pardoning, most merciful master of the universe who deals with His creation as he pleases and who's justice is tempered with mercy."⁵⁰ This suggests that when allusion to Allah's torment and vengeance are made in the same breath as the mention of his love and mercy, it is meant to signify the divine vengeance which sinners are to face and the divine love and mercy which the virtuous will receive. In the opinion of Daud Rahbar, “[S]uch descriptions of God are reminders of rewards and punishment and of God's justice.”⁵¹

When one looks at these reasons, it is possible to see that the Qur'an deliberately presents an indefiniteness to Allah's gracious attributes to emphasize the sovereignty and power of Allah. When the presence and indefiniteness of grace, along with the seeming absence of grace directed at non-believers and those who are unrepentant are taken together, it is designed to depict Allah as a powerful judge who is unrelenting in his justice. Allah will forgive only those who believe in him and obey his commandments, and he will let men know on Judgment Day what they have done. Therefore, he is “called the punisher with reference to the punishment that awaits a sinner in the hereafter, and the forgiver with reference to the forgiveness that awaits the virtuous.”⁵² The importance of Allah's justice makes sense given the fact that justice is regarded as one of the reasons why he created the earth (45:22) and the revelation of the Qur'an is specifically for the purpose of making Allah's justice known to mankind (57:25).

⁴⁹Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 64 note 165.

⁵⁰Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Holy Quran*, 734-735.

⁵¹Rahbar, *God of Justice*, 147.

⁵²Ibid.

Implications for Muslims

Implications of Responding to Allah

The presence and indefiniteness of Allah's gracious attributes in the Qur'an suggests that justice is the focal point of the Qur'an's depiction of Allah. By implication fear becomes the proper response to Allah and the motive-principle of virtuous conduct in Qur'anic thought. Verses that represent the true spirit of fear-motive include:

And fear the Day when ye shall be brought back to Allah. Then shall every soul be paid what it earned, and none shall be dealt with unjustly. (2:281) O Ye who believe! Put not yourselves forward before Allah and His Messenger; but fear Allah: for Allah is He Who hears and knows all things. (49:1)

In fact, fear of Allah is one of the most common godward sentiments in the Qur'an (e.g. 2:2, 197, 223, 282; 3:102, 175, 200; 4:77, 131; 5:8, 11, 96, 100, 6:69, 72; 7:56, 63; 9:13, 18; 16:51; 22:1; 23:42, 57; 32:16; 33:37; 35:28; 39:10, 23; 49:12; 58:9; 59:7, 18, 21; 60:11; 64:16; 56:1-2, 4-5, 10; 70:27-28; 71:3; 79:40; 87:10; 92:5; 98:8). It is telling that this prevailing fear motive fits "naturally with the idea of the Lord of Justice and Authority."⁵³ This fear motive explains many of Allah's names. A casual glance at the ninety-nine names of Allah shows that the "Terrible Attributes" occur again and again. For example, Allah is the "High One" in might and power (*Al-Ali*, 2:225-256), "the Judge among His servants" (*Al-Hakem*, 40:48), the one who will take account of people's deeds (*Al-Hasib*, 4:6-7), "the Avenger" (30:47), "the Killer at His Will" (*Al-Mumit* 15:23) and "the one who computes everything" (*Al-Muhsi*, 19:94).⁵⁴ These attributes depict his strength, majesty and greatness.⁵⁵ These attributes are meant to induce fear and terror of his power and encourage pious Muslims to be obedient to him.⁵⁶

The Bible also speaks of God as being just (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 1:6; Revelation 15:3) and does allow for the use of godly fear as a motivating principle in light of impending judgment (e.g. Isaiah 33:6; Philippians 2:12; Revelation 14:6). However, in contrast to the Qur'an,

⁵³Rahbar, *God of Justice*, 179-181.

⁵⁴Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 111-117.

⁵⁵Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, 42.

⁵⁶Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, 47.

the God of the Bible is above anything else the Father (e.g. Deuteronomy 32:6; Matthew 5:16; 6:9; 18:10; John 8:41-42; Romans 8:15). Furthermore, His love transcends His justice. For example, Jonah complains that God is too compassionate rather than just in dealing with the Ninevites (Jonah 4:1-4). The result is that the Bible allows for a reciprocity of relationship between man and God and makes love the essential motive (e.g. Deuteronomy 6:5; 11:1; Luke 10:27; 1 John 4:7-21).

Now the Qur'an does speak of Allah's loving-kindness (*Al-Wadud*) in two instances:

But ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn unto Him (in repentance): For my Lord is indeed full of mercy and loving-kindness (11:90).

For those who believe and do righteous deeds, will be Gardens; beneath which rivers flow: That is the great Salvation, (the fulfilment of all desires), Truly strong is the Grip (and Power) of thy Lord. It is He Who creates from the beginning, and He can restore (life). And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Full of Loving-Kindness, Lord of the Throne of Glory, doer (without let) of all that He intends (85:12-16).

In having only two verses, it is apparent that the Qur'an has little room for love.⁵⁷ Moreover, it would also seem that love is secondary to Allah's forgiveness in both passages.⁵⁸ In fact, Daud Rahbar notes that love is too strong a word for *Al-Wadud*.⁵⁹ Therefore, in contrast to the Bible, love is not a motivating principle for Muslims.

In conclusion, the Qur'anic depiction of Allah as an unrelenting and awesome judge on the final day directs the reader to respond to Allah in fear and caution. This fear and caution seems to be the basis of faith, which itself is the starting point of virtue and good conduct. Therefore, fear is not the outcome of faith. Rather, fear gives birth to faith and sustains it.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Ibid., 172.

⁵⁸Ibid., 174.

⁵⁹Ibid., 172.

⁶⁰Rahbar, *God of Justice*, 185.

Implications for the Islamic Understanding of Salvation

The depiction of Allah as judge leads to one of the basic tenets of Islam, which is the accountability of human beings before him. This is illustrated by the fact that the Qur'an "places an extraordinary emphasis on the binding relationship between faith and practice or what it describes as righteous deeds."⁶¹ In fact, the bulk of the content of the Qur'anic message contains exhortations dealing with righteous conduct and the consequences of not following or ignoring them and these are framed within the backdrop of the all-pervading presence of Allah.⁶² The Qur'an speaks repeatedly about the responsibility of individual human beings to Allah (17:13-14; 99:1-8) because each person's deeds have been recorded in his or her book (69:19-27).

Farid Esack, a critical and progressive Muslim scholar by his own definition, notes that the belief in the accountability of man to God is "second only to that of the existence of God and the belief in the Prophets of God."⁶³ This is especially clear when we look at the Qur'anic image of what will occur on the Day of Judgment. The predominant image used is that of judgment scales where the actions of people will be weighed according to whether their good deeds outweigh the bad (7:8-9; 23:102-103; 101:6-8). Therefore, Allah will deal with everyone on the Last Day justly, according to what they deserve, whether it is punishment or reward (4:40; 10:44).

This emphasis on human accountability on the Day of Judgment firstly establishes the place of works in gaining a positive verdict on the Last Day.⁶⁴ The Bible does not deny the place of works on the Day of Judgment. The Apostle Paul notes that God will judge everyone impartially (Romans 2:6,11): those who do good will attain eternal life (Romans 2:7, 10), while those who do evil will be punished (Romans 2:8-9).⁶⁵ In fact, Paul upholds that faithful obedience to God's laws is a theoretical means of attaining justification (Romans 2:13; 7:10). Therefore, Paul validates in principle the place of persistent good works in gaining a positive verdict on the final Day. The

⁶¹Esack, *The Quran: A Users Guide*, 146.

⁶²Ibid., 166.

⁶³Ibid., 158.

⁶⁴It is too narrow to say that Islam holds to salvation by works. Islam affirms the need for faith and works [see George, T *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad? Understanding the Differences between Christianity and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 110-111; Moucarray, *Faith to Faith*, 102].

⁶⁵D. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 135. Following Moo's chiasmic arrangement.

difference with respect to the Qur'an is that Paul goes on to show that while this principle is valid, no man meets the necessary condition for this principle to be a reality (Romans 3:9-20).⁶⁶ Therefore, a new way is required (Romans 3:21-22). It is only through Christ's obedient act, which Christians share through our union in Him, that an acquittal on the last Day is made possible (Romans 5:19b).⁶⁷

Secondly, the emphasis on human accountability creates an association between the expressions of Allah's gracious attributes with his reward (e.g. 24:37-38; 30:43-45; 33:47).⁶⁸ As such, the expression of Allah's grace seems to be the just and merited favour Allah gives to faithful Muslims based on their righteous deeds recorded in his or her book at the Day of Judgment. This stands in contrast to the Biblical teaching, which understands grace as God's unmerited favour shown to sinners (Romans 5:15, 17, 20-21; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:1; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 12:15).

The aforementioned biblical witness is affirmed in Reformed Theology, which holds to the understanding that a person needs God's "Special grace" to be saved because of mankind's total inability to live up to God's standard. Special grace is understood to be the benefit of God as Redeemer that effectually imparts salvation (Titus 2:11). This need for God's special grace is borne out of the understanding of "Original Sin" and "Pervasive Depravity" (or "Total Depravity").⁶⁹ The Bible teaches that by virtue of their determination to live autonomously rather than under their Creator's lordship, Adam and Eve tragically fell from innocence to sin (Genesis 3:1-7). This act of disobedience brought upon the couple guilt and shame (3:7), estrangement from God (3:8-10), a sinful nature expressed through blaming each other (3:11-13) and physical death (3:19). Adam's sin affected not only himself, but also all those that followed after him (Genesis 5:3; John 3:6; Romans 5:12-19). Essentially the entire human race is afflicted with objective guilt and shame, alienation from God and depraved natures that refuse to know and love their Creator. As a result, this pervasive sinfulness through Adam has seriously maimed human capacity to actualize the good through their works.⁷⁰

⁶⁶Ibid., 142.

⁶⁷"Righteous", here and in most of the Letter to the Romans, does not mean moral uprightness, but rather the acquittal in heavenly judgment (D. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 345).

⁶⁸Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 1020 note 3561-3562.

⁶⁹A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 150-152.

⁷⁰B. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 74.

Therefore, the Bible testifies that the unsaved through their sinful nature are corrupt in every aspect of their being: mind, will, emotion, relationship and actions. Due to their anti-God bias to sin, the unregenerate are apart from grace and are incapable of turning to God, pleasing him and saving themselves (Jeremiah 13:23; Romans 8:3, 8).⁷¹

The notion that God would show unmerited favour to sinners is repulsive to many Muslims. This point is popularly illustrated by Hasmi's objection to the Christian doctrine of "Faith alone and grace alone":

A person who relies on this belief is like the one who puts his trust in the exercise belt: for a time, such people will feel deluded and content in the promise, but, eventually, reality will bare its ugly head, and all men will be held accountable for their works.⁷²

For Muslims the idea that God would show unmerited favour to sinners would be presuming upon Allah's grace, which is the same temptation Satan used against Adam (82:6).⁷³ But, more importantly, it removes the need for human accountability and therefore undermines the notion that Allah is just.

The Qur'anic depiction of Allah as an awesome judge seems to drive Muslims to ask, "How do I fulfill the requirements of God for me in this day and age?"⁷⁴ Therefore, the Qur'an impresses believers to express their faith through action, to show that they are worthy of his grace on the final day. This hopefulness in the ability of mankind to fulfill Allah's stipulations and commands is allowed by the absence of original sin in the Qur'an. The notion of original sin is essentially incongruent with the idea of Allah's justice.⁷⁵ The Qur'anic teaching on Adam assumes that he repented and

⁷¹Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 75.

⁷²J. Hashmi, *Grace, Faith and Works*, 2008, n.p. Available: <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1165/viewall/>. Cited 6th August 2008.

⁷³S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Holy Quran*, 1002-1003. Allah name of *Kareem* can be translated as Most Gracious, Most Charitable, Most Noble. It is considered the attribute Satan uses to instigate man to sin. Therefore Man is warned here "... not to be beguiled by such rebellious belief or confidence in God's grace or mercy."

⁷⁴Esack, *The Quran: A Users Guide*, 146.

⁷⁵M. Asad, "The Spirit of Islam" in K. Ahmed (ed). *Islam: Its Meaning and Message* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1976), 53. It would seem unjust to generations of mankind be responsible for the sin of a remote ancestor.

was actually forgiven by Allah (7:23; 20:120-123). As a result, Yusuf Ali notes that Adam “after the Fall repented and was forgiven and the high Destiny of mankind has been the prize open to all his descendants.”⁷⁶ It follows that they were “still given a chance in this life on a lower plane, to make good and recover the lost status of innocence and bliss.”⁷⁷ Therefore, the Fall had no devastating effect on the capacity of mankind to turn to and please God.

The implication for Islamic theology is that there is no need for universal redemption of mankind.⁷⁸ Instead, Islam teaches that “. . . every Muslim is his own redeemer; he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure within his heart.”⁷⁹ Therefore a Muslim must strive for his salvation (2:202, 286; 53:36) and Allah’s graciousness must be warranted and earned.

Implications for Christian Evangelization of Muslims

Understanding the Importance of the Cross

The presence of grace in the Qur’an shows Allah’s attributes of mercy and forgiveness. When combined with the potential that Allah might withhold His gracious attributes, this emphasizes the importance of Allah’s sovereignty and justice. There is an obvious tension between these concepts of mercy and justice. Islamic theology reflects this same tension as it strives to reconcile the demands of Allah’s justice, while also maintaining his sovereign mercy.⁸⁰ For example, Moucarry, a Syrian evangelical Christian and expert in Islamic studies, divides the views into four different groups: 1) Allah is just and forgives no sins, 2) Allah is forgiving and will forgive the sins of all Muslims, 3) Allah is just and will only forgive minor sins, or 4) Allah is sovereign and he will decide to punish Muslims, with the eventual result being that all Muslims enter paradise.⁸¹ Space prevents

⁷⁶Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur’an*, 1129 note 4006.

⁷⁷Ibid., 349 note 1006.

⁷⁸George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* 111

⁷⁹Asad, “The Spirit of Islam” 53. See also George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?*, 111-112; J. Dudley Woodberry, ed. “Different Diagnoses of the Human Condition” in J. Dudley Woodberry ed. *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989), 149-150. They give a similar observation.

