The World Evangelical Alliance's Journal
of Theology and Contemporary Application

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Volume 48 • No. 1 • February 2024

Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

Volume 48 • Number 1 • February 2024

Published by

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

WIPF *and* STOCK *Publishers*
199 West 8th Avenue • Eugene OR 97401
wipfandstock.com

All issues of ERT (now published in English and Spanish!)
are available on our website:
https://theology.worldea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/
To order hard copies, contact orders@wipfandstock.com

ISSN: 0144-8153
ISBN: 979-8-3852-1278-1
Volume 48 • No. 1 • February 2024

Editorial Policy
The articles in the *Evangelical Review of Theology (ERT)* reflect
the opinions of the authors and reviewers and do not necessarily
represent those of the Editors or the Publisher.

The Editors welcome both unsolicited submissions and
recommendations of original or previously published articles
or book reviews for inclusion in ERT. Manuscripts, reviews,
queries and other communications may be addressed
to the Executive Editor at bruce.barron0@gmail.com.

Printed by Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 West 8th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401
wipfandstock.com

Table of Contents

Introduction: Good Theology Is Very Practical

Since becoming executive editor of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* in 2018, I have sought to strengthen global Christianity by presenting articles of high quality, global importance and clear practical application. I can do that only if I receive great articles. I am thankful for the impressive collection of scholars who have offered their excellent essays for this issue.

First, European religious freedom expert Arie de Pater and Finnish lawyer Ville Hoikkala provide the best commentary I have seen on the highly controversial prosecution of a Finnish politician and Lutheran pastor over their published statements regarding homosexual behaviour. The case has enormous implications for Christians' public witness, as we must carefully consider how we are perceived in both courts of law and the court of public opinion.

Next, Ian Randall discusses the history of relations between evangelical and Orthodox leaders—two groups with very different perspectives but often united by shared concerns for upholding the gospel's spiritual message—within the ecumenical movement.

Narry Santos digs deeply into how the Gospel of Mark presents servanthood and then discusses how several Canadian Christian groups have meaningfully applied the message in their ministries.

Barry Danylak's theological work sheds new light on 1 Corinthians 7 and its implications for how we treat singleness and single people under the New Covenant—a pressing issue in an age with more singles than ever.

Israel Kolade examines Calvin's commentary on Romans 13 and finds six highly relevant principles for our interaction with civil government.

The last four articles form two pairs—on creativity and contextualization, respectively. Poet D. S. Martin and popular culture expert Ted Turnau challenge us in different ways to bring creativity into our spiritual lives and our cultural engagement. Esa Autero shows how the parable of the workers in the vineyard and the plight of day labourers in contemporary Mumbai, India shed light on each other, and Richard Howell (former general secretary of the Asia Evangelical Alliance) considers key issues related to presenting the gospel in India and other multi-faith contexts.

I used to joke that if I made a mistake in *ERT*, both of my readers would complain. I think we have many more than two readers now, but it would be wonderful if you could help to confirm that by sending a note with your feedback on this issue (or even a letter for possible publication).

Happy reading!

—Bruce Barron, Executive Editor
bruce.barron0@gmail.com

ERT (2024) 48:1, 5–13

Free Speech under Threat in Finland and Beyond?

Arie de Pater and Ville Hoikkala

In Finland, Lutheran Bishop Juhana Pohjola and politician Päivi Räsänen have been accused of a crime for publishing material that allegedly threatened, defamed or insulted homosexuals. Both have been threatened with fines and even possible imprisonment simply for holding to the conservative Christian view on marriage and sexuality. Why has this case (currently on appeal to the Supreme Court of Finland) received so much international attention, and what impact is it likely to have on freedom of expression in Europe and beyond?

Summary of the case

In 2004, Päivi Räsänen wrote a brochure entitled "As Man and Woman He Created Them." This brochure was printed and distributed by Juhana Pohjola. In the brochure, Räsänen explains her view of marriage and sexuality, based on her interpretation of the Bible. This interpretation is shared by many evangelical Christians worldwide.

In 2019, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, of which Räsänen is a member, decided to support a Pride parade celebrating sexual diversity. Räsänen questioned this decision by the church leadership on social media, adding a picture of the text of Romans 1:24–27. In a subsequent interview for a Finnish radio channel, she repeated her vision regarding marriage and sexuality.

In April 2021, three separate charges of incitement against homosexuals were filed against Räsänen. Pohjola was charged with printing and distributing the brochure. In March 2022, a Finnish district court ruled them both not guilty. The prosecutor, not satisfied with this verdict, appealed the ruling and brought the case to the Helsinki Appeal Court. The hearings before this court ended in September 2023. On November 14, the appeal court acquitted both Räsänen and Pohjola of all charges. In January 2024, despite the two prior acquittals, the state prosecutor appealed the case again to the Supreme Court of Finland.

Arie de Pater (MS, Wageningen University, the Netherlands) is the Brussels representative of the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) and the European representative of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF). He has more than 20 years of experience as an advocate for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) at the national and international levels.

Ville Hoikkala (LLM, University of Lapland) has been an attorney in Finland since 2004 with a focus on human rights issues, criminal law, family law and immigration. He has been active in the FoRB activities of the EEA. He has been an opponent of prosecuting attorneys Raija Toiviainen and Anu Mantila in criminal court cases and lived for 13 years in the district that Päivi Räsänen has represented in the Finnish parliament.

The applicable law

Päivi Räsänen and Juhana Pohjola were charged for agitation against a group of people, based on the Finnish Penal Code § 11:10. The paragraph says:

> A person who makes available to the public or otherwise disseminates among the public or keeps available to the public information, an opinion or another message where a certain group is threatened, defamed or insulted on the basis of its race, colour, birth, national or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation or disability or on another comparable basis shall be sentenced for agitation against a population group to a fine or to imprisonment for at most two years. (English translation by Finnish Ministry of Justice)

Agitation against a group of people was criminalized in 1970, as Finland joined the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In 2011, the wording was slightly modified to include more clearly online expressions that fall within the description. The impulse to make this change in 2011 came from the Council of Europe's Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalization of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems, which had taken effect in 2006.

According to the police database, there are 20 to 30 investigations regarding agitation against a group of people each year. In some cases, agitation against a group of people was done in connection with other crimes, such as speaking ethnic or anti-gay slurs while committing physical violence against people who belong to those groups. Most of the agitations against a group of people took place online on different social media platforms.

Thus far, cases filed under this article have dealt with outright racism or with vandalism accompanied by a clear hate motivation. The case against Räsänen was the first one that involved more civilized and academic language.

The statute of limitations for agitation against a group of people is five years. The Räsänen case has led to a public conversation about how the statute of limitations should be interpreted in cases where potentially illegal material was initially published online at an earlier point. In January 2024, the Supreme Court, in its decision in a case of online defamation, indicated that the statute of limitations should be calculated from the date when the content was uploaded online. This means that what Räsänen wrote in her 2004 booklet could no longer be prosecuted in Finland, because the five-year statute of limitations has expired according to the new interpretation.

The main characters

Päivi Maria Räsänen (born 1959) is a well-known Finnish politician. (The proper pronunciation of the letter ä in Finnish is as in the English word *apple*.) She is a physician by education but entered politics in 1990. She became a member of the Riihimäki City Council in 1993 and of the Finnish Parliament in 1995. She was chairperson of the Finnish Christian Democrats from 2004 until 2015. From 2011 to 2015, she served the country as Minister of the Interior in the cabinet of Jyrki Katainen.

Räsänen lives in Riihimäki with her husband, Niilo. They have five grown children. Niilo holds a doctorate in theology and is a pastor and headmaster of People's Mission College (Kansanlähetysopisto) in Ryttylä, Finland.

Räsänen is a prominent figure and a household name in the Finnish political landscape. Most Finns recognize her and have an opinion about her. Räsänen has defended Christian conservative values on issues including abortion and same-sex marriage. Furthermore, she has engaged in political debates on health and social policies. Her rhetorical skills and media strategy are respected even by her political opponents. Räsänen has presented the lighter side of her personality and sense of humour as a guest on television shows such as *Masked Singer*, and she has invited journalists to her home, where she has talked openly about her family life. The high school graduations and weddings of her five children have been covered in Finnish tabloids as beautiful events of a celebrity family.

The Finnish Parliament is elected by an open-list proportional representation system. Räsänen represents the electoral district of Häme, which has 14 seats in the national parliament. A party needs about 5 percent of the votes in Häme for a seat in the national parliament. Despite Räsänen's prominence in the media, support for her party, the Christian Democrats, has declined, and in the last elections, she received barely enough votes to be re-elected.

Häme is the rust belt of Finland, with a strong industrial and agricultural base, no major universities and a tradition of Christian revival movements. Politicians with a conservative set of values get good electoral results there.

Juhana Markus Pohjola (born 1972) is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF) since his ordination in 2021. The ELMDF is a conservative break-off from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Pohjola holds two master's degrees in theology, one from the University of Helsinki (1997) and one from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, US (1998). He successfully defended his doctoral thesis in 2014.

In 1999, Pohjola was ordained as a priest in the diocese of Oulu, serving the Finnish Luther Foundation. He was also head pastor of the Lutheran parish of St. Mark in Helsinki from 2000 to 2010. In 2011 and 2012, he was visiting researcher at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catherines, Canada. Pohjola was appointed dean of the Mission Diocese in 2013. Because of his function in the Mission Diocese, the state church defrocked him in 2014. He is married to Päivi Pohjola, a music teacher, and they have four children.

Raija Sinikka Toiviainen (born 1954) was Finland's Prosecutor General when the case began. Toiviainen graduated with a bachelor's degree in law from Helsinki University in 1980. She started at the Office of the Finnish Prosecutor General in 1997 and subsequently served as state prosecutor and head of the International Unit. Toiviainen was appointed Deputy Prosecutor General in 2016 and became Prosecutor General in 2018. She retired in 2022.