⁸⁰The dilemma is essentially, will Allah be just and punish those who have not satisfactorily carried out His stipulations, or will He be merciful and save those who deserve to be punished.

⁸¹Moucarry, *The Search for Forgiveness*, 150.

this work from exploring these different views in detail. It suffices for our purposes to note that all views hold that Allah's forgiveness concerns Muslims alone. However, this does not diminish the tension since it is now expressed in how one defines who a Muslim is.⁸²

The Qur'anic perspective holds that Allah's sovereignty (e.g. 2:284; 4:48), Allah's justice (e.g. 4:31; 99:6-8) and Allah's mercy (e.g. 39:53) are all motives as to why Allah forgives. Cragg and Christensen are then too narrow in resolving the tension by noting that grace is a characteristic of his will, rather than of his divine attributes.⁸³ They emphasize Allah's sovereignty as the governing motive for Allah's grace and forgiveness (2:105; 9:28; 57:21-29; 62:4; 85:14-16). It is important to note that Islamic theology has never really found a resolution to the tension between Allah's attribute of grace, justice and sovereignty.⁸⁴ It is possible that this might be a deliberate tension on the part of Mohammed, similar with the deliberate indefiniteness of Allah's grace, to prevent mankind from presuming on Allah's generosity and mercy (82:6). Regardless, this does not diminish the fact that Muslims often feel a great sense of despondency and insecurity on their deathbed, resulting from this tension.⁸⁵

The Christian response to this uncertainty might be to impress upon Muslims the love and forgiveness of God in the Bible.⁸⁶ Jesus, for example, reveals God's mercy and compassion in the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). In contrast to the Qur'anic teaching, God loves not only those who love him and there is assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness in that the father in the story forgives his wayward son.⁸⁷ The message of God's love can resonate with the felt needs of many Muslims.⁸⁸ However, the main problem with this

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, 42; Christensen, *The Practical Approach to Islam*, 378-379. Their conclusion may reflect the fact that they have mainly encountered Sunni theologians who tend to emphasize God's sovereignty (see Moucarray, *The Search for Forgiveness*, 317 for a summary of the different positions by theological schools).

⁸⁴Any resolution essentially becomes too narrow just like Cragg and Christensen's position.

⁸⁵Christensen, *The Practical Approach to Islam*, 379.

⁸⁶E.W. Huffard, "Culturally Relevant themes about Christ" in J. Dudley Woodberry, ed. *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989) 163. This is the approach championed by many well-known missionaries such as Zwemer, Cragg and Parshall.

⁸⁷Chapman, *Cross and the Crescent*, 337-338. Contains a more extensive comparison.

⁸⁸Brown, R "Muslims who believe the Bible," *Mission Frontiers* 30 (2008), 20.

approach is that it does not deal with the core tension, which is the need to also maintain and satisfy God's justice.⁸⁹

The attractiveness of the Gospel of Jesus is that it shows how God can be just and gracious at the same time. Specifically, Paul proclaims that in the Gospel "a righteousness from God is revealed" (Romans 1:17). Now the term "righteousness of God" could mean an attribute of God (possessive genitive) or a status given by God (genitive of source) or a righteousness being shown by God (subjective genitive) or "a righteousness which is valid before God" (objective genitive).⁹⁰ These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can all be found in the literature.⁹¹ However, the significance for this work is that the righteousness of God relates to God's attribute of always doing what is right.⁹²

The emphasis on the response of faith and trust is in contrast to the Qur'anic emphasis on the need to fulfil the requirements of God in one's life. The phrase "faith from first to last" or "by faith through and through" (Romans 1:17b) is an emphatic assertion that God's act of righteousness comes by faith alone.⁹³ Now the natural word order in the Greek could also connect "by faith" (ἐκ πίστεως) as the manner for "living" (ζήσεται). Both options are plausible and the phrase is general enough to warrant both options being in view.⁹⁴ As a result, it suggests that faith and trust are not just the means to the salvation of God and but also the way of living.⁹⁵

Paul speaks of the "righteousness from God" in more detail in Romans 3:21. The need for God's act of righteousness by means of faith is because of sin (3:23). God's righteous act is shown in presenting His Son as a propitiatory sacrifice (3:25a).⁹⁶ The key idea

⁸⁹Huffard, "Culturally Relevant themes about Christ," 162-163, would add that for Muslims love is not the essential theme nor do Muslims see love as an expression of God's love. Therefore Huffard questions the extensive use of love as the governing theme in sharing the gospel to Muslims.

⁹⁰Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 70-71; A.E. McGrath 'Justification' in G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, D.G. Reid (eds). *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 521.

⁹¹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 72.

⁹²Ibid., 84.

⁹³Ibid., 75-76. J. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 64; C.E.D. Cranfield *Romans – A Shorter Commentary*, 23; F.F. Bruce, *Romans (2nd Edition)*. (Leicester: IVP, 1985) 75.

⁹⁴Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 65; Bruce, *Romans, 2nd Edition* (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 76.

⁹⁵Stott, 65.

⁹⁶Propitiation signifies the means of averting wrath. For a defense of the ἱλαστήριον

for our purposes is that God did this to “demonstrate his justice” (Romans 3:25-27). The propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on one level enables God to maintain his righteous character in postponing the punishment of sins in the past. But on the other hand, it also preserves God’s righteous character as he justifies those who place their faith in Jesus. Therefore, Paul’s point “is that God can maintain his righteous character (his righteousness’ in 3:21-22) because Jesus as the propitiatory sacrifice provides the full satisfaction of the demands of God’s impartial, invariable justice.”⁹⁷ As a result, we see in the gospel the expression of both grace and justice at the same time. It is the cross that allows God to forgive without denying His justice.

For many Muslims the idea that Jesus was given as a substitutionary sacrifice for our atonement can be a serious stumbling block. The Qur’an specifically rejects that Jesus died on the cross and was raised up:

That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah:"- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:- Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise;- (4:157-168).

Orthodox Islam not only denies the historical facts of the crucifixion, but there are also strong objections against the cross. Zwemer, with his extensive experience as a missionary to the Islamic world, notes that Muslims oppose the teaching of the cross for it denies God’s mercy since He allowed Jesus to suffer, and it denies his justice since He allowed those who committed the crime to go unpunished.⁹⁸ Therefore, the teaching on the crucifixion in the Qur’an and Islamic traditions presents a major stumbling block.

This may cause Christians to look for other ways of making the gospel relevant to Muslims by neglecting the cross. However, one should remember that the cross is often a stumbling block for people (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:23). Moreover, the cross resonates with

as “propitiation”, see L. Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 163-176.

⁹⁷Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 242

⁹⁸S.M. Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross: Selections from the Apostle to Islam*. ed R.S. Greenway (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2002), 48-49.

what many Muslims crave. Christian missions strategist, Rick Brown listed some of biblical themes that appealed to Muslims. It is telling that the main themes which resonate with many Muslims include: God's love and care for his servants, the offer of personal forgiveness and acceptance by God, and the offer of assured and complete salvation from hell and acceptance into God's kingdom.⁹⁹ Therefore, I suggest that Muslims long for a deeper experience of God's grace and mercy, which is only possible by the cross. Furthermore, the cross addresses the deficiency in the Qur'anic teaching on the Day of Judgment. The question for many Muslims is whether they will experience Allah's justice or his favour on the Last Day. According to tradition, even Abu Bakr, one of the early giants of the Islamic faith, was fearful of the Day of Judgment.¹⁰⁰ Bakr, like many Muslims after him, longed for assurance that Allah would be gracious and grant forgiveness of sins. Again, only the cross can give full assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

Therefore, the finished atoning work of Christ on the cross speaks powerfully and relevantly to Muslims since it liberates them from the aimless striving after God's requirements in one's life and fear of the final judgment, and it also emphasizes the way of true forgiveness of sins. The message of the cross shows the possibility of God's mercy without denying His justice. Therefore, the fact that the cross is repulsive to Muslims should not move Christians to shy away from the teaching of penal substitutionary atonement.¹⁰¹ Rather, Christians should look for ways to show its relevance to Muslims. How this can be achieved will be the aim of the remainder of this section.

The Need to Apply the Christian Doctrine of Special Grace

The first step in evangelizing Muslims is to earn the right to be heard. Muslims have built up misunderstandings and animosity towards Christians due to the Crusades, Western Imperialism and the support of some Christians for the state of Israel.¹⁰² The result is that Muslims are usually suspicious of Christians, hence the need to move from suspicion to trust.

⁹⁹Brown, "Muslims who believe the Bible", 20.

¹⁰⁰Christensen, *The Practical Approach to Muslims*, 379. Cites a quote by Abu Bakr from Islamic tradition to his daughter Aisha.

¹⁰¹Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross*, 5.

¹⁰²D.J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 277.

The indefinite expression of Allah's grace in the Qur'an at one level should indicate to Christians the need to show what true grace looks like. The way forward then entails that Christians properly understand and apply the Doctrine of Special Grace. This doctrine tells Christians that God's grace is an attitude of unconditional favour to the undeserving. Therefore, Spirit-filled believers ought to display a gracious attitude to Muslims around them to build relationships so as to earn the right to be heard.¹⁰³ Moreover, since grace is an action exercised towards the unworthy, Christians ought to deal compassionately towards others. Believers should treat Muslims with liberality, generosity and mercy. Jesus himself says:

Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (Luke 6:35).

Too often Christians reflect their fear and hostility to Muslims, rather than the love and compassion of which Jesus speaks. Zwemer, after forty years of ministry to Muslims, says "the nearest way to the Muslim heart is the way of God's love, the way of the Cross."¹⁰⁴ However, the sad reality for the reason as to why so few Muslims have been won for Christ might be "because no one has lived it amongst them."¹⁰⁵ Therefore, Christians need to remember and apply the doctrine of special grace to earn their trust and engage Muslims with the Gospel of Jesus.

The Need to Apply the Christian Doctrine of Common Grace

Secondly, the Apostle Paul in speaking of his missionary endeavors said, "I try to find *common ground* with everyone, doing everything I can to save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22, NLT). Therefore, in showing the relevance of penal substitutionary atonement to Muslims, one must also look for common ground. The presence of

¹⁰³Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* 96; Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 226; Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 278. For some practical principles see B. Dennett, *Sharing the Good News with Muslims: Simple Guidelines for Christians* (Homebush: ANZEA, 1992), 99-101.

¹⁰⁴Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross*, 56.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 56.

grace in the Qur'an suggests the "common ground" for Christians to engage with Muslims about the Gospel.

The theological basis for looking for "common ground" in preaching the gospel resides in the Reformed doctrine of "Common Grace." Common grace "is the undeserved beneficent of the Creator God expressed by his general care of creation and of all persons everywhere without discrimination."¹⁰⁶ As such, it is God's grace operative in creation as distinguished from God's special grace efficient in salvation. It is understood as evident in God's providential care for creation, his providential restraint of sins and man's conscience.¹⁰⁷ But also, God's common grace facilitates the development of what is true and good in philosophy, the arts and technology (e.g. Exodus 31:2-11; 35:30-35).¹⁰⁸ For example, medical and other technological advancements that improve the lives of both the redeemed and unredeemed are seen as initiated by common grace. Therefore, it recognizes that the gifts we see even in unregenerate human beings are gifts from God. This implies that Christian believers can use the great literary works of non-believers, even though we do not share their faith or commitment.¹⁰⁹ This could include the use of the products and works of other religions in such a way as to glorify God through them. In fact, Calvin notes that to reject or despise the truth when uttered by non-believers is to insult God's Spirit, since in the final analysis all truth comes from the Spirit of God.¹¹⁰ Therefore, Christians are justified in using the Qur'an (and other Muslim works) to find common ground and aspects of the true Gospel through which to engage with Muslims and to bring them to a fuller and more substantial knowledge of God's grace through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹¹¹

There are potentially many shared concepts between Muslims and Christians to discuss. For example, Muslims believe in One God (25:2), Adam and Eve (2:30-33), Satan and demons (6:100, 128;

¹⁰⁶Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 76.

¹⁰⁷P.E. Hughes, "Grace" in W.A. Elwell (ed). *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 479-480.

¹⁰⁸Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 76.

¹⁰⁹Hoekema, *Created in the God's Image*. 200.

¹¹⁰J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Volume 1 & 2*, ed. J.T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 273-274. See also James 1:17.

¹¹¹C. Chapman, "Rethinking the Gospel for Muslims" in J.D. Woodberry ed. *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989), 106. Even with differences between Muslims around the world, there is enough distinctive in the Muslim mind set to warrant finding relevant ways of expressing the gospel.

72:1, 15), heaven (2:25; 3:15; 4:13), hell (2:24; 3:10; 4:14), the second coming of Christ (4:159; 18:94, 98; 21:96) and the Virgin birth (2:87; 3:33; 4:156). Furthermore, Chapman also notes that, "Muhammad must have absorbed something of the spirit and rituals of Jewish worship, as well as many stories from the Old Testament and later rabbinic legends."¹¹² As a result, the echoes of Judaism and the Old Testament mean that the Qur'an may be used as a stepping-stone into the Gospel.¹¹³

Schlorff however provides a note of caution. In response to unrestrained experimentations in the field of contextualizing the gospel for Muslims, he cautions against what he refers to as the "hermeneutic of synthesis."¹¹⁴ Essentially, he is cautious of making the Qur'an a starting point and the interpretation of the Bible dependent on the Qur'an. This is an important word of warning. For example, the Qur'an denies the death of Jesus on the cross and His Sonship (6:95-101; 19:88-98; 112:3) and misunderstands the Trinity (4:171-172). As such, the Qur'an is not necessarily a preparation for Christianity.¹¹⁵

Consequently using the Qur'an as a means of engaging Muslims with the Gospel of Jesus requires a certain level of caution.¹¹⁶ One must be aware of Qur'anic biases. So even if the Qur'an gives us potential stepping stones to the Gospel due to its echoes with the OT, Chapman for example suggests that Mohammed did not simply borrow from Jewish sources, he may have been influenced by the negative response he received from Jews at Medina.¹¹⁷ Thus the Qur'an may only be described as a deficient commentary on Jewish scripture in speaking against an inadequate Judaism.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the Bible needs to be taken as the rule of faith and practice and the measure by which all beliefs are measured.¹¹⁹ Only the Bible completes or corrects erroneous views.¹²⁰

¹¹²Chapman, *The Cross and Crescent*, 273.

¹¹³S. Bell, *The Journey from Fear to Faith: Grace for Muslims* (Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2006), 82; F.E. Accad, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1997), 23-24.

¹¹⁴S. Schlorff, "C-5 Church Revisited," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 35 (1999): 395.

¹¹⁵Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross*, 27.

¹¹⁶Schlorff, "C-5 Church Revisited," 396-397. Schlorff's warnings are not meant to prevent the practice of finding common ground.

¹¹⁷Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 274-275.

¹¹⁸Bell, *The Journey from Fear to Faith*, 82. This is a more cautious re-wording of Bell's position on the parallelism between Judaism and the Old Testament, with the Qur'an.

¹¹⁹P.G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualisation," *International Bulletin of Missionary*

Showing the Relevance of the Cross

How can we show the relevance of the cross to Muslims who are informed by the Qur'an and Islamic traditions? The purpose of this sub-section is to show how to use an important theme in the Qur'an and to turn the same theme towards the Bible and its teachings on the cross. The example below may not be the exact words used in a conversation with Muslims. Instead, it provides a biblical theological framework for informed discussions with Muslims. Specific studying of the Qur'an reveals the close affinity between the story of prophets and the biblical literature.¹²¹ As a consequence, the concept of prophets provides a stepping-stone into the biblical worldview and the Gospel. Therefore, this example uses the nature of the prophetic office as a means of showing the fundamental diagnosis of the human condition and the need for penal substitutionary atonement. In line with Colin Chapman, the position taken here is that a theology of prophethood is essential in effectively engaging the Muslim mind.¹²²

One of the fundamental themes in Islam is that Allah responds to human ignorance by sending prophets and messengers (9:33; 48:28; 61:9). However Allah's prophets are not always well received. They are mocked (15:11), called liars (3:148; 22:42; 23:44; 35:22), falsely accused (21:5), their message denied (11:59) and rejected (14:10; 17:94; 36:15; 64:6). Some prophets are even killed "wrongfully" such as Abel, Zechariah and Yahya (see 2:61, 87, 91; 3:21, 112; 4:155; 5:170). Such rejection renders God's retribution inevitable (7:94; 17:15; 28:59). The theme of rejection and suffering faced by God's prophets is also described in the Holy Scriptures. In the *Tawrat* (Pentateuch), Moses is portrayed as a suffering mediator.¹²³ He

Research 11 (1987): 110-111. This includes receiving input from evangelical scholars to inform of key theological issues at stake.

¹²⁰B.M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Qur'an and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), 14. In contrast to scholars of comparative religion such as Wheeler, I don't subscribe to the view that the interpretation of the Qur'an informs Judaism or Christianity.

¹²¹U. Rubin, "Prophets and Prophethood" in A. Rippin ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 234.

¹²²Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 324-330; Chapman, "Rethinking the Gospel for Muslims," 109-110; Bell, *The Journey from Fear to Faith*, 63.

¹²³G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume 1: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1975), 294; G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume 2: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1975), 276.

suffered because of the sins of the people. In recounting the golden calf incident, Moses lies prostrate before God for forty days and nights (Deuteronomy 9:18, 25). Both the historical and prophetic books show again and again how the acceptance of God's call to be a prophet meant suffering.¹²⁴ Prophets often faced the wickedness of people. This includes Micaiah, who was placed in prison with reduced rations (1 Kings 22:27), and Jeremiah, who suffered the abuse and wickedness from the people in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 11:18-23; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20: 7-18).

Furthermore, the prophets in Holy Scripture came to bear the signs of people's wickedness by enduring judgment by way of example.¹²⁵ For example, Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land due to Yahweh's great wrath being directed upon him (Deuteronomy 1:34; 4:21). The *Tawrat* sets Moses as the stereotypical prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15). As such, the role of representing the penalty for the sins of people cannot be excluded from future prophets. In fact, we see that their lives often came to personify the pain and grief that is deserved for the wicked (e.g. Ezekiel 2:6; 21:2-6; Hosea 1-3).

This habitual rejection of God's prophets and their suffering places a question mark on whether human beings can in fact live out God's righteous requirements.¹²⁶ As a consequence, the Holy Scriptures makes us aware that there is something more seriously wrong with human nature than mere "weakness" or "forgetfulness".¹²⁷ This problem resides essentially in the human heart (Jeremiah 17:9).

The serious problem of people's hard-heartedness prompted Moses to offer to take the penalty for Israel's sins after the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:30-40). Therefore, the solution to the problem of the human heart comes in the act of an intercessor to take the wrath of God.¹²⁸ This expectation gives rise to the prophecy of Isaiah regarding a future prophetic figure.¹²⁹ This character has been given a mission

¹²⁴S.H.H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2003), 413.

¹²⁵von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume 2*, 275.

¹²⁶J. Dudley Woodberry, ed. "Different Diagnoses of the Human Condition," 154-155, notes that the Qur'an frequently refers to the problem of human corruption. The fact that most people reject right guidance would suggest a serious problem in human nature.

¹²⁷These are the common terms for sin in the Islamic thought (see George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?*, 108).

¹²⁸von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume 2*, 276.

¹²⁹J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 118-119; B.S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 383.

since birth (Isaiah 49:1), equipped with prophetic speech and instructions (Isaiah 49:2; 50:4a), and possessing special knowledge and guidance (Isaiah 50:4b). This figure will face opposition (49:4a) progressing to open abuse (Isaiah 50:6; 53:3), which leads to death (Isaiah 53:7-12) and ultimate vindication (Isaiah 49:4b). At first glance, he seems to be Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-5). But this figure is more than just a prophetic figure, which opens up the possibility of the servant being a divine figure.¹³⁰ His death is described as a substitution for many (Isaiah 53:1-9) and a guilt offering for sins (Isaiah 53:10).¹³¹

The identity of this person is a mystery until we come to the special person of Jesus. Jesus was born by special means of God (3:45-47) and called to be a prophet of God (4:171; 6:85). According to tradition, He lived a sinless life.¹³² Jesus' life is recorded for Muslims in the *Injil* (Gospels). The *Injil* sees Jesus as the greatest prophet.¹³³ Jesus himself speaks of His life, death and resurrection as the fulfilment of what was written in the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27). Specifically, the Holy Scriptures speaks of Jesus' death on the cross as God's sacrifice to avert His wrath against mankind in order and to demonstrate His justice (Romans 3:25). Therefore, it is the physical death of Jesus at the cross that allows God to forgive without denying His justice. As a result, one can know peace in this life with God and, by faith alone in Christ, be assured that one has gained access into God's grace (Romans 5:1-2).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the Qur'an deliberately describes the presence and indefiniteness of Allah's gracious attributes to show that Allah is an awesome God of Justice. This helps explain the prevalence of a fear motive in the Qur'an and the importance of human accountability before Allah at the end of time. This serves to establish the importance

¹³⁰The servant's office is manifestly prophetic (G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume 2*, 273). However it is not exclusively prophetic [J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 384, 388-389.

¹³¹Notice the interplay between the pronouns "he" and "us" or "our", which give the sense of substitution.

¹³²Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross*, 11-14. Zwemer cites Islamic traditions that say Satan did not touch Jesus at birth.

¹³³M. Strom, *Symphony of Scripture: Making Sense of the Bible's Many Themes* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2001), 121-122.

of works in regards to a favorable verdict at the final judgment and leads to the understanding that the expression of Allah's grace is the merited favour due to a person as a result of his justice. Islam teaches that each person bears the responsibility of spiritual failure and success. For Christians seeking to engage Muslims, the presence and indefiniteness of Allah's graciousness in the Qur'an highlights the importance of addressing the tension between God's justice and His attribute of grace. The relevance of the Gospel of Jesus for Muslims is that at the cross we see God's forgiveness and favour without denying His justice. Leading Muslims to understand this is difficult in light of its denial by the Qur'an and Islamic traditions. However, an understanding of the presence and indefiniteness of Allah's attributes of grace in the Qur'an offers a framework in showing the relevance of the Gospel. Specifically, the indefiniteness of grace in the Qur'an reminds Christians of the need to show grace to Muslims through our attitude and actions in order to earn their trust. In addition, the presence of grace in the Qur'an encourages us to look for "common ground" through which to present the Gospel of grace meaningfully to Muslims. The exercise of seeking common ground leads us to the importance of the theme of prophethood as a means of showing the biblical witness of the pervading sinfulness of man and the need of an intercessor to die in our place for our sins.

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BEHAVIOR TRANSFORMATION IN FILIPINO CHRISTIAN WOMEN

By Dr. Kimberley Snider

After spending more than twenty years in the Philippines producing discipleship tools for Filipino Christians, I wanted to know: Does the Gospel really have transformational power?

Tired of hearing religious platitudes about “trusting that God was doing something even though I couldn’t see it,” I conducted a grounded-theory study on behavior transformation among Filipino women. The research was designed to discover whether or not transformation of behavior occurred after conversion. If I found that it did, I wanted to understand how the process of transformation unfolded among Filipino women, and to discover the catalysts for the change process. This paper summarizes the findings of my research and underlines the importance of the Bible as a catalyst in the transformational process.

Research Methodology

To find the answers to questions about the transformational process, I completed twenty-four semi-structured interviews involving urban Filipino women. They ranged in age from twenty-two to sixty-two, identified themselves as having become born-again Christians as adults, and came from a Roman Catholic background. All had quit attending Roman Catholic churches by the time I interviewed them. These participants were selected by referral from reputable pastors or Christian leaders. All of them had attended college, and all were members of various segments of the middle class.

In view of the fact that women are the “heart” of the Filipino family, and sometimes the power brokers, I expected that a discovery of the process of how born-again Filipino women change their behavior patterns—perhaps in ways that are counter cultural—might provide valuable insight into how Christian workers could facilitate the behavior transformation process.

Behavior Transformation—A Consequence of Conversion

My personal observations spanning two decades in the Philippines had led me to believe that Filipino Christians did not always expect behavior change after conversion, either from themselves or from others. Due to the non-confrontational nature of Filipino culture, pastors seldom addressed behavior issues directly. Additionally, both lay Christians and pastors repeatedly told me that I should not expect people to automatically change their behavior when their “culture script” differed from the Bible. As a result, I formed the opinion that behavior change after conversion either did not matter much to Filipinos or did not happen much.

My Opinion Changed

It is crucial to understand that my beliefs about behavior transformation in the Filipino context have totally changed as a result of this study. I have now come to believe that if there is no behavior transformation, Filipinos themselves do not view conversion as genuine. In each of my interviews, participants conveyed their expectation that conversion would result in behavior transformation for themselves and for anyone else who became born again.

Each individual I interviewed recounted, without hesitation, how her behavior changed after conversion. In fact, one of them dated her conversion from the time that she changed her behavior instead of from the time that she believed. The only variances I found were in what changed, how long it took, and how the process occurred.

I have come to believe that my own mono-culturalism and Western Protestant background blinded me to all that transformation really entails in the Philippines. I was listening for strong verbal statements of change of spiritual allegiance. I was expecting immediate cessation of drunkenness, resignation from companies with questionable ethics, and termination of immoral living arrangements. I was looking so hard for these behavior changes that I did not see what was really happening.

While the things I delineated do indeed happen after conversion, they are neither the most important, nor the first change, in a Filipina’s behavior pattern. The most important and immediate change after conversion, according to my interviews, was that Filipinas stopped worshipping idols. Behavior transformation began with obedience to the First and Second Commandments.

Definitions and Clarifications

Before I unpack the results of my study, it is important to clarify that the practices of Filipino “folk Catholicism” are not all sanctioned by the official Roman Catholic Church. The data I present here are qualitative, so the conclusions I have drawn derive from the stories and opinions of the women that I interviewed. These opinions may or may not reflect the official stance of the Roman Catholic Church of the Philippines.

Also, it is important to explain what I mean by the word “conversion.” In this paper, I define it as the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual, enabling him or her to make a personal decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, not as initiation into church membership. The words “saved” or “born again” are used by some Filipino participants to mean “converted.”

Lastly, it is necessary to explain my definition of ‘worldview.’ Worldview includes the way that persons look at others, at their life circumstances, and at their purpose as human beings. It influences how people process what happens to them and affects behavior. Worldview affects the way people see and understand their Creator, thus it comprises their theology. It also encompasses the way people engage with their own cultural paradigms and biblical behavior options.

The Ways Behavior Changes

My study participants explained that their post-conversion behavior transformation consisted of two parts. The first part was the termination of behavior that they determined was counter to the tenets of their new faith. The second part involved establishing new behavior patterns.

Behavior that Stops

The behavioral changes regarding the things that the participants stopped doing made a deep impression on me that led to my change of opinion noted above. The transformation of their behavior suggests that the participants had grasped the truth of the gospel and had applied it to their lives.

Worship of Idols

The first behavior transformation to take place after conversion among the women I interviewed was that they ceased worshipping idols. They were adamant that their conversion was what initiated this change. Although professional Catholic clergy claim that images are not really worshiped but only depict Jesus or the saints to draw attention to them, all my study participants declared they had believed and practiced the opposite. They said the images were not reminders to them but rather idols that they actually worshiped. The following is a typical statement: “What I remember was we have all these saints, idols. I used to pray at night to those idols. But right after I accepted Christ, I cannot even look at those idols.”

Praying to Mary

Eleven of the twenty-four interviewees declared that they worshiped and prayed to Mary before their conversion. In fact, they said that their relationship with Mary was more important to them than their relationship with her Son. They depended on her to answer their prayers and forgive their sins. One woman reported that she prayed to Mary as soon as possible after she committed a sin so that the sin would not be counted against her. Another related that she had been raped and during this experience had cried out for help to Mary, not Jesus. Stopping Mary worship and getting rid of images of Mary proved to be a defining moment for the participants who had depended on her. They also gave up the notion of multiple mediators for sin. One young lady said, “There’s only one mediator. Because when you’re Catholic you seem to be praying to so many people not just to God, go to Mary.”