The Prosecutor General is responsible for leading, supervising and developing the National Prosecution Service. The Prosecutor General makes decisions about the actions of the prosecutors before the Supreme Court. In cases related to limits of freedom of speech in mass media, terrorism, and police misconduct, charges can be filed only by the Prosecutor General. Usually, the Prosecutor General assigns an

ordinary prosecutor to present those cases in court. A new Prosecutor General is appointed by the Finnish government when the previous one leaves the job, but it is not a political office, and the Prosecutor General does not change when Finland gets a new government. In this way, the appointment is similar to the nomination of Supreme Court judges in the United States, who do not change when the president who appointed them leaves the office. The Prosecutor General can make decisions about criminal investigations against ministers, so the independence of the National Prosecution Service is important. During the Räsänen investigation and court proceedings from 2019 to 2023, Finland has had four governments with parties from left to right.

Toiviainen is deeply concerned about hate speech. She ordered a police investigation into Räsänen in 2019–2020, and even though the police did not report any misconduct, the state prosecutor still pursued a court case against both Räsänen and Pohjola. The prosecutors have an independent role, and sometimes the prosecutors and police have different views of a case.

Toiviainen assigned Anu Mantila to present the Päivi Räsänen case in court. Mantila has served in the National Prosecution Service in different tasks for several decades. She holds a Doctor of Laws degree, having written her dissertation on the influence of administrative and civil law decisions in penal proceedings. She is widely respected as an academic scholar in procedural law.

The arguments

Räsänen

In her brochure, Räsänen argues that sexual education should be grounded in values. She contends that if same-sex relationships are presented as of equal worth and value to heterosexual relationships in the context of sex education, youth will be encouraged towards homosexual experimentation. 'The most important question is if homosexuality is a neutral state of existence or a negative developmental disorder.' If the latter is the case, Räsänen states, we are not doing anyone a favour by normalizing homosexuality. As the brochure states, 'Campaigning for the rights of homosexuals leads to a change in the values of the society, which does not support growth into a healthy marriage.'

According to Räsänen, deviant sexual urges are often linked to disorders in early childhood and adolescent development. 'There is undeniable scientific support that homosexuality is a disorder of psychosocial development.' Räsänen further observes that casual sexual relations and frequently changing partners are common among homosexuals. According to her, that's a clear indication that these are 'very broken individuals'.

In an interview with a Finnish radio station, Räsänen was explicitly asked for her opinion on homosexuality. She did not exclude a genetic factor in the preference for a same-sex relationship. But she squarely defended marriage as between a man and a woman: 'I think it is clear that God didn't create the human being as a homosexual. God created us as heterosexuals. God created a man and a woman, and the intention of God is a marriage between them. It is clearly against the will of God and a sin to be in any other kind of sexual relationship.'

The prosecutor

According to the prosecutor, Räsänen's communications on homosexuality and marriage are not within the limits of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) or freedom of expression but discriminate against homosexuals.

The prosecutor stated, 'Päivi Räsänen claims that homosexuality is an unnatural and unhealthy state of being, a psychosocial developmental disorder that one should get rid of.'

The prosecutor further defended her accusation with the following summary of Räsänen's position: 'Homosexuals are labelled as people prone to sexual abuse of children, immoral, casual sexual affairs. The defence of their rights is labelled as questionable. Räsänen claims that those attributes, especially lack of morality and the urge to sexual abuse of children, are associated with homosexuality.' She added, 'Räsänen claims that homosexuality is a negative and reprehensive personal attribute and identity, and that all homosexuals are inferior as human beings.'

This led to the conclusion that 'The statements of Räsänen insult the equality and human dignity of homosexuals. and they are likely to lead to intolerance, disrespect and hatred against homosexuals.'

The same line of reasoning was applied to Räsänen's tweet accompanied by several verses from Romans 1: 'Räsänen defends her opinion with verses from the Bible. Her statement means that homosexuality itself is a negative personal identity and attribute, due to which homosexuals are and should be considered immoral and inferior compared to other people. The statement violates the equality and human dignity of homosexuals, and is likely to provoke disrespect, intolerance and hatred against homosexuals.'

Commenting on the radio interview, the prosecutor declared, 'The statements are disrespectful against homosexuals. According to Räsänen, if homosexuality is a genetic condition, it is seen as a genetic degeneration and a sickness. The statement is untrue and degrading against homosexuals. Räsänen doesn't give any facts to support her statements. The religious view of Päivi Räsänen, that homosexuals are not created by God as heterosexuals are, is derogatory against homosexuals.'

Helsinki District Court

In the verdict, the Helsinki District Court criticized the prosecutor: 'The expression of Räsänen's writing cannot be interpreted more broadly than her written text.' It added, 'Räsänen's writing doesn't give a reason for the conclusion that homosexuals are prone to sexual abuse of children. Räsänen also doesn't say that homosexuality is a reprehensive personal attribute or identity as such, or that homosexual persons should be considered inferior.' Nevertheless, the District Court did acknowledge that Räsänen's comments were offensive to homosexuals.

The court took into account that Räsänen's writing was distributed among scholars and members of congregations linked to the conservative Christian Luther Foundation. Although she was also a politician when she wrote the brochure, she did not write in that capacity.

'Considering the background and context of the writing, and the textual context of the quotations in the charge, the District Court considers that the opinions and statements, even though they are insulting, are not hate speech that would be outside

the scope of the freedom of speech. The quotations don't demean the humanity and equality of homosexuals, and they don't create disrespect, intolerance or hatred against homosexuals. Räsänen has not agitated against a group of people as defined in Penal Code §11:10. The charge shall be dismissed.'

The appeal

After the prosecutor appealed the District Court ruling, the Finnish Court of Appeal in Helsinki thoroughly interrogated both Räsänen and Pohjola. Mantila, representing the prosecutor general, urged Räsänen to review her position on homosexuality and marriage, which she declined to do. According to Mantila, the trial was not about the Bible per se but about the way in which Räsänen and Pohjola interpreted the text. The prosecutor reportedly argued, 'The point isn't whether it is true or not but that it is insulting.'

The new judgement clarified that for a hate speech claim to stand under the Finnish statute, there needs to be evidence of intent to insult in the utterances themselves. Here, the Court of Appeal agreed with the trial court that, although some might feel insulted by Räsänen's opinions, intent cannot be proved. The Court of Appeal unanimously threw out all the charges, stating that the law required the post to be intended to offend, and that 'there must be an overriding social reason for interfering with and restricting freedom of expression.'

On 13 January 2024, the prosecution announced that it was appealing the decision to the Supreme Court of Finland. There is no obligation for the Finnish Supreme Court to accept the case. The Supreme Court is a precedent-setting court that focuses on cases where the law does not provide a clear answer. The new Prosecutor General, Ari-Pekka Koivisto, can decide whether the prosecutors take the case to the Supreme Court or not.

A human rights perspective

Both freedom of expression and FoRB are well anchored in international and European law. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ensures the right 'to manifest [one's] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching'. Furthermore, the article states, 'No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.' Limitations of the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief are admissible only when they are 'prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others'.

The brochure that Räsänen wrote and that Bishop Pohjola printed and distributed was first and foremost intended for a Christian audience, explaining the church's understanding of marriage. There was no call to hatred or violence or other provocative language in the brochure. Therefore, based on Article 18 of the ICCPR, there is no basis on which to prohibit the writing, printing or distribution of the booklet. Of course, people may disagree with the church's teaching. If so, under FoRB, they should be free to leave that community for another church or none.

The tweet and the radio interview by Räsänen are more about freedom of expression than about FoRB. Article 19 of the ICCPR states that freedom of expression includes the freedom to 'impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of

frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice'. This right can only be restricted 'for respect of the rights or reputations of others' and 'for the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals'.

In the well-known case of *Handyside v. UK*, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that 'Freedom of expression ... is applicable not only to "information" or "ideas" that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population.'

In both the tweet and the radio interview, Räsänen imparted ideas on sexuality and marriage based on her reading of the Bible. From the responses received, it is obvious that some consider these ideas offensive or shocking. But according to the European Court of Human Rights, that's no reason to restrict her freedom of expression.

The Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, published under the auspices of the United Nations, provides a six-part threshold to clarify the bandwidth of freedom of expression. The six criteria used to identify hate speech are '(1) the social and political *context*, (2) status of the *speaker*, (3) *intent* to incite the audience against a target group, (4) *content* and form of the speech, (5) *extent* of its dissemination and (6) *likelihood* of harm, including imminence'.

The content of the message on social media gives no reason to believe that it was the speaker's intent to incite. From the content of the message, it was clear that Räsänen was speaking primarily to her church leadership. The dissemination of the message was greatly boosted by people who disagreed with Räsänen. Regarding the likelihood of harm, 'the courts will have to determine that there was a reasonable probability that the speech would succeed in inciting actual action against the target group, recognizing that such causation should be rather direct.'

In light of the international human rights instruments listed above, we must conclude that there is no reason to prosecute either Räsänen or Bishop Pohjola.

Impact

Christians across Europe and beyond have followed the court case against Räsänen and Pohjola with interest. They feared that a conviction in this case would have serious implications for freedom of expression and FoRB in other European countries as well. Of course, a ruling by a Finnish court as such carries no authority in other nations, but many people regarded the verdict as an important indicator of where we stand regarding freedom of expression and FoRB in Europe.

The vindication of Räsänen and Pohjola came as a relief to all who feared a serious limitation of Christian voices in the public domain. The acquittal has been hailed as a victory for free speech, and many have said they felt emboldened to share their Christian views in public. At a press conference following the verdict, Räsänen told the audience that she had just received a message from a 16-year-old who wrote that the acquittal encouraged her to be more open about her Christian views. So, for now, the impact of the court case is greater support for Christians who share the views of Räsänen and Pohjola on sexuality and marriage. That could change if the Supreme

Court of Finland accepts another appeal by the prosecutor general or if the European Court of Human Rights should rule against the two Finnish Christians or against freedom of expression in a similar case.