Practice of Various Rites

Ten of the women interviewed claimed they were “saying the rosary” regularly before they became born again. Interestingly, even when doing so, they did not feel they benefited from it, one reporting: “So seems like I am going to church every day and of course the rosary. . . . But, I haven’t seen that changing in me. Feel like I am not doing anything good at all.” By the time I interviewed them, not only had all ten given up saying the rosary, they had also stopped saying novenas, practicing repetitious praying, and wearing the scapular. In conjunction

with stopping the practice of these rites, they had destroyed the paraphernalia that went with them fairly soon after their conversion. Their reason was extremely practical—Why should they keep something that did not work? They recognized religious articles were powerless. “So why will I be afraid?” one woman asked. “I am stronger than holding that number of beads of that rosary. I am much stronger now.”

Confession to a Priest

Another behavior that study participants stopped after their conversion was participating in routine confession to a priest. Instead, they began to confess their faults directly to God, which they found more difficult than confessing to a priest because they said that when they talked to God, honesty was not optional. One woman reported:

Because . . . it is so easy to go to confession and get the priest’s blessing and he says, “Child, you’re forgiven.” Moreover, it’s easier than confessing directly to God. . . . It’s like who you fooling? You know it’s so difficult to go back to God after you’ve sinned. Because it is you and Him, there’s nothing you can hide from Him.

Attending a Catholic Church

As previously stated, by the time I interviewed them, all study participants had stopped attending the Catholic Church, some for doctrinal reasons, others because they appreciated more demonstrative forms of worship and fellowship. Explaining why she began attending a non-Catholic Christian church, one said, “I was just so inspired. How can they have a God like this who inspires them to worship this way? So I came back again, and again, and again until I got saved.”

For some participants, leaving the Catholic Church was a welcome relief because they had never enjoyed it. Others found it to be a wrenching break with their families and their identity. For a while, some of the participants tried to attend both the Catholic Church and their born-again fellowships. Eventually, however, those I interviewed came to feel they had to leave the Catholic Church. Several told me that they believed some Roman Catholics had a relationship with Christ, but staying in the church was something that they personally could not do.

Behavior that Starts

Behavior transformation after conversion includes acquiring new as well as abandoning old behavior patterns. My study participants listed their newly acquired behaviors as: Bible reading, prayer, tithing, and serving.

Bible Reading

After being born again, all twenty-four women started to read the Bible and, in most cases, immediately upon conversion. Many were encouraged to do so by those who were discipling them. They said that Bible reading was the key motivating force behind their decision to destroy family idols. All of them appreciated the freedom to read the Bible and noted its life- changing quality, as this participant affirmed:

When I became born again. I could not have enough with the Bible. I would read sometimes 24 hours you know. I didn't feel sleepy, didn't feel tired because I felt the presence of the Lord then. I did not understand it was the presence of the Lord but there was something that was really good.

Prayer

After conversion, most of the women said that prayer took on a more informal quality and became personal. One told me that before conversion she did not pray at all; now she prays for everything from getting a parking place to purchasing a new business. This same lady also said that, since all her professional friends know she is born again, she is always asked to pray spontaneously in large social and professional gatherings.

Tithing

My study participants also started tithing. One admitted that it was difficult for her because she kept thinking, "I can buy a lot of things with that tithe." However, she now attributes her family's financial success and retreat from bankruptcy to the obedience of tithing.

Serving

Lastly, most of the women are now involved in activities they see as service unto the Lord. Three of them expressed that, if individuals were not serving, they did not have a real walk with God. One told me: “Kasi [because] . . . You can’t just say, “OK Lord, you’re my Lord and my Savior, but I’m not doing anything about it.”

Worldview Change Influences Behavior

As I analyzed my research, I realized that the transformation that occurred in the lives of my study participants encompassed more than the rejection of former religious practices and the adoption of new ones. Rather, it was really one of a personal worldview change, which became the underlying motivator for their behavior changes. I discovered that the women’s worldview had changed in three ways: (1) they saw life’s purpose in terms of God’s kingdom rather than in terms of fate or personal whim; (2) their spiritual understanding matured; and (3) their cultural paradigms were revised to fit a growing understanding of the Bible.

New Life Purpose

After being born-again, the study participants’ recognition of the purpose for their lives changed to one of seeing God’s hand, not fate, in the things that happened to them and in their lives in terms of His kingdom. Most admitted that, before their conversion, they wanted money and material things above everything else. Those priorities changed as they realized God had a plan for their lives outside of making money. One said:

Before, I’m thinking I’m here on earth just for myself and my family. But as I learn every day and as I pray and read the Bible I realize that I’m here, I was sent here, not to live for myself but for a purpose; like everybody has a purpose and I have my purpose. And now, I’m confident that God will provide my every need.

The realization that God had different priorities than they had led the participants to believe that obeying God must encompass the way they made and used money. For example, one of the women quit her

job as an insurance salesperson because of the pressure to give sexual favors to men who bought her policies. Two others told me they were so passionate about their new faith that they became concerned for people in general and shared their faith whenever they could. One woman recalled: "I look at them and I pity them. That's right. Because I know I have something, I have somebody in my heart that they do not have. So I was on fire even in the bus; if I had the chance to talk with them, I shared with them."

Mature Spiritual Understanding

Many of the participants talked about coming to terms with the reality of the person of Christ and knowing Jesus intimately. They had not known Him in this way before being born again. One woman described the difference this way:

I can remember that he was talking about Jesus, and a different kind of Jesus than I knew. He was different. He was somebody that you could know, He was somebody, in fact . . . this is somebody that you can touch and have. It was something personal; it wasn't about a Jesus that was up there when I would pray and hear nothing.

Another evidence of matured spiritual understanding was the participants' revelation with regard to sin. They underlined that after conversion they knew when they were sinning and what they should do about it. One of the women shared:

Before, I don't know that what I'm doing is a sin. I have no conviction at all. Unlike now, even the small things that I'm doing that is not OK with the Lord I felt the Holy Spirit's conviction already. And it's so different that you know there is something in your heart that you really need to confess it. Anything you do that you learned wrong, you have to confess it and you even have to cry. Sometimes you have to pour out what's in your heart. Unlike before that it's, it's just nothing. Sin is nothing . . . Unlike now I'm just scared to once again commit sin. I'm afraid of the Lord.

As the participants understood sin for the first time, they also began to understand more fully what salvation meant.

They talked about a sense of relief as they realized their future was now secure. One commented: “So, that was the main difference between when I was a Catholic and when I received Christ—that I’m not scared to die. I know where I’m going when I die.”

Revised Cultural Paradigms

Because my original motivation for this research was to discover if and how transformation took place after conversion I asked the study participants for their views about Christianity as it compared or contrasted with their culture.

They were divided as to whether they felt their new behavior aligned with or went counter to Filipino culture. A number of them equated Filipino culture with Catholic culture—i.e., “to be Filipino is to be Catholic.” Therefore, it was a new concept for some of them to think of Filipino culture as separate from and different than the Catholic faith.

A number of participants stated that Filipino culture definitely ran counter to their new beliefs. According to one woman, Filipino culture entailed celebrating fiestas, borrowing at high interest rates, gambling, drinking, smoking, and cursing. As a result, she saw her born-again behavior, which rejected these activities, as counter-cultural. Another participant felt her new born-again behavior was counter-cultural because she had not taken her family elders’ advice regarding her religious beliefs. She said: “In Filipino culture, older people know better so they should be listened to and obeyed about the church and religion.” Still another participant felt Filipino superstitions were so strong in the culture that to deny them, something her new faith caused her to do, was counter-cultural behavior.

By contrast, some participants felt that their transformed behavior readily aligned with Filipino culture. One woman described her transformation as not really that different from what other Filipinos believed, just a deeper understanding of what she already knew. Another felt that her transformation aligned with the culture because: “Filipinos are originally religious already. And so, I think there hasn’t been a problem with me in regards to shifting into a new faith.” Still another felt that the Filipino culture is largely biblical because of the strong family ties, saying that Filipinos have close families even after the children are grown, and that Filipinos are concerned about their neighbors and help each other in times of crisis.

Another participant said that, as a born-again woman, she still could practice some, but not all, of the Filipino cultural values, such as *utang na loob* (i.e., debt of gratitude) because she was grateful to those who had helped her, but not *pakikisama* (i.e., doing whatever it takes to insure smooth interpersonal relationships). An older woman who used to love saying the rosary said, “This is the Filipino culture; we pray every six o’clock the rosary. Now I don’t pray the rosary. I pray directly to the Lord, but its six o’clock, the same six o’clock.”

As the participants’ recounted their conversions and subsequent behavior transformation, the impact of their new behavior—both on them and those around them—became evident. One middle-aged lady articulated that Christian behavior transformation could potentially affect the culture as a whole. She said:

The Filipinos . . . a large percent of us still have to have a relationship with Christ. Because there would be a great change if we Filipinos, if most of the Filipinos, if all the Filipinos should start a true saving relationship with Christ.

Catalysts for Transformation

What sparks the process of change in Filipino women after conversion? My research identified four transformation catalysts—(1) spiritual disciplines, (2) God’s activity, (3) the individual’s desire to change, and (4) the individual’s relationships with others.

Spiritual Disciplines

I have already identified two spiritual disciplines as catalysts for behavior change—Bible reading and prayer. My Filipina participants credited Bible reading and knowledge as impacting personal transformation (i.e., their specific behavior and worldview) more than any other catalysts. There were many comments about how the Bible had empowered personal change, one of the most salient being: “The ones who are deep in the Bible are the ones who change or try to change. Because the ones who don’t read the Bible and aren’t familiar with His truth and expectations don’t have any motivation to change.”

From my interviews, three themes emerged from the data that identified how the Bible facilitated fundamental personal change. First, the Bible caused the women to put aside their personal agendas and submit to Christ.

Secondly, the Bible revealed to them what behaviors should change or be eliminated. One woman said that Bible reading motivated her to stop drinking and another to stop cursing. I also discovered that reading the Bible changed the view participants had of their traditions and, in some cases, caused them to terminate their practice of those traditions. For instance, when I asked, "How did you know idolatry was wrong?," one answered: "It is in the Bible." This same woman told me that the Bible was why she quit going to Mama Mary for help, saying:

The Bible did not say that we have to go to Mama Mary. So if that is what in your mind, well it's your choice. But it's my choice [to stop praying to Mama Mary] because it is written so I have to follow. Because I know the words here in the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by the human being.

Thirdly, the Bible empowered counter-cultural behavior. For example, one Filipino cultural mandate is filial obedience to fathers in areas like education, career choice, and religion. One of my interviewees reported she had taken a strong stand for Christ in her early teens even though her parents were against her born-again faith. When I asked how she had been able to do this, she said: "I think because there are some verses that say the truth will set you free. So I think I just need to speak up what the truth is. And the truth is because I am seeking the real God."

The participants think that prayer has the potential to empower behavior change in those who are praying, as well as those being prayed for. If personal transformation was slow or transient instead of permanent in nature, they felt that it was likely prayer had been lacking. One said: "Maybe they don't give much time in praying. Because if you will continue to pray, it's impossible that you will not feel those kinds of discernment coming from God."

God's Activity

God's involvement is another catalyst that emerged from my research as motivating change. The participant who became born again at the youngest age of any whom I had interviewed told me about how her perception of God's presence changed her: "When my Sunday school teacher taught me to pray, I felt God's presence. I felt that He hears my prayer. I felt that He's there, that He's alive."

In addition to God's presence, His kindness emerged as generating transformational response. Among the Filipinas I interviewed, God's kindness to them motivated a desire to reciprocate by changed behavior, as this comment illustrates:

I would say it's His kindness; the kindness of the Lord in my life. Because I've experienced a lot of hardships but every time that I would ask Him to help me, He will always help me. He will always be there. So, I was thinking, what kind of a person, what kind of a daughter am I to hurt my Father [by my unbiblical actions] who is so good to me?

A third way God empowered change was when the Holy Spirit directly instructed people to change. Two of the women referred to the Holy Spirit as "the voice in my head." Another said that miracles done by the Holy Spirit were change catalysts for transformation: "When they see a miracle, they change." Many participants also noted that knowing Christ personally as enabled by the Holy Spirit as well as knowing what is written about Him causes transformation. One put it this way: "It's just you can't help but change. Because this Person truly, this God up there, this Mighty Being loves you so much so that He's willing to die for you . . . and then after that, you can't help but change."

Individual Desire to Change

Participants said transformation also depends on each individual's depth of commitment, their concern for God's happiness, their felt needs, and their life experiences. Their responses indicated that the desire to change after conversion comes at different times for different people. While almost everyone stopped idol worship immediately, other behaviors took longer to change. Deeper commitment to Christ, the women explained, brings about more profound behavior transformation, as the following affirms:

In my opinion, I think it's your relationship with Jesus. It's how deep it is. *Kasi* even if I attend all the seminars around, then I read the Bible 20 times a day, but if I don't love Him, it's just nothing at the end . . . If they love that person who gives them life then I am very sure that their lives would change.

Another thing that influenced transformation was how much a person cared about God's feelings—for instance, whether or not they loved God enough to desire to spare Him pain. One of the interviewees illustrated it this way:

Drinking, like if I want to go back to that again; well, I'm just, I'm just looking at . . . would that hurt my God if I'd did that? For example, if I wanted a relationship [with another woman], would that hurt my God? . . . The bottom line of it is, it's how you love God. It's still the love for your God. If you love Him, you have to show Him that you love Him by what you're doing and by the changes in your life. Because if you love a person, you won't want him hurt. And I didn't want to hurt Him; that's why I'm trying to be good. . . . I'm asking the Holy Spirit to help me to change because I want to be good for my God. Because He loves me.

Lastly, their desire to change was influenced by the participants' felt needs. One of the most interesting stories recounted was the transformation in one woman's family that came about as a result of a perceived demonic presence. She was praying constantly for her family because her parents were living with different partners. One night a demon spirit physically attacked her sister. This so scared the parents that they quit their adultery, reconciled with each other, became born again Christians and started attending church faithfully.

One woman suggested that people are open to transformation if they need healing. She reported that her brother's illness caused her mother to attend an evangelistic crusade—something, as a Catholic, she had not been willing to do before. Another participant confessed that she had neglected God; but when she suffered a stroke, she asked forgiveness for that neglect. A pastor's wife articulated that, in addition to sickness, financial problems, depression, and emptiness drive people to seek the Lord.