Reflection

The rulings of both the district court and the Helsinki Court of Appeal clearly vindicated Räsänen and Pohjola and reaffirmed their freedom of expression under Finnish law. This verdict is supported by international human rights law. Therefore, Christians can still defend and promote their views on sexuality and marriage. The court case also made it clear that some regard these views as shocking and insulting. In the context of growing secularization, we can expect the number of objectors to grow. Strengthened by this court case, we could just shrug our shoulders and move on. We could even cover ourselves in a martyr's cloak. But would these attitudes really advance the good news that we find in the Scriptures?

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul discussed how to deal with food offered to idols. Some argued that they could eat it, since neither the offering to idols nor the idols themselves are anything. These people, one might say, wanted to have their cake and eat it. Paul strongly criticized this attitude. '"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive' (1 Cor 10:23).

In concluding his teaching, Paul wrote, 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved' (1 Cor 10:31–33).

When we use our right to freedom of expression, it is good for us to keep that aim in sight. We want others to be saved. So, when we communicate biblical truth, we should try to do that in a winsome way. Even then, some people will feel offended. That's no different from Paul's time when the Christian sect was a tiny minority. But when shaping our message, we should try to anticipate the response by our audience.

We hasten to say that this is not about changing religious doctrine. All religions or belief systems are, generally speaking, free to instruct their members and the next generation on what they believe and how that should impact their behaviour. But when we represent our faith in the public domain, we should take into account the audience and how our message would affect their understanding of our faith. Being a Christian in the public square is more than our position on abortion or homosexuality. It is about justice, protecting the weak and the vulnerable, fighting poverty, creation care, international relations, fair trade, refugee and migrant issues, and much more. And all our public engagement should be concerned with opening hearts to our spiritual message.

The case against Räsänen and Pohjola once again illustrated the gap between biblical teaching on sexuality and marriage and the spirit of our times. That calls for a prudent use of Scripture in our communication with the wider society.

When speaking publicly about sexuality and marriage, we need wisdom to apply unchanging biblical truth to our contemporary situation. When we listen to the testimonies of some homosexuals, both those still in the church and those no longer in

the church, we cannot help but conclude that as Christians, we haven't always been successful in sharing God's truth in love with those in need. In fact, sadly enough, at least some of the allergic responses to our public messages on sexuality and marriage are of our own making. This problem goes back decades. Perhaps the offender wasn't you or me, and maybe it was not our church either. But to those who have been hurt and left in the cold, that does not really matter. For many of them, the people inflicting pain on them were Christians, brothers and sisters, people who are called to live by high standards. That's the context that influences how people receive our biblical message.

Communicating the gospel in a culture that is increasingly foreign to it is not an easy task. It requires great wisdom. We can thank God that doing so is still permissible since, thus far, the fundamental right to freedom of expression is on our side. Let's use it prudently to advance the kingdom of God, so that many may be saved.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 14–29

Orthodox and Evangelical Missional Interaction: Insights from the *International Review of Mission*

Ian Randall

Orthodox and evangelical Christians have frequently had a shared interest in encouraging traditional views of the gospel and mission within the modern ecumenical movement. In this article, one of Europe's most respected historians of evangelical life traces Orthodox and evangelical engagement with mainline Protestants through articles in the ecumenical movement's leading mission journal.

The *International Review of Mission* (*IRM*, originally *Missions*) arose from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and is sometimes referred to as a daughter of Edinburgh. It soon became very significant as a quarterly journal on missionary theology and practice. J. H. Oldham, organizing secretary for Edinburgh, was the first *IRM* editor, from 1912 to 1927, with Georgina A. Gollock as assistant and later as co-editor. Evangelical experiences were important in the shaping of both Oldham and Gollock.[1]

Those who wrote about the Edinburgh conference saw it as emerging from Protestant revival movements and as 'the birth place of the modern ecumenical movement'.[2] Edinburgh was chaired by John Mott, General Secretary of the World's Student Christian Federation, and Mott also chaired the subsequent International Missionary Council (IMC), formed in 1921. *IRM* represented thinking within the IMC, and from 1948, with the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the *Review* became an official WCC organ.

This article reveals, mainly through articles and book reviews in *IRM* over the course of a century, how mission-related interaction between Orthodox churches and evangelicals took place in the context of ecumenism.[3] It examines the process by

Ian Randall (PhD, University of Wales) is a senior research associate at the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide (UK), a senior research fellow of the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology in Cambridge, and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He is the author of more than a dozen works on European evangelicals, communities, and spiritual renewal.

1 On Oldham, see Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J. H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999). On Gollock, see Ian Randall, *Georgina Gollock (1861–1940): Pioneering Female Missiologist* (Cambridge: CCCW, 2023).

2 K. S. Latourette, 'Ecumenical Bearings', in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 355–56, 362.

3 For a survey of Orthodox engagement by a leading Orthodox missiologist, see Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, 'Tradition as Impulse for Renewal and Witness: Introducing Orthodox Missiology in the *IRM*', *International Review of Mission* [hereafter *IRM*] 100 (November 2011): 203–15.

which those at the forefront of Orthodox missionary thinking and representatives of the global evangelical movement became more aware of each other.[4] At first, this was awareness from a distance, but gradually, increased interaction occurred, partly due to shared Orthodox and evangelical concerns that the WCC was in danger of losing sight of the divine calling to proclaim the gospel. More positively, the interaction also saw Orthodox and evangelicals come together in affirming, on the basis of Scripture, the message of Jesus Christ as the one who brings salvation to the world. They contended that mission should be at the centre of the ecumenical movement. Their common commitment was forged in unexpected ways within an ecumenical framework.

A missionary vocation (1912–1948)

Two months before Edinburgh, at a meeting of the British Evangelical Alliance, J. Campbell Gibson, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England, referred to moves towards church unity in China and urged the Alliance to bring Christian union 'into some concrete form'.[5] The Alliance, formed in 1846, brought together individuals but not denominations. Gibson was seeking something more. The 1911 'Annual Report' of the Alliance, although not uncritical of the way in which Edinburgh accommodated some Anglo-Catholic perspectives, considered the Conference an 'evident outcome of the early and later labours of the Alliance in the promotion of Christian Union and co-operation'.[6] Henry Van Dusen, in his *World Christianity* (1948), described the Evangelical Alliance as 'the principal seed plot of the nascent impulse toward Christian unity'.[7] Ruth Rouse, a significant ecumenical participant and historian who had been mentored by Georgina Gollock, referred to thorough surveys of missionary news in the Alliance's monthly, *Evangelical Christendom*. She saw the coverage as often advocating 'advanced and forward-looking policy' and as anticipating *IRM*'s surveys.[8] When evangelicals later became critical of the ecumenical movement, that represented a major contrast with this early period.

Neither the Roman Catholic nor the Orthodox Churches were invited to Edinburgh, and it was described as an assembly of 'evangelical Christendom', not an ecumenical council.[9] However, the World's Student Christian Federation, at its conference in Constantinople in 1911, welcomed members of Orthodox churches for the first time. K. C. Chacko, of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India, became a

4 In thinking about varied Orthodox Churches, reference is sometimes made to Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox.

5 J. Campbell Gibson, 'China and the Promotion of Unity', *Evangelical Christendom*, May–June 1910, 62; cf. Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 152.

6 'Annual Report of the Evangelical Alliance, 1911', 9; cf. Harold H. Rowdon, 'Edinburgh 1910, Evangelicals and the Ecumenical Movement', *Vox Evangelica* 5 (1967): 49–71.

7 Henry P. Van Dusen, *World Christianity: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (London: SCM, 1948), 86. Van Dusen was president of Union Theological Seminary, New York.

8 Ruth Rouse, 'Voluntary Movements', in Rouse and Neill, eds., *Ecumenical Movement*, 322.

9 C. E. Wilson, *The Baptist Times and Freeman*, 3 June 1910, 362. Wilson was foreign secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society. For the wider context, see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 1–17.

committee member.[10] Two years later, *IRM* published an article by Charles Sweet, an American Anglican missionary in Japan, on 'Archbishop Nikolai and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to Japan'.[11] Sweet, the secretary of the Anglican and Eastern-Orthodox Churches Union in Japan, had written *An Attempt at Unity in Japan*.[12] He knew Nicolai Kasatkin, a missionary who became the Orthodox Archbishop of Japan in 1906 and who sent a cordial greeting to the Edinburgh Conference in 1910. In his *IRM* article, Sweet drew out similarities between Orthodox mission in Japan and the beginnings of the church in the book of Acts. He noted that Kasatkin saw local evangelists emerging from among those who came to faith and wanted them to 'teach the Christian truth to each other while they continue to study it for themselves'. While concentrating on the Orthodox story, Sweet also wrote about Japanese Protestantism, with its 'active, untiring, intensively living energy'.[13]

Despite this *IRM* article, Oldham and Gollock did not explore wider commitment to mission within Orthodoxy.[14] Petros Vassiliadis, a professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, writing in *IRM* in 2013 about ecumenical mission, commented that Orthodoxy was 'completely marginal' in the period when the early Edinburgh vision for worldwide missionary endeavour was constructed.[15] Even the famous 'Orthodox Encyclical' in 1920 from the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras, calling for a League of Churches, was not covered in *IRM*, although that call subsequently contributed to the process that led to the formation of the WCC.[16]

By contrast with Orthodoxy's marginality, evangelicals were seen as major promoters of mission. In 1913, the trustees of the annual Keswick Convention, which attracted thousands of evangelicals each year to its Lake District setting, and with which Oldham and Gollock were associated, arranged for Oldham to give a lengthy review, at the Convention's missionary meeting, of the global missionary situation. A vision of advance for the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) was part of the presentation.[17] When the International Missionary Council (IMC) was formed in 1921, Oldham and Gollock were core members. The secretary of the Evangelical Alliance in Britain, Henry Martyn Gooch (whose first names showed his family's interest in the evangelical missionary hero Henry Martyn), was in touch with John Mott to prepare material for prayer for the IMC; and following the third IMC Conference, in 1938 in Tambaram, India, Mott wrote to Gooch with appreciation for the 'vital part' played by the prayers of Evangelical Alliance members.[18]

10 Ruth Rouse, *The World's Student Christian Federation* (London: SCM, 1948), 155–64.

11 Charles Sweet, 'Archbishop Nikolai and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to Japan', *IRM* 2 (1913): 126–47.