Relationships with Others

The final category of factors that energize change is that of relationships. Discipling relationships are strong catalysts for transformation; but for them to be effective, the disciplers must be credible and available. Behavior transformation must be evident in the disciplers' lives. Various participants also stressed that, in the Filipino

context, persons who are discipling must be readily available to those being disciplined. One woman said that her discipler called her every morning and prayed with her. Another related that her pastor came to her office weekly for Bible study and to pray with her. The participants explained that Filipinas want to talk and thus view availability as a part of a transformational discipleship relationship. One said:

There's a word that we use always, *tutok*. Tutok is you focus yourself on him; you know you're always there for the person. Anytime, 24/7 they can call you and if anything happens, you know, you're there. That's what we called *tutok*, you focus on that person; you follow through.

Culturally Appropriate Delivery Systems That Elicit Change

During the interview process, it became apparent that how information was communicated could affect whether or not transformation occurred. But although some of the Filipinas articulated learning style preferences, none of them ever stated that one presentation method was totally without value or that any one teaching method was the best for presenting information. Instead, the women's comments consistently emphasized that the life and actions of the communicator was what validated or invalidated whatever information or delivery method was used. Unlike a western mindset, which views information as separate from the information giver, Filipinos could not accept spiritual truth that was separate from the life of the communicator.

The Discipler's Life

My interviewees unanimously agreed that they had to see their disciplers as persons of integrity whose own behavior mirrored scriptural principles in order for them to take their discipleship instruction seriously. The participants generalized that, if people's lives did not match their words, most Filipinos would discount their instruction and not feel obligated to mimic their behavior. One woman said that a person would only have the right to talk to others about wrong behavior if their own behavior was right.

A reason that a discipler's integrity is so important is because Filipinos learn by example. One of the newer believers among the study participants told me that she was making an effort to witness by

her example to her non-born again friends; in her mind, a good example extended to every part of her life, not just religious issues. She said:

By the way I speak, the way I wear clothes, it's good that they are noticing it and they're mentioning it and . . . I was like very thankful to Him because even if I don't speak, His light will shine and people will know *na* how really different their life will be if you know Him, if your God is Jesus.

Besides looking at the integrity and example of someone's life, the participants also considered how their disciplers related to them personally. They explained that a good relationship allows one person to influence another; and, conversely, a poor relationship closes the door to influence. One woman, referring to her church and pastor as part of her family, explained that because of this close relationship, her church community was able to help her and her husband learn new behaviors and beliefs that saved their marriage.

A particular behavior transformation that emerged from my study as especially dependent on good relationships was regular church attendance. One interviewee confessed that there was a two-year period of time when she stopped attending church because she did not feel a part of that fellowship anymore. She said: "Then a church mate visited me and asked, 'Why don't I see you in church now?' Then I felt like, 'Oh, I was missed.'" She resumed attending church again right away.

Confrontation by one believer to another about his or her behavior is one way to illuminate the need for change. However, in Filipino culture, confrontation is only possible when strong relationships exist and it must be done privately. One woman said direct confrontation is so difficult for Filipinos that she prays hard before she ever attempts it. Although she confronted people regularly at work, she had never tried confrontation in her personal friendships. Instead, she would tell the friend a story about someone in a like situation and give her opinion of what should be done in that situation, hoping that the friend she wants to direct will "pick up" on it.

This is not to say that direct confrontation regarding behavior never happens in the culture. One of the older interviewees says that she does not follow Filipino cultural dictates regarding confrontation but rather talks directly to the persons she feels need correction. She says she does this because "I was taught by the Bible to be honest with myself. That's the reason I want people to be honest with themselves also."

Although only one study participant admitted to practicing direct confrontation, all of them said that, if they needed correction or instruction regarding their behavior, they would want to be told about it directly, without third party involvement. One said that she wanted the direct approach as well as specifics on exactly what she did or said that was wrong even though she admitted it would be hurtful.

When participants deemed confrontation impossible, their recourse was prayer, asking that God would speak to the person who needed to change or send someone else to do the confronting. One woman said:

Because I don't have that confidence in confronting them, or talking to them, explaining to them, this and that, because I'm afraid that they might think, "Who are you to talk to me like that? Your being a Christian doesn't give you a license or the right to enter my life." So what I'm doing is I'm praying for that specific person, and I'm confident that God will send somebody to them to help them. Not me.

Listening

Several Filipina participants emphasized that it is vital to earn the right to give instructions or advice by listening first. Listening builds a relationship that grants the listener the right to speak into the life of the other person.

Using Scripture

One technique participants suggested for giving information on how behavior should change is using Scripture to correct someone rather than using one's own words. This technique avoids direct personal criticism and places the "blame" for the potentially hurtful information on the Bible rather than on the instructor. One of the women said:

I respect their religion. I don't say anything against them. When we talk about the Lord, I only say what I written in the Bible . . . because they all keep on telling me, "Why you don't pray to Mama Mary, which we usually do?" Then I just tell them. "The Bible says that we have to pray to the Lord, because we cannot go to the Father if we will not go to Jesus first. The Bible did not say that we have to go to Mama Mary.

So if that is what's in your mind, well it's your choice. But it's my choice because it is written so I have to follow. Because I know this, the words here in the Bible, this was inspired by the Holy Spirit written by the human being.”

Text Messaging or Letter Writing

One of the younger interviewees suggested text messaging as a means people could use to communicate with her if they felt she needed to change her behavior. She said text messaging would give her time to think about what was said rather than just react. Letter writing was another activity participants found effective and non-threatening.

Direct Instruction

Although in most cases, direct instruction for the purpose of motivating behavior change is deemed impolite or insulting in the Filipino context, participants conceded that there are times when direct instruction is appropriate. One example is when one person is older than the person that she is trying to instruct, especially adult to child.

Storytelling

My research participants agreed that storytelling is a good tool for teaching and motivating change. In a Filipino context, storytelling is used to cite examples of good or bad behavior and give hints as to who should change what in their lives without saying so openly. While a variety of story types can be used, drama and soap operas were cited as being particularly popular. Parables from the Bible and true-life testimonies were also noted as effective story forms for motivating change.

Other Learning Techniques

Study participants mentioned other techniques them to grasp concepts about behavior transformation. Reading received strong support as a preferred learning method; many talked about Bible reading as what changed the way they acted, as this statement illustrates:

When I was reading the Bible, it's like the Spirit of God talking to me. But during that time it's like I'm reading for the first time something that I can understand. Something that my spirit is being fed. Something like that.

Experience was also mentioned. "Good and bad experiences in the past have taught me and made me who I am today," one woman declared. In addition to learning from their own experiences, participants said they learned from the experience of others.

Also, small group learning is both effective and popular, according to a number of interview respondents. One reason is that this learning method is a format wherein people can ask questions.

Detrimental Communication Styles

I also discovered several communication styles the participants deemed detrimental to the learning or correction process. Being too blunt does not encourage behavior change. A mature Christian woman said this regarding her pastor's poor method of presenting the Gospel when she was considering becoming born again:

But then I, I told him directly, "Pastor, if I have heard the plan of salvation from you, I will not be saved. Because, you know the Baptists. When you die where are you going? *Di ba* bluntly they will say that 'Oh, you will go on hell. You are a sinner; you are *ganyan, ganyan* [like this, like that].' *Parang judgmental ang dating eh.* [Very judgmental] So, Pastor, if I have heard this plan of salvation from you, I will not be saved."

Conclusion

My research confirmed that transformation resulting in behavior that conforms to biblical principles was a natural sequel to conversion among Filipino women. The conclusions drawn from this study's finding were deeply significant to me on a personal basis. Furthermore, some of the study conclusions were personally life changing. For instance, I learned that God's priorities line up differently than my own and that He understands the culture more deeply than I could ever comprehend it. God's main concern is always that people understand the truth about Him and that they give up idolatry.

(Readers should note that, for the purposes of brevity in this article, I –included only the most salient responses to my research questions. For a detailed explanation, I refer you to my 2011 dissertation published by William Carey International University Press, titled *A Grounded Theory of Behavior Transformation Among Filipino Christian Women*.)

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO RETAINING THE NEXT GENERATION IN
CANADIAN-CHINESE DIASPORA CHURCHES
AND DOING MISSION

By Matthew Todd

Statement of the Problem

One of the critical issues facing Chinese diaspora churches in the Asia Pacific Region, specifically in Western Canada, is the ‘silent exodus’ of their next generation. In 2014, I had completed a six-year study with the primary intention to identify key factors as to why English-speaking Chinese adults exit (i.e., defect from, apostatize from, leave) Canadian-Chinese bicultural¹ churches—a problem Helen Lee has termed a “silent exodus.”² A secondary purpose of the study was to recommend some leadership strategies towards the longitudinal retention³ of these adults through English ministry congregations. I firmly believe that transformational leaders can develop healthier congregations that maximize missional capacity.

The model and structure for English ministries is an area of concern. Almost all Canadian-Chinese churches operate their English congregations as a youth ministry or as an ‘associated dependent parallel congregation.’ This system can also be called a ‘parent-child model,’ in which the Chinese congregation is the parent and the English congregation is the child. However, once the English

¹Biculturalism is defined as having one’s foot in two cultural worlds and “navigating through the hills and valleys of each.” Rutledge M Dennis, ed., *Biculturalism, Self-Identity and Societal Transformation*, vol. 15 of *Research in Race and Ethnic Relations* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), 6. The book notes that...“being bicultural means theoretically [that one is] not [yet] being assimilated” (5).

²Helen Lee, “Silent Exodus: Can the East Asian Church in America Reverse the Flight of Its Next Generation?,” *Christianity Today* 40, no. 12 (August 12, 1996).

³This objective resonates with Jonathan Wu’s question...“Is there anything [English-speaking Asian adult] home congregations can do or could have done to serve better or retain them longer?” Johnathan Wu, “Trusting Households,” in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, ed. Peter Cha, S. Steve Jang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 107.

congregation matures into adulthood and becomes intergenerational, enforcing a “systemic dependence on the Chinese-speaking congregation”⁴ becomes a significant factor in the silent-exodus phenomenon. If these churches switched to an ‘associated independent parallel congregation model,’ more people would more likely remain in these maturing English congregations, and fewer of them would leave the church.

Addressing the silent exodus and promoting development of a parallel independent congregation model in Chinese bicultural churches are intended to advance the fulfillment of Jesus’ Great Commission. In Chinese bicultural churches, the networks of the English congregations tend to be more heterogeneous and multiethnic than those of the overseas-born Chinese congregations. For this reason, bicultural Chinese churches have unrealized potential to reach their communities (the nations) through their English congregations. But what if resistance towards egalitarianism and the associated parallel independent congregation model creates a barrier that makes it more difficult for the English congregation to bring in other races? The question might be . . . Is Jesus’ Great Commission (i.e., reaching all nations) applicable to ethnic churches?

An emerging area of study has been in the interrelationship between religion and ethnicity.⁵ The literature indicates that a major motivation for immigrants to create or join congregations composed of fellow immigrants is to share their ethnic backgrounds (e.g., traditions, customs, languages) and transmit their ethnicity to the next generation.⁶ In other words, there is a vested interest in maintaining a cultural context different from that of the broader intercultural/multicultural society/denomination the church is in.

I have spent a good deal of research and ministry time on both the question of incremental assimilation versus rigid preservation of a distinctive cultural identity for ethnic churches and the question of the role religious organizations play in endorsing either assimilation or

⁴Marcus Tso, “English Adult Ministry in the Canadian-Chinese Churches,” *MB Chinese Herald* 48 (August 2005): 6-8. The author points out that with this model. . . “the Chinese-speaking board continues to be the real decision maker, without any plan for a cultural/language and generational transition.”

⁵Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, eds. *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002). Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁶Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet S. Chafetz, “Chinese Gospel Church: The Sinicization of Christianity,” *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 180 ff.

cultural preservation. Members of ethnic churches in Canada opt to practice their faith in a manner that preserves ethnic identity; or they take an approach that allows incremental, selective adaptation to Canadian culture. While many laud the fact that Canada no longer espouses an assimilationist model for its immigrants, there can be an assumption that immigrant churches are going to be comfortable with practicing *carte blanche* multiculturalism. Ample research is available that suggests these churches experience a significant amount of tension in the transmission of their religious and ethnic identity to the next generation. My observation has been that ethnic churches tend to be very successful in reaching immigrants of their own ethnicity—for which I am thankful.

It is also obvious that an ethnic church will be especially effective in evangelizing non-believers that belong to its ethnic group (homogeneous unit). One could think of ethnic churches as ‘midwives’ who help first-generation Christians with cultural transition and the transmission of faith. They also try to do a good job of nurturing early faith in their second generation. For example, English-language congregations in Chinese churches have been established to ‘keep their kids’ and to transmit faith and Chinese culture. The problem is that, for a high percentage of these churches, the immigrant group expects the emerging English-language congregations to follow its example in mission—that is, reaching out exclusively to the same immigrant group, even though the English congregations have wider social networks.

Churches of any ethnicity can function partly as cultural societies. Now the question is...Because there are ethnic churches that may have such a vested interest in preserving and reproducing their cultural traditions, customs, and language, does Jesus’ Great Commission to “go and make disciples of *all nations*” (Matthew 28:19) apply to cultural churches? Are ethnic churches ‘off the hook,’ so to speak, from participating in, initiating, and commissioning cross-cultural, multiethnic, and multiracial outreach, mission, and evangelism or from establishing parallel associated but independent English congregations that are autonomous in mission?

I find it meaningful to remind myself how Christ started the new era of the church. It was with a more inclusive idea about who the new family of God would embrace.⁷ Every human being bears the image of

⁷My theology also comes from examples in scripture of the Lord incorporating multiethnic peoples into the family of God. These include Ruth, a Moabite (Ruth 1:4); Rahab, a Canaanite (Joshua 6:22-23); Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:3); a Roman

God and, therefore, is eternally valuable to him (Genesis 1:27).⁸ Every race was precious enough for the Creator of the universe to give his only Son to die (John. 3:16). Thus, it is wise to embrace the Lord's opinion and the priority he puts on 'the world.' One of the features of human fallenness/brokenness can be an inability to grasp the scope of who the new spiritual family includes—redeemed people from every nation. In the Old Testament, the Jews frequently seemed to struggle with keeping the faith as an ethnic faith, but God intended them to be a 'light to the nations' (Isaiah 42:6). Certainly, while there is some scriptural evidence of non-Jews coming to faith, there is considerably more of God having to judge the people of Israel, in part because of their treatment of foreigners (e.g., Malachi 3:1-5, Zechariah 7:10-14).

When the Christian church first got started, it was an ethnic church, and there is evidence that many Christian Jews continued to struggle with, including people of other ethnic backgrounds (see Acts 15). One of the early tensions in the Christian Jewish community was with other Jews who were culturally different. The local-born Jews were having a problem with overseas-born Jews. For example, "Grecian" Jews were overlooked in the distribution of food; they looked like Jews but were bicultural, part of the Jewish Diaspora (Acts 6:1). Luke pointed out that they were among the "Jews from every nation" (Acts 2:5).⁹

The first generation of Christian Jews also struggled with cultural/racial biases over other Christian Jews taking the gospel to different people groups. For instance, Peter struggled with the Holy Spirit over associating with those not of his race—e.g. Cornelius (of the

(Matthew 8:5); a Greek (Mark 7:24-30); and many Samaritans (John. 4:39-42). The book of Acts focuses on the spread of the gospel to the world—from one ethnic group to another (Acts 17). Christ's Great Commission and his heart for the ethnic groups of the world is very clear (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15). Additionally, my theology for harmonious multiethnic living comes from Paul's teachings, including Galatians 3:26-28: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free [poor or rich], male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In advocating for parallel independent congregations, it is important to also focus on what Christians hold in common: "There is one body and one spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Ephesians 4:4-7).

⁸Wayne Grudem comments that, "This has profound implications for our conduct towards others [that every culture and] race deserve equal dignity and rights." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 450.

⁹Some Canadian-born Chinese have expressed to overseas-born Chinese leaders that their experience were similar to this story.

Italian Regiment) and other gentiles (Acts 10:9-48); the impression is that he would have preferred segregation (see Acts 11, Galatians 2:11-13). But in obeying the Holy Spirit, he witnessed the outpouring of God's presence, causing him to conclude . . . "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. Jesus Christ is Lord of all" (Acts 10:34). Luke records the criticism Peter received from the Christian-Jewish ethnic church for focusing gospel initiatives outside the Jewish race and culture (see Acts 11). Jewish believers' obedience in sharing the Good News sparked a multiracial/multicultural church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). Peter had to "revision and rethink [his] theological paradigm" and make a shift.¹⁰

Three Observations

The Lord Gave the Great Commission to an Ethnic Group of Jewish Men

Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to *all* creation" (Mark 16:15). His followers were to begin among their own ethnicity, but they weren't to stop there; they were to reach out to "Jerusalem . . . Judea . . . Samaria . . . the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Despite the fact that Jesus had clearly instructed that the gospel was to be spread to every nation, too many in the first-generation Jerusalem Christian-Jewish church were reluctant to be inclusive of other nationalities in evangelism. Many, but not all, didn't show a lot of enthusiasm for reaching other races/cultures with the gospel.

The Lord Specifically Intervened to Call Out Individuals of the First-Generation Ethnic Church

If it wasn't for God's direct intervention (e.g., Peter's vision, Paul's calling), one wonders how long it would have taken for the early church to be mobilized to do world evangelism. However, two persecutions—40 AD and 70 AD—forcibly scattered Jewish Christians

¹⁰Ray S. Anderson, "The Praxis of the Spirit as Liberation for Ministry," in *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 118.

from Jerusalem to geographical areas that were more multiethnic.¹¹ Paul especially found himself challenging people of his own ethnicity about their sin in keeping the gospel ‘ethnic’ instead of offering it to people of other ethnicities. He knew his ultimate identity as a citizen of heaven was greater than his ethnic background (Philippians 3:20). On more than one occasion, Paul felt compelled to tell the church that the Lord had made all of the redeemed into one family:

- “[Jesus] has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:13-14).
- “His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Ephesians 2:15-17).
- “The Gentiles are heirs, together with Israel, members together of one body, sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6).
- “We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together . . . grows and builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Paul found himself having to challenge those of his own ethnicity for showing prejudice in evangelism and even for treating differently those Christians who did not share the Jewish ethnicity (Galatians 1:7-10, 2:11-16). He even took Peter to task for behaving as if one race was better than another and for dividing the church (Galatians 2:13). This second-class treatment of gentile Christians (via in the matters of withdrawal/separation during fellowship and hospitality) was basically canceling out all that Peter and Paul had preached to people who were of a different ethnicity—that the gospel was for all ethnicities/cultures/races and that all would become equal in the family of God. Paul did not hesitate to label the second-class treatment of other Christian ethnicities as hypocritical and out of line with the gospel. He had to remind the Jewish ethnic church that . . . “There is neither Jew nor Greek, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Jesus spoke of others not yet reached with the gospel and of bringing them together into one flock (John 10:16). Paul taught that

¹¹Earle E. Cairns, “To the Jew First,” in *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 56, 58.

the body of Christ was to be racially and culturally diverse—“whether Jews or Greeks” (1 Corinthians 12-13)—and that for the Christian to have feelings of ethnic superiority was a sin (Philippians 2:1-8).

In the Bible, God is never found affirming racial, ethnic, or cultural segregation, only religious segregation—“Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). It is true that Paul was mindful of his ethnicity as a starting point in evangelism—“to the Jew first” (Acts 19:8-10, 26:20). But he didn’t stop there, taking the gospel to those culturally removed. Heaven will be multiracial and multicultural (Revelation 7:9), and one day all cultures will bow before Christ (Ephesians 1:10, Philippians 2:6-11).

In light of this clear biblical teaching, ethnic churches should be seen as the beginning, not the end, of God’s vision for his church. Biblically and historically, diaspora churches are also called to engage in cross-cultural mission. So here’s the real question . . . If Christ commanded his Christian-Jewish ethnic followers to make disciples of all nations, how can any Christian individual or church be exempt from the Great Commission today? The development of associated independent parallel English-speaking congregations is one optional step towards fulfilling Christ’s mission.

The Gospel Moved from Being an Ethnic Enclave to Crossing Cultural and Ethnic Boundaries

If Christians want to know what they are supposed to be doing, sometimes it helps to see a vision of where they are going. The Apostle John provides a picture of the whole family of God singing before the living God Almighty—a group of worshipers “from every tribe and language and people and nation standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9). How can heaven be so racially diverse? In part, the people of God are diverse because of the obedience of Christian leaders in every generation to go out of their ‘comfort zones’ to reach others who are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse. The will of God is that all of the redeemed would be one on earth as they will be in heaven (John 17:22). Isaiah said that the desire of God for his church is that it be a “house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7). When Jesus quoted that passage, the religious leaders feared him. They didn’t want the nations to worship with them, so they looked for a way to kill Jesus and his mission (Mark 11:17-18).

How can people who are heavily invested in their cultural identity be brought to where they begin to invest in cross-cultural/intercultural outreach? The place to begin is to do an effective job of teaching people that God loves the world—not just their own ethnicities, but every nation. They need to grasp the reality that their present and eternal identities are to be found in this multiethnic global family of God. For this reason, church leaders should make certain that their churches' mission (expressed in their statement of faith¹²) is based on the Great Commission. It is one thing to talk about these truths, yet another to put them into practice. Church leaders should then ask if their churches are comfortable with multicultural expressions within their particular contexts.

Scripture shows clearly what the new spiritual family of Christ is supposed to look like.¹³ Today, Christianity is no longer identified strictly with its historic first-century ethnicity.¹⁴ Rather, it is a global faith family. Out of many ethnicities and races, God has created a new multiethnic nation (1 Peter 2:9)—the family of God. Christians are called to obey the Lord in this area, to work for unity in the body of Christ, and to advance Christ's kingdom beyond barriers of race and culture.

Since the Kingdom of God is to be multiracial, then no ethnic church can relinquish its responsibility to obey Jesus' Great Commission to reach all nations. In fact, in bicultural Chinese churches (i.e., those that have English-speaking congregations), the capacity for evangelism may be even greater because of the members' transnational and multicultural social networks. There is a parallel between Canadian-born Chinese and Timothy, who was bicultural, a hybrid who successfully did mission among two cultures—Jewish and gentile (Acts 16:1-5, 1 Timothy 1:3).

One of the significant ways a bicultural church can carry out Jesus' Great Commission is to release, resource, bless, and affirm its English congregation to do mission in ways that are authentic for that congregation. One such way is to make it an associated independent parallel congregation. As wonderful as the Chinese cultural heritage

¹²Many Chinese churches say in the statements of faith on their websites that they value spreading the gospel and missions. Many of them are in multicultural communities, but the ethnic composition of their churches is not representative of their communities.

¹³1 Timothy 5:1-2, 2 Corinthians 6:18, Matthew 12:49-50, 1 John 3:14-18; Grudem, 858.

¹⁴By the second century, the Christian church was no longer Jewish but predominantly gentile.

may be, I hope that every Chinese Christian church has a greater mission for its English congregation than just ‘keeping our kids with us’ and ‘transmitting our ethnicity’ to the next generation. When leaders in Chinese churches see the Holy One face to face (Revelation 22:4, 2 Corinthians 5:10), they will be made keenly aware of whether they have obeyed the heart of God in mission; their “work will be shown for what it is,” whether its foundations were in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:12-13, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 2:6-11, 14:10,12, Revelation 20:12,15). An English ministry needs a spiritual vision rooted in Christ’s mission. The networks of an English congregation in a Chinese church tend to straddle two cultures. This bicultural reality should be acknowledged, nurtured, commissioned, and released, in many cases through an associated independent parallel congregation.

Further Theology Towards the Retention of English-speaking Adults Associated with Chinese Churches

Theology for Cultural Transition/The Creation of Subcultures

Humanity makes culture because human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, Acts 17:28), who is the Maker of heaven and earth. Humanity has been given a cultural mandate to take care of the created order (Genesis 2:15), and this includes culture. Culture, says Rah, “consists of shared socially learned knowledge and patterns of behavior.”¹⁵ Humankind has been given dominion over creation and culture (Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 8:6, Genesis 9:1); therefore, culture is dynamic, is something human beings both generate and change—e.g., Christians are charged with reconciling cultural elements to God (Colossians 3:23-24). As Niebuhr has discussed, human beings need to recognize that they can co-create with God in the transformation of culture.¹⁶ Yancey notes that the “static notion of culture needs to be challenged . . . all cultures are constantly changing

¹⁵Soong-Chan Rah, “A Theology of Culture,” *Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Regent College, 2013), compact disc.

¹⁶Richard Niebuhr, “Theological Convictions,” in *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, reprint 1996), 194-196. From an anthropological perspective of culture, both theology and culture are things that humans produce, and they only do it well if God is their ultimate point of reference. Kathryn Tanner, “The Nature and Tasks of Theology,” in *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 63-65.

over time and will change . . . from exposure to other cultures.”¹⁷ Christians are reminded that stewardship includes culture (Matthew 25:14-30) because culture ultimately belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). Certainly, “The only way to change culture is to create more of it,” says Crouch.¹⁸ Because humanity is given both the *imago Dei* and the common grace to make culture, there can be much of culture which is good, Kersten concludes.¹⁹

However, all “cultures . . . are an expression by fallen humanity [in the] attempt to reflect God’s image through the process of creativity.”²⁰ Therefore, Scripture warns

Christians not “to conform to this present age” (Romans 12:2) and to be cautious of “the deception of the world’s wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:18-19).”²¹ Thus, when Christians witness power groups blocking cultural diversity, they should recognize it as a symptom of human depravity. “The gospel destigmatizes and deabsolutizes every culture; no culture can claim it is the full expression of the gospel;” furthermore, Christians should recognize that the “gospel can only advance by being able to take root in every culture.”²² Sugikawa and Wong aptly state that, “When Christ is ‘born’ into each society, his presence may oppose, replace, complete, or fulfill various aspects of society’s culture.”²³ The New Testament shows many subcultures transformed by the gospel. The Great Commission has profound implications for the cultural mandate in terms of how the Good News enters into different cultures (Matthew 28:18-20). Only God’s people can fulfill this salvific aspect of the cultural directive. Although there is no culture-free expression of the gospel, Christians

¹⁷George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 39.

¹⁸Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 67.

¹⁹G.H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 78. Common grace is given to humanity in all cultural dimensions of life that require gifts and abilities with the accompanying virtues, graces, wisdom, understanding, capacities, and ethical exercise (78). Common grace is a reflection of God’s love, mercy, and preservation (75).

²⁰Soong-Cha Rah, “What Is Culture?,” in *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 29.

²¹Doug Heidebrecht, “Culture Clash: What Do We Mean by ‘Culture?’,” *MB Herald* 46, no. 9 (September 2007): 9.

²²Bob Paul, “Leadership Integrity,” (class lecture, DMPM 922 Leadership Theory, Theology, and Practice, Carey Theological College, Vancouver, BC, January 18, 2013).

²³Nancy Sugikawa and Steve Wong, “Grace-Filled Households,” in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, ed. Peter Cha, Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 32.

are called to be an alternative culture that gives witness to the Good News.²⁴ Rah expressively states, “Our goal [is] to seek ways to honor the presence of God in different cultures.”²⁵ Based on Revelation 7:9, which refers to cultures and languages, and Revelation 15:2-3, which refers to cultural forms, the knowledge that Christ’s lordship includes everything plus the understanding that everything will be renewed (Romans 8:19-21) should mean that some human culture-making will have eternal significance.

Theology for Cultural Inclusiveness and Diversity

Rah has made the case that a cultural framework (e.g., Western, Eastern, Confucian) can hold the church captive to a cultural worldview.²⁶ There are a number of themes in the Scriptures that invite the church to embrace diversity. Genesis 1 repeats five times God’s pleasure in diversity. Mention of the various nations in Genesis 10 further reinforces God’s acknowledgment of ethnic multiplicity. In Genesis 12:2-3, God tells Abram that he plans to bless all the peoples of the earth through him. Thus, if a people are redeemed, the cultures they create can be too. The obvious conclusion is that God intended the human family to become multiethnic and multicultural. A divine affirmation of dispersion is reinforced by the scattering after the flood (see Genesis 7) and after the tower of Babel incident (see Genesis 11). Sheffield suggests this scattering was meant as a gift.²⁷ Cultural multiplicity is the ramification of Genesis 1:28 and 9:1, where humankind is told to “be fruitful and increase . . . fill the earth.”