12 Charles F. Sweet, *An Attempt at Unity in Japan* (Tokyo: n.p., 1912).

13 Sweet, 'Archbishop Nikolai', 144.

14 One historical article did appear: Charles H. Robinson, 'The Conversion of Russia', *IRM* 5 (July 1916): 398–422. Robinson was Anglican Dean of Westminster.

15 Petros Vassilidias, 'An Orthodox Assessment of the New Mission Statement', *IRM* 102 (November 2013): 174.

16 Papathanasiou, 'Tradition as Impulse for Renewal and Witness', 204; cf. W.A. Visser't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), 1–8.

17 J. C. Pollock with Ian Randall, *The Keswick Story* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2006), 176.

18 Randall and Hilborn, *One Body in Christ*, 157.

The common image of Orthodox missionary inertia began to change in the 1930s. After the Bolshevik Revolution, many Russian intellectuals and theologians began emigrating to Western Europe. This led to the formation of the Anglican-Orthodox Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius.[19] In 1934, *IRM* published 'The Christian Church of the East', by the Russian lay theologian Nicolas Zernov, who had a University of Oxford DPhil. Zernov argued that because 'in the East as in the West, communism and secularism, fascism and totalitarianism are spreading', a new Christian spirit was emerging: 'The eastern and western Churches begin to feel that they need each other's help.' Zernov saw 'reunion' and 'missionary activity' as 'strongly interwoven'. His concrete proposal was 'interchange' of Church leaders.[20]

Perhaps partly as a response, in 1935, a review appeared in *IRM* of a substantial book on mission (published five years previously) by Vasile Ispir, professor of missions at the Theological Faculty in Bucharest, Romania, who had also studied in Oxford. The reviewer, C. T. Harley Walker, a contributor to the evangelical Anglican quarterly *The Churchman*, stated that no one reading Ispir 'could continue for a moment to entertain the idea too prevalent in the West, that Eastern Christianity is petrified or somnolent'. Ispir highlighted Orthodox distinctives, such as 'the redemption and sanctification of mankind' understood as 'organic and comprehensive'. Walker emphasized that Ispir's work was marked by 'generous recognition' of missionary work undertaken by different denominations.[21]

In the 1940s, two articles appeared in *IRM* by authors who were aware of Orthodox and evangelical perspectives on mission. One was written by Nadejda Gorodetzky, originally from Moscow, who had left Russia following the Revolution. In the 1930s, after studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, she was involved in the inter-denominational group of Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham. By the early 1940s, she was at Oxford, lecturing on Russian religious thought. Her DPhil was on St. Tikhon of Voronezh. In her *IRM* article, Gorodetzky addressed the common description of Orthodoxy as 'without mission'. While accepting that Orthodox missionary work was on a smaller scale than Roman Catholic, Anglican or Protestant endeavours, she presented evidence that the Orthodox Church 'never forgot her missionary vocation'.[22]

The other article was by C. E. Abraham of the Mar Thoma Church of Travancore, India, who in 1949 became the first Indian principal of the Baptist-founded Serampore College. Abraham featured three recent leaders of the Syrian Orthodox

19 A. G. Bowden-Smith wrote about the encouraging way in which Russian Orthodox and Anglicans were meeting in this fellowship, in 'The Problem of the Russian Emigrés', *IRM* 27 (April 1938): 183–94. He added that Orthodox–Roman Catholic relationships were not at this cordial level.

20 N. Zernov, 'The Christian Church of the East', *IRM* 23 (October 1934): 539–46. Zernov was a founder of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius.

21 C. T. Harley Walker, review of Vasile Ispir, *Curs de Indrumari Misionare* (Bucharest: Doicescu, 1930), in *IRM* 24 (October 1935): 553–54; C. T. Harley Walker, 'Pope Pius IX and the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs', *The Churchman* 52 (1938): 19–25.

22 Nadejda Gorodetzky, 'The Missionary Expansion of the Russian Orthodox Church', *IRM* 31 (October 1942): 400–411. In the same year, Lev Gillet, a French convert to Orthodoxy who was active in the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, proposed an understanding of mission as dialogue, as expressed in the second-century work of Justin Martyr: Gillet, 'Dialogue with Trypho', *IRM* 31 (April 1942): 172–79.

Church of South India, including K. C. Chacko, who taught at the United Theological College in Bangalore before founding Union Christian College. Wanting Orthodox Christians to appreciate evangelical mission, Abraham drew a parallel between Chacko's influence on students and that exercised—for example, on Henry Martyn—by Charles Simeon, the 19th-century evangelical leader in Cambridge.[23] Common features in the Orthodox and evangelical missionary stories were being highlighted.

The WCC and world mission (1948–1963)

The formation of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948 signalled a new era in the relationship between evangelicals, Orthodoxy and the ecumenical movement. Few Orthodox Churches joined the WCC at first; only the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Church of Greece sent delegations to Amsterdam.[24] Although it is now commonly assumed that evangelicals opposed the WCC from its inception, that is not the case. In 1946, as steps were being taken to form the WCC, the Evangelical Alliance in Britain spoke of the British Council of Churches and the WCC as 'great and representative bodies'.[25] A leading Alliance figure, Hugh Gough, who became Bishop of Barking in 1948 and later Archbishop of Sydney, hoped that the Alliance could provide spiritual inspiration for the WCC's global work.[26] The *IRM* editorial in January 1957 noted encouraging signs: with support from the WCC, there was 'a new understanding between Evangelical and Orthodox' in the Middle East.[27] However, by the 1950s North America was at the forefront of global evangelical missionary activity, and Harold Lindsell, writing in *IRM* in 1958, described major bodies such as the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association as either completely unconnected with or opposed to the WCC. Those linked with these groups constituted 50 percent of North American missionaries.[28]

In a companion article in *IRM* in 1958, '"Evangelicals" and WCC-IMC', Norman Goodall, a British Congregational minister who served the ecumenical movement in various capacities, including as *IRM* editor, wrote about the implications of shifting missionary patterns. With regard to missionaries from North America whose agencies were not co-operating with either the IMC or the WCC, Goodall wondered if the WCC could do more to secure their participation.[29] It was not that the missionary

23 C. E. Abraham, 'Three Leaders of the Syrian Church of South India', *IRM* 37 (July 1948): 285–91. See Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 294.

24 W. A. Visser 't Hooft, 'The General Ecumenical Development since 1948', in Harold C. Fey, ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 2: *1948–1968* (Geneva: WCC, 1970), 14. For a wider discussion of Orthodoxy and ecumenism, see Razvan Porumb, *Orthodoxy and Ecumenism: Towards an Active Metanoia* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2019).

25 *Evangelical Christendom*, April–June 1946, 50.

26 Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Evangelical Alliance, 17 November 1948; cf. Randall and Hilborn, *One Body in Christ*, 235. Gough would become Archbishop of Sydney.

27 Norman Goodall, 'Editorial', *IRM* 46 (January 1957): 8.

28 Harold Lindsell, 'An Appraisal of Agencies Not Co-operating with the International Missionary Council Grouping', *IRM* 47 (April 1958): 202–9.

29 Norman Goodall, '"Evangelicals" and WCC-IMC', *IRM* 47 (April 1958): 210–15.

impetus from outside North America was being eclipsed. For instance, Nicolas Zernov wrote in *IRM* in 1954 about Orthodox missionary prospects in India. Drawing from his teaching experiences at the Orthodox Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India (a college established in 1952 under the auspices of the Malankara Orthodox Church), he expressed encouragement about the number of students wanting to be missionaries. Nevertheless, he was not complacent about the general state of Orthodoxy. He also indicated concern about the attitudes of 'extreme Protestant sects, most of them of American inspiration' promoting their agenda in India.[30] As early as 1938, Donald McGavran, an American missionary serving in India who would become a prominent evangelical missiologist, had argued forcefully in *IRM* for an agenda which concentrated only on evangelism that produced church growth.[31]

The integration of the IMC with the WCC was discussed at the IMC Assembly in Achimota, Ghana, in 1958, with 200 people attending.[32] In anticipation of the event, the widely read evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* wrote that most ecumenical leaders viewed integration as 'a logical move in shaping a master framework of organizational unity for Protestant witness', whereas many evangelical leaders regarded the drive for merger 'as tending to disrupt the harmony of missionary effort in many parts of the world'.[33] Under the leadership of Lesslie Newbigin, a Presbyterian missionary who had studied at Westminster College, Cambridge, and who became a bishop of the Church of South India and then IMC general secretary in 1959, integration was affirmed at the Ghana Assembly. Writing about this event in 1978, Ralph Winter of the US Center for World Mission saw it as a turning point and a bifurcation, as evangelical groups in America turned to their own patterns of cooperation in world mission.[34] At the New Delhi WCC Assembly in 1961, integration duly took place and Newbigin became WCC Associate Secretary and its first Director of World Mission and Evangelism. In a forthright *IRM* article looking back on this process 50 years later, Mark Laing argued that the 'loose, broad-based association the IMC had maintained', incorporating evangelicals and 'ecumenicals', was fractured, and that the relationship between these groups 'became increasingly polarised and antagonistic'.[35]

However, New Delhi did see several Orthodox churches come into full membership of the WCC. Another important Orthodox development in 1961 was the estab-

30 Nicolas Zernov, 'Christianity in India and the Eastern Orthodox Church', *IRM* 43 (October 1954): 390–96.

31 D. A. McGavran, 'The Rural Church in India', reviewing J. W Pickett, *Christ's Way to India's Heart* (1938), *IRM* 27 (October 1938): 667–68.

32 'The Christian Mission at This Hour: The Ghana Assembly of the I.M.C.', *IRM* 47 (April 1958): 137–42.

33 Editorial comment, 'The Drive for IMC-WCC Merger', *Christianity Today*, 30 September 1957, 9.

34 Ralph D. Winter, 'Ghana: Preparation for Marriage', *IRM* 67 (July 1978): 338–53. Winter was founder and director of the centre. John Meyendorff of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, New York, in a further reflection in 1981, regretted that the Orthodox had not thought more critically about integration. Meyendorff, 'An Orthodox View on Mission and Integration', *IRM* 70 (October 1981): 256–58. Meyendorff was a member of the Central Committee of the WCC.

35 Mark Laing, 'The Church Is the Mission: Integrating the IMC with the WCC', *IRM* 100 (November 2011): 218.

lishment in Athens by 'Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth' of a pan-Orthodox centre. It was called Porefthendes, or 'Go Ye' (i.e. into all the world), and it was directed by Anastasios Yannoulatos, who had undertaken post-graduate studies in German universities. This centre, with an associated journal, was a catalyst for a new impetus in Orthodox missionary consciousness. Porefthendes was noted in *IRM*, with Carnegie Samuel Calian, an American Presbyterian pastor and academic whose writings included a study of eschatology in the thought of the Russian philosopher Nicolai Berdyaev, commenting in 1963 that Orthodoxy was 'once again asserting its former interest in missionary activity', which, he said, would 'come as a surprise to the majority of Protestants and Roman Catholics'.[36] In another *IRM* article in 1963, Yannoulatos wrote on 'Orthodox Spirituality and External Mission'. He expressed the view that any Orthodox spirituality 'devoid of the element of universality' and not involved in seeking the salvation of 'all the world' was a 'crippled spirituality'.[37] Yannoulatos would become a shaping figure in Orthodox mission thinking and practice, described as a 'Modern-Day Apostle'.[38]

The first meeting of the WCC's Division for (later Commission on) World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), which succeeded the IMC, took place in 1963 in Mexico City. The conference, 'Witness in Six Continents', agreed that the time had passed in which mission could be divided into the 'home base' and the 'mission field', and there was recognition of the extent to which the West had become a mission field.[39] Yannoulatos, then in his early thirties, was the youngest member present.[40] Only three Orthodox were delegates, but for Petros Vassiliadis, a theologian of the Greek Orthodox Church who would be CWME's Orthodox Commissioner from 1998 to 2006 and who became particularly involved in dialogue with Pentecostals, Mexico City represented a welcome beginning of a deeper understanding of the place of witness (*martyria*), dialogue and liberation in mission.[41] For some Orthodox, therefore, the developments there were positive. For some evangelicals, however, 'dialogue' and 'liberation' represented diversions from evangelism. Alan Bailyes, moderator of the Church Relations Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, traced a strong anti-ecumenical stance that had gained ground in evangelicalism, especially in North America, by the 1960s. Some statements at evangelical mission conferences, Bailyes said, exhibited 'a crusading spirit with the WCC family in its sights'.[42]

---

36 C. Samuel Calian, 'Eastern Orthodoxy's Renewed Concern for Mission', *IRM* 52 (January 1963): 33–37.

37 Anastasios Yannoulatos, 'Orthodox Spirituality and External Mission', *IRM* 52 (July 1963): 300–302.

38 Luke A. Veronis, 'Anastasios Yannoulatos: Modern-Day Apostle', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 19, no. 3 (1995): 122–28.

39 Ronald K. Orchard, ed,, *Witness in Six Continents* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1964).

40 Anastasios Yannoulatos, 'Mexico City 1963: Old Wine into Fresh Wineskins', *IRM* 67 (July 1978): 354–64.

41 Petros Vassiliadis, 'Reconciliation as a Pneumatological Mission Paradigm: Some Preliminary Reflections by an Orthodox', *IRM* 94 (January 2005): 30–42.

42 Alan J. Bailyes, 'Evangelical and Ecumenical Understandings of Mission', *IRM* 85 (October 1996): 485–504.

Shared evangelical and Orthodox concerns (1964–1979)

Orthodoxy's contribution to world mission was affirmed in 1965 by Lesslie Newbigin, then *IRM* editor. He noted that the question 'Can the Orthodox churches really be part of a missionary council?' had been debated ecumenically. He believed the strength of the whole church was needed 'to finish the unfinished task' of bringing the gospel to all, and that 'Christian world mission without the witness of the Orthodox churches is a maimed and lop-sided thing, deprived of some of the riches of the Gospel.'[43] The editorial was followed by three articles on Orthodoxy and mission. Yannoulatos, writing on 'The Purpose and Motive of Mission', drew extensively from Scripture and proposed that the dominant theological emphasis in Orthodox theology was the love of the trinitarian God; that the goal of mission was ultimately the glory of God; that the divine calling was to be involved in 'the preaching of the Gospel' and its incarnation in every culture; and that salvation had a cosmic dimension.[44] Elias Voulgarakis, later professor of missiology at the University of Athens, exploring biblical and theological themes, argued that mission and unity were in 'essential relationship, which is confirmed by the very nature of the Church, the institution of love'.[45] In the third article, Nikita Struve studied the work of the 19th-century Siberian missionary Macaire Glukharev, whom Struve considered 'a prophet'.[46]

At a time when many evangelicals were convinced that liberal theological tendencies dominated within ecumenism, the fact that *IRM* carried articles by Orthodox theologians who were so deeply engaged with Scripture in relation to mission might have been expected to attract evangelical attention. However, this does not seem to have been the case. At a major Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission, held at Wheaton College, Illinois, in April 1966, Eugene Smith, executive secretary of the WCC office in New York, was an observer. He applauded the Congress's concern for world mission but continued, 'The distrust of the ecumenical movement within the group has to be experienced to be believed. Fifteen major papers were presented. … Nine of the fifteen carried attacks on the ecumenical movement, and at times, the World Council of Churches by name.' Some statements, he declared, were 'sadly irresponsible'. Smith noted frequent comparisons by speakers of the best in evangelicalism with what seemed to them the worst in ecumenism. Typical charges made against the WCC included 'theological liberalism, loss of evangelical conviction, universalism in theology, substitution of social action for evangelism, and the search for unity at the expense of biblical truth'.[47]

Later in 1966, a World Congress on Evangelism was held in Berlin, jointly organized by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and *Christianity Today*. Of the

43 Lesslie Newbigin, 'From the Editor', *IRM* 54 (July 1965): 272–78.

44 Anastasios Yannoulatos, 'The Purpose and Motive of Mission', *IRM* 54 (July 1965): 281–97.

45 Elias Voulgarakis, 'Mission and Unity from the Theological Point of View', *IRM* 54 (July 1965): 298–307.

46 Nikita Struve, 'Macaire Gloukharev: A Prophet of Orthodox Mission', *IRM* 54 (July 1965): 308–14.

47 Eugene L. Smith, 'The Wheaton Congress in the Eyes of an Ecumenical Observer', *IRM* 55 (October 1966): 480–82.

200 speakers, 57 came from the non-Western or Majority World.[48] John Stott, rector of All Souls Church, Langham Place, London, made a profound impression. He argued that 'the primary task of the members of Christ's Church is to be Gospel heralds, not social reformers'.[49] He would later modify this position. In 1968, Stott, increasingly recognized as the key thinker in the global evangelical movement, attended the WCC's Uppsala Assembly. Backed by Buna Kibongi of the Evangelical Church of the Congo, he stated that while Uppsala spoke about physical hunger and poverty, it expressed no equivalent concern for spiritual hunger.[50] An opportunity for evangelicals and the Orthodox to voice similar criticisms was afforded at the 1973 CWME meeting in Bangkok, on the theme 'Salvation Today'. The outspoken Patriarch Pimen of Moscow voiced the misgivings of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the discussions at Bangkok. While affirming struggles for social justice, he was disturbed that nothing was said about 'the ultimate goal of salvation', namely, 'eternal life in God'. Some statements made had, in his view, 'no clear and direct confirmation by the Scriptures'. He commended the words of St. Paul, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel', and said he did not see that sentiment reflected in the Bangkok documents.[51]

Meanwhile, plans were advancing for an International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. Much of the financing came from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, but it was far from a Western event. Of the approximately 2,500 participants from 150 countries, over 1,000 were from the non-Western world. Three Latin American speakers, René Padilla, Samuel Escobar and Orlando Costas, made a powerful impact with their challenge to Western thinking. In *IRM*, Stott acknowledged that Padilla's trenchant criticism of equating Christianity with the American way of life caused offence. Stott countered that, in contrast with the previous year's CWME event in Bangkok, Lausanne approached the issue 'in biblical terms' and recognized that socio-political-economic liberation was not 'salvation'; rather, liberation and salvation were distinct works of God.[52] A book Stott prepared for Lausanne, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, was reviewed in *IRM* by the Orthodox Metropolitan Mar Osthathios from India, who saw the text as 'a laudable attempt' by 'one of the liberal spokesmen for the evangelicals' to solve evangelical-ecumenical tensions. Although he felt that Stott did not take proper account of societal situations in interpreting the Bible and criticized the selective use of Scripture (noting, for example, that Stott never cited the book of James), he recommended Stott's work 'to all those who have a deep desire to communicate the

48 Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013), 69–70.

49 John Stott, 'The Great Commissions', in Carl Henry and Stanley Mooneyham, eds., *One Race, One Gospel, One Task: World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin, 1966* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1967), 1:50–51.

50 *The Uppsala Report 1968* (Geneva: WCC, 1968), 26.

51 'Message of Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Central Committee of the WCC', *IRM* 63 (January 1974): 125–29.