Throughout the Old Testament, there are texts that refer to the people of God coming from many cultural backgrounds (Genesis 14:18, Exodus 3:1, 12:48-49). In the New Testament, people from every cultural background are invited into the Good News. In the book of Acts, the trajectory of outreach is towards the nations. Since “from one man [God] made all the nations” (Acts 17:26), God is therefore the

²⁴Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 87, 119.

²⁵Rah, “What Is Culture?,” in *Many Colors*, 29. Rah says that Cultural Intelligence is about being hospitable to different cultures and cultural expressions and developing a biblical view, rather than a socially derived view of culture (195).

²⁶Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 207.

²⁷Dan Sheffield, “Biblical Reflection on Cultural Diversity,” in *The Multicultural Leader: Developing a Catholic Personality* (Toronto, ON: Clements Publishing, 2005), 28.

ultimate source of the potential for cultural diversity. In declaring that the gift of salvation is extended to “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21),” no matter what culture they may have come from (“for all who are far off,” Acts 2:39), God is presenting an inclusive, multiethnic, multicultural, and multiracial template for the church. Further, the church is reminded of the call to embrace unity in diversity (Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 4:3-6), with Christians called to love their neighbors (Matthew 5:44), their enemies (Matthew 5:46-48), and those different in the body of Christ (John 13:35).²⁸ There is nothing the matter with wanting to preserve culture (it’s a matter of free choice), but to use that as an excuse to hinder other subcultures from doing culturally relevant mission is an act of suppression.

The reason for addressing cultural inclusivity is that many Chinese churches have not come to terms with how to keep the unity of the faith despite cultural diversity. Paul makes a call for unity and maturity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6) and for Christians to “build others up according to their needs” (Ephesians 4:29). It is wrong to confuse unity with uniformity in the body of Christ (Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:1-4). Creation shows that the Creator did not make everything the same—there is great variety. Scripture also advocates for cultural diversity (Ezekiel 47:22, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, Isaiah 56:6-8). Therefore, trying to preserve cultural uniformity in the church misses the point that the church in all its cultural diversity finds its identity in Christ. Simply put, “A biblically grounded theology of cultural diversity does not simply inspire us to affirm our differences . . . but also to . . . seek out truly reconciled relationships.”²⁹ Lee offers an “Asian American theology in the context of marginality [as] an invitation . . . to meet as fellow strangers and to stand by each other in solidarity as we join in God’s own joyous struggles to build the household of God where [others] can come and be at home.”³⁰

²⁸David K. Clark, “Theology in Cultural Context,” in *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 126-128.

²⁹Ibid., 131.

³⁰Sang Hyun Lee, “Pilgrimage and Home in the Wilderness of Marginality: Symbols and Context in Asian American Theology,” in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*, edited by David K. Yoo (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 228.

Theology for Identity

I agree with Wing So that, “The quest of identity . . . is also a theological problem.”³¹ Certainly, every wave of new Chinese immigrants has helped reinforce the retention of Chinese culture and kept Chinese communities negotiating identities between two worlds.³² Ng has noted that historically many first-generation Chinese in the immigrant community have taken a dim view of local-born Chinese (LBC) assimilating into the Canadian/Western culture.³³ One first-generation Chinese labeled the acculturation of Canadian-born Chinese (CBC) as a problem of “the local born, who should be ashamed of their cultural corruption and deficiency.”³⁴ On the other hand, in 1964, a CBC minister “reflected on the fallacy of assimilation and the merits of integration” as being more able to fully “participate . . . as Canadian citizens.”³⁵ Furthermore, “Embracing a Canadian identity should not entail the loss of one’s ethnic culture.”³⁶

The statements by these two men demonstrate the competing views in Chinese culture of what it means to be Chinese-Canadian and what it might mean to be a Chinese Canadian Christian. Neither view makes it imperative that one cease to be Chinese or embrace Chinese culture. Wang notes that because CBC is a hybrid culture,³⁷ “The coexistence of Chinese and western (Canadian) identities in the church brings tensions and conflict into this community.”³⁸ My impression is that

³¹Wing Y. So, “Identity and Identification,” in *A Winning Combination: ABC/OBC: Understanding the Cultural Tensions in Chinese Churches*, ed. Cecelia Yau (Petaluma, CA: Chinese Christian Mission, 1986), 35. This quest asks questions such as, “Why am I here?” and “What is the ultimate reference point of my life?”

³²Wing Chung Ng, “Negotiating Identities between Two Worlds, 1945-1970,” in *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-80: The Pursuit of Identity and Power* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1999), 88.

³³Ibid., 89.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 105.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Paul C. Wang, “A Study on Cross-Cultural Conflict Patterns and Intervention Between Two Generations of Leaders in Two Chinese Churches in Vancouver: Toward a Vibrant Intergenerational Partnership in Ministry,” DMin dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL, 2003), 6-7.

³⁸Ibid., 140. Wang believes that the coexistence of “interlocking identities of Chinese culture, Canadian values, and Christian beliefs induce tensions and conflict” (32). Wang’s belief is that CBCs are “a generation in search of its identity” (143). Yang comments that these tensions and conflicts become manifest where “immigrants want [LBCs] to show deference and obedience whereas [LBCs] want more independence and

some overseas-born Chinese (OBC)³⁹ see the movement towards acculturation as a CBC identity problem. In other words, some OBCs preach a purer form of Chinese culture, seeing the cultural drift as a CBC problem and feel that OBCs have an obligation to pull CBCs back to the cultural center.

It should be obvious that a bicultural identity is different from either a Canadian or a Chinese culture; and it is true that, in the history of English ministries, many have had “a difficult time finding a sense of significance, identity, and belonging within the church.”⁴⁰ However, from a theological point of view, the Christian’s identity is given by Christ, not culture (1 Corinthians 15:10, 2 Corinthians 5:17). People need to recognize theologically that God did not make a mistake in their faith development or their ethnic identity formation. The canon defines the people of God as members of Christ’s body (Ephesians 4:15-16). The true lineage of faith, according to Romans 4:16-17, is that the descendants of Abraham are those who live by faith. Christians are God’s community (John 1:12, Romans 8:14-16), and being “baptized into the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27) brings people into this new covenant family of God (Galatians 6:10, Romans 11:27). This covenant family of God sets the framework for Christians’ identity. The family of God exists to worship God, to be “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17), to nurture the intercultural faith family, and to carry out Christ’s mission.⁴¹ For these purposes, all the boundaries of ethnic cultural identity are dissolved in Christ. The Cross is the reconciliation point for all nations (Ephesians 2:11-22). Believers are called to pursue peace in light of the reality of the new family of God (Romans 14:19, Hebrews 12:14-17). As part of God’s family, Christians are recruited to carry out his mission and purpose (John 20:21)—“The church’s essence is missional for the calling and sending action of God forms [Christians’] identity.”⁴² Christians share a unity, a common identity that is Christocentric and surpasses all

respect.” Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1999), 178.

³⁹ From this point forward the acronym OBC means Overseas Born Chinese.

⁴⁰ Wayne Wong, “The Current Challenges of Doing Inter-Generational Chinese Ministries in Greater Vancouver: A Reconciliation Ministry,” Master’s thesis, Northwest Baptist Seminary (Vancouver, BC, 1998), 8.

⁴¹ Grudem, “The Nature and Purposes of the Church,” in *Systematic Theology*, 867.

⁴² Guder, 82.

cultural conventions. This common identity is anchored “in the theological claim unity is [a reflection of the] Trinitarian God.”⁴³

Theology for Passing the Leadership Baton On to the Next Generation of Adults

Some OBC leaders in Chinese churches are suspicious that an acculturating English ministry is a subtle rejection of Chinese identity and culture and possibly a rejection of Christian orthodoxy. In fact, many adult second-generation Chinese “find that . . . Christianity reinforces ‘Asian’ values of family, work, and education;” in some ways, “Confucian ideals . . . [are treated] similar to Christian ideals.”⁴⁴

Back in the 1980s, Ling commented that, “The baton belongs to the future leaders.”⁴⁵ English ministries in Chinese bicultural churches have come of age and that future is here now. It is time for an expanded model for English ministries. The scriptures provide various examples of the leadership baton being passed on to the next generation. Some of these narratives are messy, and others are intentional and seamless. Moses mentored and commissioned Joshua (Numbers 27:18-23, Joshua 1:1-18); David prepared Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:1-21); Elijah mentored Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21); Jesus trained and commissioned the disciples to disciple other leaders (Matthew 28:18-20); Barnabas advocated for Paul’s leadership (Acts 9:27-29); and Paul cultivated leadership in bicultural Timothy and encouraged him to also pass the leadership baton (2 Timothy 2:2).

⁴³M. Sydney Park, “Theology of the Household of God: Identity and Function of Christ’s Body in Ephesians,” in *Honoring the Generations*, 9.

⁴⁴Rudy V. Busto, “The Gospel According to the Model Minority? Hazarding an Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students,” in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*, ed. David K. Yoo (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 177. Jeung discusses various Confucian virtues, such as family unity, education, a work ethic, a sense of responsibility, duty, and obligation that get adapted into the Western Christian context; Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 33-35. Ruokanen and Huang note that Chinese Christians repeatedly find themselves interfacing Confucianism with a Christian identity; some believe there is little conflict between Christianity and Chinese Confucianism due to the fact that “Confucian thought has a definite religious dimension;” Miikka Ruokanen and Paulos Huang, eds., *Christianity and Chinese Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 81ff., 215, 279, 101, 107.

⁴⁵Samuel Ling, “The Chinese Way of Doing Things: Contours of OBC-ABC Cultural Differences,” in *A Winning Combination: ABC/OBC: Understanding the Cultural Tensions in Chinese Churches*, ed. Cecelia Yau (Petaluma, CA: Chinese Christian Mission, 1986), 58.

The discerning of such transitions needs to be immersed in prayer (Matthew 6:10) and focus on a calling-based leadership. Given scripture, the literature review, and the survey results in this study, I am advocating the retention of English-speaking adults from Canadian-Chinese churches through associated parallel independent English congregational models. These models will require a passing of the leadership baton and empowering English ministry leaders to authentically leverage mission.

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Valli Boobal Batchelor, ed. *When Pastors Prey: Overcoming Clergy Sexual Abuse of Women* (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation and World Council of Churches, 2013). xxvii + 191 pp.

The title of this book certainly catches one's attention. Sexual abuse needs urgent attention, and all the more if it happens in the context of church life where trust and power often produce psychologically precarious situations. This issue prompted former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to contribute with a four-page prologue to the book.

When Pastors Prey is divided into four sections. The first deals with identifying the problem. Authors from different Christian traditions introduce the gravity of the situation by pointing to religious, institutional, and systemic elements that contribute to why some people find excuses for sexual exploitation. One reason for recommending this book is because it addresses the issues involved without 'beating around the bush,' but neither does it point fingers at particular churches or religious institutions. The problem of sexual abuse can be found everywhere.

Another thing that makes this volume worthy is that gives victims a voice. In the second section, women speak about the circumstances, the excuses, and the hurts and how they managed to 'move on' in life. Most of us are all too familiar with spousal abuse or children being at the mercy of relatives—or at least tales of such. How much more should we be upset when clergy use their position of authority and trust to take advantage of others. These victims' stories will challenge the reader to want to do something about this problem. But testimonies of suffering, while illuminating the problem, do not provide answers. In the book's third section, nine authors tell how their churches have attempted to address the problem. We read of the initiatives that denominations in different regions of the world have taken to combat (clergy) abuse of (mostly) women. Breaking the silence, creating a response team, and establishing a circle of hope are among the many initiative discussed here.

The fourth section issues a call to be proactive and stop the abuse for good. In some areas of the world, fundamental reform is necessary. Misconduct needs to be criminalized, sexual predators have to be identified, the vulnerable must be protected, and the victim helped to move beyond shame. These are just some of the suggestions made.

(Note. I was recently teaching at a theological seminary, and this issue seemed so important to its dean that he made *When Pastors Prey* required reading for all my D.Min. students.)

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Robert P. Menzies, *Pentecost: This Story is Our Story* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2013). 165 pages. ISBN 978-1-60731-341-0.

In this highly readable volume aimed at a general readership both within and outside Pentecostalism, American Assemblies of God missionary and Lukan scholar Robert Menzies delineates a compelling apologetic for Classical Pentecostal readings of Scripture, experience, and spiritual and missional practice. The book's title directly states Menzies' consistently argued descriptive of Pentecostal theological identity, which he moreover argues, is foremost accountable for Pentecostal church growth worldwide. Menzies thus argues that Pentecostal identity and church growth primarily emerges from the Pentecostal hermeneutical practice of reading the Luke-Acts narrative (e.g., "stories"), specifically via the Acts chapter two Pentecost story, as their primary paradigmatic "model" for shaping their "identity, ideas, and actions" (p. 23). Hence, Pentecostals read the story of Pentecost as "*our* story" (pp. 21, 23, 35, 67, 98, 117-118, 138, 144, 147).

The first four chapters closely delineate methodological approaches and theological themes that Menzies has extensively argued throughout most of his past and more scholarly-toned writings. Menzies begins with a brief introduction that clarifies key terminology and addressed issues. Then in chapter 1 ("Why We Read Differently") Menzies reiterates his past arguments for the traditional Pentecostal Lukan-prioritized hermeneutic, stressing theological, paradigmatic and historically enduring methodological purposes to the Lukan corpus. Menzies thus also shows how this hermeneutic contrasts with common Evangelical hermeneutical premises that restrict Luke's writings to purely historiographical aims.