52 John Stott, 'The Significance of Lausanne', *IRM* 64 (July 1975): 288–94.

redeeming Gospel of Christ to the whole world'.[53] Evangelical-Orthodox engagement was showing significant promise.

Lausanne was followed in 1975 by the WCC's Assembly in Nairobi, an event of similar size. The theme of Nairobi was 'Jesus Christ Frees and Unites'. Mortimer Arias, bishop of the Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia, delivered a keynote address on 'That the World May Believe'. Stott, as an official respondent, affirmed much that Arias had said while pointing out what he believed the WCC should recover: (1) a recognition of the lostness of humanity; (2) confidence in the truth, relevance and power of the gospel; (3) conviction about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ; (4) a sense of urgency about evangelism; and (5) a personal experience of Jesus Christ. Stott ended by asking what could be done about 'the wide gap of confidence and credibility which exists today between ecumenical leaders and evangelicals'. He suggested that evangelicals should offer more evidence of their commitment to social action and that the WCC needed to show its commitment to worldwide evangelism.[54] In a substantial written response, Metropolitan Mar Osthathios congratulated Bishop Arias on 'highlighting the evangelical priority of the evangelism of this world'. He agreed with Arias that 'this world needs Jesus Christ more than anything else'. He voiced reservations, however, about 'evangelistic brothers' who estimated the number of 'the lost'; he argued that biblically 'we are not permitted to judge before the time', and that doing so created 'a superiority complex' in the minds of 'the saved'. Metropolitan Osthathios called for mission performed as 'the spontaneous expression of the joy of Christian discipleship' and for evangelism that shared 'a joy which is freely given to us by Christ'.[55] This was a call that evangelicals could affirm.[56]

Mission together 'in Christ's Way' (1980–1998)

In 1980, a CWME conference was held in Melbourne, Australia, with the theme 'Your Kingdom Come'. *IRM* carried various reflections on the meetings. Among the Orthodox responses, Metropolitan Anthony of Leningrad and Novgorod was appreciative of the event but noted that in the material for the conference, many political, economic and social issues relating to the theme were addressed, whereas 'the Gospel concept of the Kingdom of God was considered least of all'. He saw a danger of replacing 'the teaching of Christ and the Apostles' with 'earthly and human teaching'.[57] Another response came from the Romanian Ion Bria, who had become Secretary for Research and Relations with the Orthodox churches in the CWME and had been deeply involved in bringing Orthodox theologians and leaders together to

53 Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, review of *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, *IRM* 66 (January 1977): 81–82.

54 John Stott, 'Response to Bishop Mortimer Arias', *IRM* 65 (January 1976): 30–34.

55 Metropolitan Mar Osthathios, 'Worship, Mission, Unity—These Three', *IRM* 65 (January 1976): 39–43.

56 Bruce Nicholls, 'Nairobi 1975: A Crisis of Faith for the WCC', *Themelios* 1, no. 3 (Summer 1976): 66–75, saw a place for evangelicals to stand with some Roman Catholics and Orthodox in defence of biblical faith. Nicholls was director of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

57 Metropolitan Anthony, 'On Mission and Evangelism', *IRM* 69 (October 1980): 479.

discuss mission.[58] Bria believed the most important outcome of Melbourne was that 'the Orthodox became part of the universal missionary movement.' Among his suggestions for renewing Orthodox witness were that Orthodoxy needs 'to refer to, and to be rooted in, the Bible' and 'rediscover its own missionary past'.[59]

One of the evangelicals who wrote 'Impressions of Melbourne' in *IRM* was Orlando Costas, a lecturer at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA. Costas, himself a Latin American, was struck by the number of Latin Americans at Melbourne, by contrast with Bangkok. Indeed, one German Lutheran commented that Melbourne had been dominated by evangelicals and Latin Americans. At the same time, said Costas, there was a 'strong delegation' from various Orthodox churches that 'insisted on the importance of liturgy and contemplation in mission and evangelism'. It was significant for Costas that North Americans and Western Europeans criticized the 'forcefulness of the Latin American presence'. Although Costas did not draw a parallel, at Lausanne radical evangelicals from Latin America had made a similar impact. For Costas, Western criticisms might well be traced to the West's 'deep nostalgia' for the days when it set the agenda. As an evangelical, Costas was glad—and here he was more affirming than Metropolitan Anthony—to have found at Melbourne a 'strong word on the proclamation of the gospel'. At the same time, he was disappointed that little had been said to encourage the 'emerging Third World missionary movement' and that the conference showed 'liturgical insensitivity toward those of us who come out of a free church, Pentecostal and/or charismatic tradition'.[60]

In the same year as the Melbourne Conference, a CWME publication, *The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, was produced, edited by Ion Bria. It was reviewed by Waldron Scott of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Bria observed that Catholic or Protestant mission in an Orthodox area (or canonical territory) was considered 'an ecclesiastical contradiction'; in response, Scott, who had been a missionary in Cyprus, shared his vivid memory' of the 'hostile reception' he had received from Orthodox clergy. Scott highlighted the contribution of Anastasios Yannoulatos to the book. Yannoulatos, now a bishop and professor of religions at the University of Athens, stated that the preaching of the gospel was 'not a mere announcement of ideas', but—and here he echoed Bria's 'liturgy after the liturgy'—a 'doxological movement'. For Scott, this important dimension, although it surfaced at Melbourne, was 'almost totally lacking from both ecumenical and conservative evangelical missiology'.[61]

The 1983 WCC Assembly in Vancouver affirmed the text *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, and it also proposed ongoing examination of 'Gospel and Culture'. Yannoulatos was one who took up the challenge. He warned against identifying the gospel with 'Christendom', a warning with obvious relevance

58 For example, see Ion Bria et al., 'Confessing Christ Today', *IRM* 64 (January 1975): 67–94. This is a report from an Orthodox conference.

59 Ion Bria, 'On Orthodox Witness', *IRM* 69 (October 1980): 527–28.

60 Orlando Costas, 'Impressions of Melbourne', *IRM* 69 (October 1980–January 1981): 529–31.

61 Review of Ion Bria, ed., *Martyria/Mission: The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today* (Geneva: WCC, 1980). *IRM* 70 (April 1981): 75–76. See also Ion Bria, 'The Liturgy after the Liturgy', *IRM* 67 (January 1978): 86–90.

in Orthodox 'canonical territories', and envisioned the gospel as receiving from and transforming cultures (sometimes termed interculturation), a process in which the gospel was 'incarnated in new conditions and renews everything by the Holy Spirit'.[62]

An indicator of the emerging Orthodox leadership was that at the CWME conference of 1989, 'Mission in Christ's Way', held in San Antonio, Texas, with 700 present (including 80 Orthodox), Bishop Anastasios (later Orthodox Archbishop of Albania) was conference moderator.[63] In his address, he spoke of experience of the Holy Spirit, which had been 'of late much sought after in the west' (a reference to the charismatic movement), as an emphasis that had 'always been strong in the east; but in a sober Christological context and in a Trinitarian perspective'.[64] A further significant aspect at San Antonio was that 160 evangelicals present wrote a letter to Lausanne II, meeting at the same time in Manila, reporting that they were encouraged by those from many traditions who joined 'in affirming that they cannot point to any other way of salvation but Jesus Christ'. They also pointed out that 70 percent of the delegates at San Antonio came from the Two-Thirds World and 43 percent were women; they advocated similar proportions in evangelical gatherings.[65]

In 1990, *IRM* carried an article by Susan Perlman, a member of the Lausanne Committee and an official observer at San Antonio. She appreciated the evangelical contributions at San Antonio but stated that Bishop Anastasios especially 'spoke to my heart and lifted me above the conference as he developed the theme of the centrality of the cross'. His words, she said, contained 'gems I shall keep with me always'.[66] Georges Lemopoulos, Secretary for Orthodox Studies and Relations of CWME, followed this up. Crucially, he stated that some at San Antonio and Manila had appealed for Orthodox-evangelical 'collaboration'.[67]

Collaboration proceeded apace after the WCC's Canberra Assembly in 1991. René Padilla noted that CWME had no part in forming this Assembly's programme. Padilla described the reaction of Orthodox delegates to a presentation by Chung Hyang-Kyung from South Korea in which she blended Korean traditional religion with Christianity. Representing the Russian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Kirill lamented 'a tendency towards syncretism with non-Christian religions' in the WCC. Nicolas Lossky, later an editor of the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, asked whether the WCC had abandoned its original aim to bring together churches that confessed Jesus Christ and the Trinity.[68] Jan van Butselaar, General Secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council, in an issue of *IRM* on the 'Evangelical Challenge', wrote that at Canberra the WCC's 'ecumenical agenda' was challenged by a

62 Anastastios Yannoulatos, 'Culture and Gospel', *IRM* 74 (April 1985): 185–98. Half of the articles in this issue of *IRM* were by Orthodox authors.

63 The full report is Frederick Wilson, ed., *The San Antonia Report. Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: WCC, 1990).

64 Anastastios Yannoulatos, 'Address', *IRM* 78 (July/October 1989): 316–28.

65 'Letter from Those with Evangelical Concerns', *IRM* 78 (July/October 1989): 431–35.

66 Susan Perlman, 'An Evangelical Perspective on the San Antonio Conference', *IRM* 79 (January 1990): 6–16.

67 George Lemopoulos, 'Some Orthodox Reflections', *IRM* 79 (January 1990): 17–26.

68 René Padilla, 'The WCC 7th Assembly', *Transformation* 8, no. 4 (October 1991): 1–6. See Nicolas Lossky et al., eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 2002).

'powerful' statement from the Orthodox and also by evangelical critique. The Orthodox lamented 'a growing departure from biblically based Christian understandings' in the WCC, and evangelicals spoke similarly of a 'theological deficit'.[69] Out of these shared concerns came three Orthodox-evangelical consultations, facilitated by the WCC, in Stuttgart, Alexandria and then Hamburg. At the third, in 1998, the theme of the imminent WCC Assembly in Harare, 'Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope', was studied. This consultation also gave attention to issues of mission and unity.[70]

Together Towards Life (1998–2015)

The WCC Assembly in 1998 in Harare was intended to draw missional thinking from the CWME conference in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, two years before.[71] Following Harare, Ioan Sauca wrote an important article in *IRM* on 'Reaffirming Mission at the Centre of the Ecumenical Movement'. Professor Sauca, from Romania, was a member of the faculty of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey and had worked for the WCC in the area of Orthodox relationships in mission. He noted that when he offered seminars at Bossey on the topic of mission, a great majority of the students opted to study the subject. Sauca was pleased that at Harare the Programme Guidelines Committee said clearly, 'Mission should be kept at the centre of the ecumenical movement, and must be held together with the concern for unity.' However, he felt that the debates at Harare showed 'a need for a clear re-articulation of the nature and content of mission and evangelism'. He welcomed the 'strong input and contribution' from evangelicals at Harare and quoted a letter to the WCC from evangelical participants, which stated, 'While the theme, *Turn to God—Rejoice in Hope*, should have led to a strong emphasis on mission, evangelism and the church, this was largely missing.' Like Sauca, evangelicals were disappointed that Harare had not utilised work done at Salvador.[72]

Despite disappointments at Harare, determined work by CWME continued. This issued in a conference in Athens in 2005 with the theme 'Come Holy Spirit—Heal and Reconcile'. A number of reports were featured in *IRM* following Athens. Vasile Mihoc, an Orthodox priest and professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Sibiu, Romania, and Anastasia Vassiliadou, who had engaged in ecumenical discussions as an Orthodox member of consultations of young missiolo-

69 Jan van Butselaar, 'Thinking Locally, Acting Globally', *IRM* 81 (July 1992): 363–73. For the Orthodox and evangelical statements, see Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit* (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 279–86.

70 Publications followed: Huibert van Beek and Georges Lemopoulos, eds., *Proclaiming Christ Today: Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation Alexandria, 10–15 July 1995* (Geneva: WCC, 1995); Huibert van Beek and Georges Lemopoulos, eds., *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope* (Geneva: WCC, 1998). See Tim Grass, 'Dialogue between Evangelicals and Orthodox: Past, Present and Future', *Transformation* 27, no. 3 (2010): 186–98; Tim Grass, Jenny Rolph, Paul Rolph and Ioan Sauca, eds., *Building Bridges: Between the Orthodox and Evangelical Traditions* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012).

71 T. V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999).

72 Ioan Sauca, 'Reaffirming Mission at the Centre of the Ecumenical Movement', *IRM* 88 (January/April 1999): 51–55. Sauca quoted from 'A Jubilee Call: A Letter to the WCC by Evangelical Participants at Harare', 2–3. See Bradley Nassif, 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: The Status of an Emerging Global Dialogue', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 21–55.

gists, reported. They highlighted the significance of the first CWME conference held in a predominantly Orthodox setting and noted that the 600 participants included not only people from WCC member churches but also delegates from the Roman Catholic Church and from Pentecostal and evangelical communities. Mihoc was disappointed that inter-confessional tensions at the grassroots level—which he called 'concrete wounds'—were left largely unaddressed. He asked what kind of ecumenical relationships could be built 'between Orthodox and those Evangelicals who stubbornly teach that there is no salvation in the Orthodox Church, that the Orthodox icons are idols and the priests just performers and teachers of idolatry'.[73] Vassiliadou was much more positive. For her, the opportunity for dialogue between 'distanced traditions' (she mentioned Orthodox and Pentecostals as an example) was very encouraging. She welcomed the stress on pneumatology, against the background of what she called 'the dangerous Christomonistic inclination of the mission movement in the past'.[74]

In the period after Athens, preparations were made for a conference in Edinburgh to celebrate 100 years since Edinburgh 1910. In parallel, the Lausanne Movement arranged a conference in Cape Town, South Africa.[75] In April 2010, CWME moderator Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, who was Metropolitan of the Niranam Diocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church and a former lecturer at the United Theological Seminary, Bangalore, gave an outline of ecumenical missiological developments since 1910. Having described all the IMC/CWME world mission conferences, he concluded that with its range of participants Athens was 'the most representative' held so far.[76] The November 2011 issue of *IRM* celebrated Edinburgh 1910 and the centenary of *IRM* itself.[77] Also. throughout this period, between the WCC Assemblies in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2006), which attracted 4,000 participants, and in Busan, Republic of Korea (2013), a new WCC affirmation on mission and evangelism was developed. This affirmation, under the title *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (*TTL*), was unanimously approved by the WCC central committee in September 2012.[78] The Busan Assembly's acceptance of *TTL* meant that the missional mandate took centre stage.[79]

Petros Vassiliadis, writing about *TTL* in *IRM*, spoke of how the 'missional dimension' of the Orthodox Church had been rediscovered 'just more than a generation ago', thanks in large measure to the influence of Yannoulatos, who had become not only archbishop of the Albanian Orthodox Church but also president of the WCC, and also thanks to the work of Ion Bria. The previous WCC statement on

73 Vasile Mihoc, 'Report on the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens', *IRM* 94 (July 2005): 406–13. For views in this period, see James Stamoolis, ed., *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

74 Anastasia Vassiliadou, 'Discerning the Spirit of Athens', *IRM* 94 (July 2005): 435–39.

75 The Cape Town Commitment of 2010 was considered in some depth, with an editorial and articles, in *IRM* volume 104 (November 2015).

76 Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, 'Towards and Beyond Edinburgh 2010: A Historical Survey of Ecumenical Missiological Developments since 1910', *IRM* 99 (April 2010): 6–38.

77 See Brian Stanley, 'Edinburgh 1910 and the Genesis of the *IRM*', *IRM* 100 (November 2011): 149–59.

78 Editorial, *IRM* 101 (November 2012): 243–46; 'Moderator's Address', 299–308.

79 Editorial (quoting Kenneth Ross), *IMR* 103 (April 2014): 1.

mission of 1982, in Vassiliadis's view, had reflected Protestant understandings, but *TTL* brought in important Orthodox concerns: the role of the Holy Spirit, a call to deeply rooted spirituality, and the need to address 'structural sin, expressed in intertwined contemporary crises, economic and environmental, from the perspectives of the marginalised'. He referred to Lausanne and noted how a socially oriented missionary appeal had caused a dramatic split in the 1970s in the international missionary movement. However, Vassiliadis considered that *TTL*'s 'profound biblical, theological, and spiritual argumentation can hardly provide any reasonable excuse for theological disagreement on the part of the evangelicals or the Pentecostals'. He was pleased to add that the Orthodox were 'engaged in a very constructive theological dialogue' with these movements.[80]

Two months before this November 2013 article, approximately 50 participants attended a consultation held at the monastery of St. Vlash in Albania, with Archbishop Anastasios as host. This significant global initiative, the first consultation convened by the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, was sponsored by senior leaders from Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches and from evangelical churches in the Lausanne Movement. Their goals included building relationships of trust, benefitting from theological work within their varied traditions, fostering understanding and appreciation of spiritual and theological heritages, confronting differences with the desire that Christ's prayer for unity might be fulfilled, and proposing and planning common actions.[81] This meeting led to further gatherings.

In 2015, *IRM* gave extended attention to three documents that represented three major streams of mission: the Cape Town Commitment adopted by the Lausanne Movement in 2010, the WCC CWME's *TTL* of 2013, and the 2013 apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Stephen Bevans, a leading Roman Catholic missiologist, writing in *IRM*, described these three documents, respectively, as highlighting love, life and joy, and he urged organizing conversations.[82] With evangelicals so well recognized in the discussion, and with an Orthodox leader, Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, as CWME moderator, the call by a Roman Catholic for ongoing ecumenical and missiological dialogue was surely one to be heeded.

Conclusion

The *IRM*, over the course of a century of publication, is an invaluable source offering insight on how Orthodox and evangelicals have engaged in mission in the ecumenical context. In the early years of *IRM*, following Edinburgh 1910, evangelicals were fully involved in the global missionary endeavour, but many later became wary of an ecumenical agenda in the WCC that seemed to be losing connection with that early vision. Evangelical conferences on mission emerged as an alternative to ecumenical gatherings. In the meantime, Orthodox representatives were becoming involved in the WCC, but they brought a critical perspective. Increasing Orthodox commitment

80 Petros Vassiliadis, 'An Orthodox Assessment of the New Mission Statement', *IRM* 102 (November 2013): 174–78.

81 On the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, see www.loimission.net. See also Bradley Nassif, 'Orthodox Dialogue with Evangelicals: A Survey', in Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al., eds, *Oxford Handbook on Ecumenism* (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 536–41.

82 Stephen Bevans, 'Life, Joy and Love', *IRM* 104 (November 2015): 193–202.

to mission, led most notably by Anastasios Yannoulatos, caused the Orthodox to find common ground with evangelicals, especially in the CWME. Beginning in the 1980s, shared concerns and beliefs about mission, shaped by Scripture, drew together two Christian communities that had been seen as separate from each other. The process accelerated in the 1990s. Ioan Sauca, in his forthright article in *IRM* on 'Reaffirming Mission at the Centre of the Ecumenical Movement', which critiqued the 1998 Harare Assembly, associated himself unhesitantly with a post-Harare letter to the WCC from evangelicals who wanted 'a call to personal turning to God' to be 'at the heart of the church's mission of social transformation'. Sauca underscored this emphasis, stating his conviction that mission gave the ecumenical movement 'life, substance and meaning'.[83] Orthodox and evangelical missional interaction continued in the 21st century, with the establishment of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative being one of the major developments. One of this initiative's aims is that evangelicals and Orthodox may be 'mutually enriched and strengthened in the work of mission'. This desire took shape over time within the ecumenical environment, and the articles found in the *International Review of Mission* testify to its flourishing.