In chapter 2 ("Baptism in the Holy Spirit"), Menzies similarly reiterates his past thesis that Lukan pneumatology doctrinally posits an experience of Spirit baptism that lacks soteriological dimensions, being strictly missiological in purpose for the sake of empowering believers for Spirit-inspired witness. Menzies thus again argues how these themes account for how Luke consistently likens this experience to Old Testament ideas of vocational, charismatic, and prophetic empowering. In chapter 3 ("Role of Tongue in Luke-Acts") Menzies offers some fresh developments to his past discussions on tongues-speech. He also suggests that the Pentecostal practice of tongues speech emerges from the distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic delineated in chapter 1.

Building on this premise, Menzies suggests that in Pentecostalism, the practice of tongues speech symbolically illustrates the true prophetic calling of the Christian church, which he substantiates by building a theology of tongues speech from the prophetic speech motifs running throughout Luke-Acts.

Chapter 4 (“Signs and Wonders”) also illustrates some ongoing development in Menzies’ thinking. While he still contrasts distinctives between Pentecostals and Charismatics in their differing stress on charismatic gifts and phenomena, here he stresses an integral role to “signs and wonders” within Pentecostal experience and ministry praxis. Yet he argues that the Luke-Acts narrative subsumes charismatic experience and phenomena within its intended, ongoing model of prophetic-empowerment for Spirit-inspired witness.

In chapter 5 (“Why Pentecostal Churches are Growing”) Menzies suggests “five theological-oriented reasons” accountable for Pentecostal church growth worldwide. These are: 1. Their “missional DNA” that emerges from their paradigmatic reading of Acts; 2. Their “clear message” again emerging from their reading of Bible stories as “our stories;” 3. Their expectation that the “signs and wonders” evident in the early church should characterize our contemporary experience and ministry practice; 4. “Limited church structure,” meaning a “strong egalitarian” ethos in Pentecostal community; and 5. An “emphasis on experience,” again referring to how Pentecostals believe that believers should share in the kinds of experiences recorded in Luke’s record of the early church. In his “Conclusion,” Menzies reiterates his broader thesis that the Pentecostal movement ultimately demonstrates the theological distinctiveness of Luke-Acts. Menzies thus concludes by suggesting that a major contribution the Pentecostal movement should continually make to the broader Christian church worldwide is Luke’s theological distinctiveness and the Lukan portrayal of the early church as a paradigmatic template for ongoing Christian experience and missiological practice.

I shall now point out what I see as Menzies’ most salient and sustainable apologetic towards a theological understanding of Pentecostal identity. Here I refer to Menzies’ sustained stress on the paradigmatic role that Luke-Acts has and should serve towards Pentecostal identity formation, experience, and missiological practice. I say this, however, for the following rebuttal to some of Menzies’ argued themes. Broader theological and interdisciplinary perspectives would substantiate this presumed hermeneutical relation, even if we do not wholly concur with Menzies’ long-sustained reading of Luke’s

pneumatology as strictly void of soteriological dimensions and hence also, Pentecostal experiences of Spirit baptism. I applaud Menzies' insistence, as a biblical theologian, on the formative role of Lukan theology on Pentecostal identity. Yet I feel that his ambivalence towards broader theological disciplines and varied interdisciplinary methodologies that have become well integrated in broader Pentecostal theological scholarship unfortunately hamstrings his own contribution towards this apologetic. His ambivalence thereby also undermines the logical coherency of his concluding chapter. For while he claims to offer "theological" reasons for the growth of Pentecostalism worldwide, his identified reasons, (which essentially focus on matters of praxis) can easily be deemed as broad generalizations albeit lacking adequately appropriated empirical research.

Another weakness to Menzies' theological portrayal of global Pentecostalism emerges from his argued stress on its Reformed heritage and perceived affinities between the two traditions. In chapter 2 Menzies specifically grounds this trajectory on his concurrent stress that the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism is best developed on an understanding of Luke's theology of spirit-empowerment as wholly consisting of charismatic power for mission ("prophetic enabling") without soteriological implications (pp. 48-52). Granted, the original context of chapter 2 was a paper delivered in Amsterdam for probably an audience of Reformed background. Yet because Menzies does not acknowledge other major traditions that Pentecostalism shares historical and current affinity to, such as particularly Wesleyanism, and because of the chapter's importance within an introductory text, what results is a singularly Reformed construal of Pentecostalism. Perhaps it would actually better serve Menzies' intent if, in his introduction, he clarifies that his perspective is in fact a Reformed Pentecostal perspective and that he privileges this perspective's interests.

On the other hand, throughout his book I notice some commendable developments in Menzies' thinking. First to note is that he more clearly affirms that as a biblical theme, the Spirit baptism metaphor is polyvalent in meaning (Menzies states that the "New Testament speaks of two baptisms in the Spirit—one that is soteriological . . . and one that is missiological" [p. 63]). Second, in explaining the relation of tongues speech to Spirit baptism (chapter 3) Menzies seems to consistently define tongues speech as a "sign" of Spirit baptism, while avoiding evidentialist terminology (pp. 68, 93-94, 97-99). I say this while noting that Menzies clarifies the chapter as an edited version of a paper (originally in Mandarin Chinese) on "initial

evidence” presented in Taiwan (p. 68). Related to this is perhaps an emerging willingness to describe tongues speech in sacramental terms. As earlier mentioned, in chapter 3 Menzies infers a sacramental nuance in describing tongues speech as a “sign” of “prophetic power” (p. 94). Then in his “Conclusion,” he explicitly suggests that tongues speech functions “as a sacrament,” in the sense of “an outward sign of a spiritual reality” (p. 144). Finally, Menzies provides some helpful perspectives towards observed missiological power in the lives of non-Pentecostals, and the sometimes missing phenomena of tongues speech amongst believers open to or seeking Pentecostal experiences of Spirit baptism. Menzies thus suggests that some experiences, or the lack thereof, are beyond our human judgements, and what matters most is that we encourage believers to stay open to miraculous expressions of God’s presence and blessings (pp. 98-101).

To conclude, given its merits while bearing in mind its critical limitations, Menzies’ book can function well as a Bible college text, and for general readers wanting an introduction on how Pentecostals derive their identify from their unique reading of Scripture.

Monte Lee Rice

Jonathan J. Bonk. ed. *Family Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies* (New Haven, CT: OMSC Publications, 2013). 326 pp. ISBN: 0-9762205-6-3.

A careful reading of this book plunged me into a trance, which I was not able to get out of easily. It so closely reflected my life as a missionary and as a father of a Baguio-born son in the Philippines. Each chapter I visited evoked memories that made me laugh, cry and feel heartbroken. Because of my sense of empathy, it was very difficult for me to criticize the issues of other missionaries. Rather, I appreciated their great efforts on the mission field; their experiences could be mine. The agenda they discussed was all about family responsibility, which is the most important for parents. That responsibility, particularly in a foreign land, ought to be taken more fully into consideration because the missionary family is more vulnerable.

It is worthwhile to look closely at the contour of this well-organized book, which contains a variety of case studies and experiences from long-term missionaries. It is unique in that it explores issues very effectively by using the various genres of biography, Bible study, sermon, testimony, interview, survey, analysis, statistics, and dialogue.

Chapters 1-2 and 6-27 deal with the following twelve issues— (1) missionary families then and now, (2) Korean culture and English language, (3) third-culture children, (4) the education of missionary children, (5) the provision of education for the children, (6) the relationship between the church and the missionary family, (7) American policy between the church and the missionary family, (8) Korean mission financing, (9) mental and emotional health, (10) family resilience, (11) Korean missionary families and retirement, and (12) American missionary families and retirement. Chapters 3-5 deal with missionary family, missionary marriage, and missionary children in terms of biblical principles on family responsibility. Chapter 28 presents a summary of suggestions regarding financial support, family matters, awareness of multi-cultural contexts, multiple responsibilities, and trust in God, with the writers pointing out the weaknesses of their past experiences and then proposing alternatives for improvement. The book also includes addenda covering three subjects for practical information—Korean missionary children's educational needs, a Korean missionary retirement survey, and the care of missionary kids.

The twelve issues enumerated above are addressed in the form of a dialogue between presenters and respondents. I have summarized the substance of each of them as follows:

Issue 1 (1-2). A biography of a Korean missionary family in the past and present chronicles many episodes that happened on the field between the parents and children, focusing primarily on the children's education. As their response, a Canadian missionary couple, feeling sympathy with what is common to many families serving cross-culturally, suggest that time prioritization is an important factor relative to cultural differences and how they relate to children's education.

Issue 2 (6-7). The presenter emphasizes that children's education for English language and other culture should involve the parents to a greater degree in order to sustain their home culture and identity and that the children should learn to appreciate the diversity in the world and the complexity of local identities. The respondent applauds the fact that children can become global Christians embracing both East and West and offers a positive impact on the world challenges.

Issue 3 (8-9). In the initial stage, the reentry of bi-lingual or bi-cultural (multi-lingual or multi-cultural) children to their home culture causes cultural shock and the transition takes time to be familiarized. However, this reentry is considered an advantage when bi- or multi-lingualism demonstrates a wide range of cognitive development and cultural consolidation is achieved.

Issue 4 (10-11). The presentation points out the importance of a proper education for the children, proposing that both mission agencies and the church should cooperate to make an excellent educational system and support the scholarship. The response agrees with those suggestions and compliments a radical education system (*i.e.*, homeschooling), which is against Korean ethos.

Issue 5 (12-13). Here the presenter, after providing a brief historical survey of the educational systems that missionaries in the last half century chose for their children, feels that the parents should help their children in choosing the proper system (*e.g.*, homeschooling, national schools, online programs, or boarding school). The respondent, agreeing that there are opportunities for choosing the educational system, suggests rather that MK parents

should take the initiative to educate their children, considering which educational system would be the most appropriate for them.

Issue 6 (14-15). Two concerns are raised in relation to the education of children and married life, the former being its high cost and the latter fueling stress, burnout, or depression; in this case, the church should offer both understanding and professional assistance. The respondent, complimenting in his discussion that the case is a good testimony, proposes that an established agency is to provide professional supervision on the field as a partner for the missionary team.

Issue 7 (16-17). Shared is the story about a particular church (Park Street Church) in America that experienced a radical change from apathy to enthusiastic support for missions, two of the results being that it made a full-support missionary policy and ensured the long-term mutual accountability. The respondent encourages the leadership of the church that took these bold policy for secure missionary work and accountability steps for making upgrades in effective mission.

Issue 8 (18-19). Emphasizing that high-quality financial support is necessary for a missionary family's well-being, because it is an investment which is of great value, the presenter addresses these two issues—preparation of future mission and alleviation of the future suffering of the missionaries, which should be dealt with missionaries, mission agencies, and supporting churches. The respondent, agreeing with the presentation, summarizes the issue in his own words.

Issue 9 (20-21). Addressing the significance of member care, the presenter cites results of a survey that proposes the Korean style of passion and self-sacrifice for missions can actually contribute to the problem of inadequate member care. His 'solution' includes the need for multiple sources of support, such as counseling and mental health services. The respondent adds that member care should start at home and be continued in the host country.

Issue 10 (22-23). The presenter shares the many lessons he learned through a bad experience caused his mission agency which resulted in severe hardship for his family. While such is not a common thing, an awareness of financial management needs to be considered to ensure the stability of family life. The respondent offers three suggestions to further undergird family resilience—

teaching how to normalize, teaching how to communicate a matter, and providing counsel.

Issue 11 (24-25). The presenter's claim is that retirement is one of the important issues in which accountability is needed, yet the situation in which he is now is not adequate in dealing with this problem, given the present decline in the economic and social climate. The respondent affirms that this is not a simple issue because it depends on what the individual may face, and that too many missionaries are not adequately prepared for this impending reality. Thus, providing a retirement plan is considered imperative.

Issue 12 (26-27). Presenting six cases studies, which are of one retired individual, two churches, and three missions agencies in North America, shows diverse plans and approaches to retirement in North America. The principles presented at the end of each case study are helpful for the understanding the general trend of how retirement of missionaries is handled. In general, churches in North America are categorized into two groups of continual support or no support; mission agencies are trying to help retire missionaries with possible plans and resources. But most of Korean missionaries, though yet young to retire, are aware of the necessity of preparing secure plan and system in the near future, surveying the Western policy.

Family Accountability in Missions deals chiefly with case studies of Korean missionary families, which begs the question—Can this book serve as a general guide for new Asian and Western missionaries? I submit that the answer is affirmative. First, the agenda of this forum was all about the family issues, particularly the children's. Although some issues are perhaps unique to Koreans, many of the others are common to all families. The attitude that Korean missionary parents showed toward their children's well-being is the same with all missionary parents. For example, both Asian and Western missionaries encounter problems, such as when the children suffer cultural shock, racial differences, or identity crisis (49-50). Secondly, it is an international Christian community in that the forum participants got involved with the presentations and the responses. The striking thing was that the cross-cultural dialogue produced no criticisms or arguments. Thirdly, the questions raised through the case studies in this research are expected to facilitate general applications for many missionaries. Those questions make the readers think and reflect on

similar situations they may face or discuss possible solutions for the different problems. Fourthly, Korean missionaries follow the same experience as Western ones. "Today, Korean missionaries often repeat the 'old days' experience of Western missionaries." (190) One of their experiences included the family accountability accompanying the issues. New missionaries can learn much from reading a lot of case studies on the same agenda dealt with in both Korean and non-Korean (*i.e.*, other Asian, American, and Western) missionary lives.

It is high time to appreciate the work of foreign missionaries to Korea (particularly Americans), because of the growth that Korean churches have experienced. "Missionaries to Korea set a remarkable example of self-sacrifice, even to the point of giving their lives, and of relentlessly planting churches everywhere they went. These foreigners kindled a passion for the gospel that Koreans are now taking to the mission field." (154) In fact, Korean missionaries are known for their passion and self-sacrifice, that nation now sending more missionaries than any other country—over 25,000. Korean churches spend more than a half billion U.S. dollars annually on world missions. Although Korean missions just started in the early 1980s, it has gone through many trials. "The young Korean mission movement has already experienced the same range of problems that modern Western Protestant missions have encountered since their inception more than two centuries ago." (226)

A young child tumbles over and over again in learning to walk properly. It is like growing pains that every adult has experienced. What matters is to know the problem first and then to find a solution. I assume that Korean churches have already found it, and now the implementation is following. This dialogue is an evidence of even greater improvement.

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