83 Sauca, 'Reaffirming Mission at the Centre of the Ecumenical Movement', 51–55.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 30–39

Jesus' Mission to the Vulnerable: The Power of Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark

Narry F. Santos

Mark's Gospel is carefully structured to highlight Jesus' example of sacrificial servanthood. This article draws on sociological analysis of the first-century Jewish community to show how Mark illustrated Jesus' mission to the low and powerless. It then pairs Mark's key messages with real-life, parallel examples of servanthood to contemporary refugee communities.

The Gospel of Mark unpacks Jesus' powerful mission to the vulnerable, poor, underprivileged, needy and unimportant outcasts. The group of marginalized people in this Gospel comprises those referred to as 'poor',[1] 'sick',[2] 'leper',[3] 'Gentile',[4] 'widow',[5] 'wife',[6] 'woman'[7] and 'child'.[8] This article has two goals: (1) to place Mark's original audience in its 'social location' (i.e. position in a social system shared by a group of people), including the marginalized segment (composed of the degraded, unclean and expendables), through the use of insights from sociological studies, and (2) to survey how Mark challenged his audience to be on mission in their community, just as Jesus engaged and empowered the vulnerable in the narrative, using the servanthood motif. As a result, understanding who the marginalized people were in Jesus' day and how Jesus met their needs can serve as a relevant biblical model for 21st-century churches and mission agencies in helping to address inequality, marginalization and woundedness in their local contexts.

Narry F. Santos (PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary and University of the Philippines) is Associate Professor of Christian Ministry and Intercultural Leadership at Tyndale University, Toronto, Canada.

1 The word 'poor' (*ptōchos*) occurs five times in the Gospel (Mk 10:21; 12:42, 43; 14:5, 7).
2 The word 'sick', which occurs seven times in the Gospel, is seen in five Greek words: *katakeimai* (1:30), *kakōs* (2:17; 6:55), *arrōstos* (6:5, 13), *astheneō* (6:56) and *nosos* (1:34).
3 The word 'leper' (*lepros*) occurs three times in the Gospel (1:40, 42; 14:3).
4 The word 'Gentile' (*Hellēnis*) occurs once (7:26), and the word 'nation' (*ethnos*) occurs twice (10:33, 42).
5 The word 'widow' (*chēra*) occurs three times (12:40, 42, 43).
6 The word 'wife' (*chaora*) occurs eight times (6:17, 18; 10:11; 12:19 twice, 20, 23 twice).
7 The word 'woman' (*gunē*) occurs seven times (5:25, 33; 7:25, 26; 12:22; 14:3; 15:40).
8 The word 'child', which occurs 20 times, is seen in two Greek words: (1) *paidion* (5:39, 40 twice, 41; 7:28, 30; 9:21, 36, 37; 10:13, 14, 15); and (2) *teknon* (7:27 twice; 10:24, 29, 30; 12:19; 13:12 twice).

The vulnerable and their social location of Mark's audience

Though 'there is no consensus on the setting of Mark, nor is there a method agreed upon for describing the social makeup of a given community on the basis of a text',[9] it is generally believed that the Markan community was composed of predominantly Gentile Roman[10] Christians, who suffered Neronian persecution and betrayal by other Christians, experienced the Roman Empire's political turmoil[11] and were temporally situated just before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.[12] These factors could have contributed towards leaving the disciples highly vulnerable and marginalized.

Aside from this socio-political setting of hatred and betrayal in the community of Christ-followers, some insights from sociological studies[13] can also help us place Mark's original audience in its social location.[14] Using Gerhard Lenski's diagrammatic description of social relationships in the Herodian period[15] (which was typical

9 John R. Donahue, 'The Quest for the Community of Mark's Gospel', in F. van Segbroeck et al. (eds.), *The Four Gospels, 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1992), 2:819–34.

10 Scholars who take the Roman view include Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) and F. F. Bruce, 'The Date and Character of Mark', in E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (eds.), *Jesus and the Politics of his Day* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 69–90.

11 Arguments for this view are as follows: (1) external, historical witnesses related to Mark and/or Peter with Rome; (2) Tacitus's record of Neronian persecution of Roman Christians; (3) Latinisms in the Gospel; (4) the probability that the prediction about the temple's destruction (Mk 13:1–2) had not yet been fulfilled (i.e. in 70 CE) at the time of the Gospel's writing; and (5) a cluster of Markan motifs that may reflect experiences familiar to the narrative's original readers.

12 Proposed dating of Mark's Gospel has ranged from the 50s by J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New* Testament (London, UK: SCM, 1976), 114–15, to about 80 CE by William R. Farmer, *Jesus and the Gospel: Tradition, Scripture and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 4. However, it seems probable that 'Mark's Gospel was written shortly before the destruction of the temple in Rome or in Galilee shortly after the war.' Pieter J. J. Botha, 'The Historical Setting of Mark's Gospel: Problems and Possibilities', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5, no. 1 (1993): 30. For a discussion of reasons for this probable date, see W. R. Telford, *Mark*, New Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 21–23, and John R. Donahue, 'Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995): 1–2.

13 For an overview of social criticism, see D. Rhoads, 'Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries', in Janice C. Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 135–61. For an assessment of the method, see Thomas S. Caulley, 'Sociological Methods in the Study of the New Testament: A Review and Assessment', *Restoration Quarterly* 37 (1995), 36–44.

14 Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location of the Markan Audience', *Interpretation* 74, no. 4 (1993): 394. Cf. Rohrbaugh's sociological studies in relation to the New Testament in *The Social Sciences and the New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996).

15 Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 207–62; cf. Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966). Aside from Rohrbaugh, Anthony J. Saldarini also uses Lenski's sociological framework in *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988).

of advanced agrarian societies[16]), Richard Rohrbaugh listed five social groups and classified all the Markan characters within those five levels of stratification. These groups were the urban elite; retainers; urban non-elite; the group of degraded, unclean and expendables; and the rural peasants (along with other villagers).

Urban elite

The urban elite group, which included an estimated 2 percent of the population, was composed of powerful, wealthy and highly literate people. In the Markan narrative, the characters in this category were Pilate (15:2), Herod (6:14), Herodias (6:17), Herodias's daughter (6:22), Philip (6:17), the high priest (14:53), the chief priests (14:1), the scribes (2:6), a rich man (10:22), the Sadducees (12:18), Jairus (5:22) and Joseph of Arimathea (15:43).

Retainers

The 'retainers' group, which represented 5 percent of the population, was made up of lower-level military officers, officials and bureaucrats. In Mark's Gospel, the characters in this class were the Pharisees (2:16), Levi (2:14), tax collectors (2:15), money changers (11:15) and centurions (15:39).

Urban non-elite

The 'urban non-elite' group, which claimed 8 percent of the population, comprised merchants, artisans, day labourers and service workers. In the Gospel, the characters belonging to this classification were the urban poor—e.g. those making purchases in the temple (11:15), urban crowds (1:5) and the poor widow (12:42).

Degraded, unclean and expendables

The 'degraded, unclean and expendables' group, which consisted of 10 percent of the population, was composed of beggars, low-status prostitutes, the poorest day labourers and tanners. In the narrative, the characters at this level were the man with an unclean spirit (1:23), the sick and the demon-possessed (1:32), the leper (1:40), the paralytic (2:3), the demoniac (5:2), the swineherds (5:14), the hemorrhaging woman (5:25), the Syrophoenician woman and her daughter (7:25–26), the deaf man with a speech impediment (7:32), the blind man (8:22), the boy with an unclean spirit (9:17), Bartimaeus (10:46), and Simon the leper (14:3).

Rural peasants and other villagers

The 'rural peasants and other villagers' group, which encompassed 75 percent of the population, was made up of free-holding peasants, tenant farmers, slaves, and other landless groups such as fishermen, artisans and craftsmen. In the Gospel, the characters on this level were Jesus, Peter and Andrew (1:16), James, John and Zebedee (1:19–20), Mary, James, Joses, Judas, Simon and Jesus' sisters (6:3), Mary Magdalene,

16 Herman C. Waetjen defines an agrarian society as a 'generic type of society based on agriculture that is made possible by the invention of the plow and the harnessing of animal energy and that therefore generates a greater economic surplus which in turn leads to population growth and labor specialization'. Waetjen, *Reordering of Power: A Sociopolitical Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), xix.

Mary the mother of James, Joses and Salome (15:40), Simon of Cyrene (15:21) and the rural crowds (2:4).[17]

Since the Markan disciples can be taken as 'representatives of Mark's audience',[18] and since the disciples were socially located within the category of rural peasants and other villagers, the Markan community could have been mainly composed of the 'exploited non-elite', who were socially and economically below peasant farmers and who had less long-term security.[19]

Moreover, Mark expressed a favourable assessment of three urban elite members of society—Jairus (5:22), the exceptional scribe (12:34) and Joseph of Arimathea (15:43)—despite the narrative's indications that this elite social stratum generally held a negative view of Jesus. As Malbon pointed out, the presence of these three characters prevents interpreters from excluding members of the elite from Jesus' community[20] and indicates conversely that some of them were part of the Markan community.

Engaging and empowering the vulnerable in the Gospel

Mark sought to persuade his readers, the predominantly poor non-elite peasants and other villagers (and some urban elite members), to engage and empower the vulnerable, in the same way as Jesus had engaged and empowered the marginalized. Though Mark's community was poor and had little authority, they were still exhorted to minister to the degraded, unclean and expendables.

Lexical use of 'servant' and 'slave'

Mark urged his community to minister to the vulnerable through the motif of servanthood, as seen in the words 'servant' and 'slave'. The term 'servant' (*diakonos*) and its various forms occur seven times (1:13, 31; 9:35; 10:43, 45 twice; 15:41) in Mark. The two instances of the noun form 'servant' are both found in the discipleship discourses of Mark 8–10. Both occur in a similarly phrased paradoxical statement: 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all' (9:35, NRSV updated edition) and 'Instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant' (10:43).

Of the five occurrences of the word's verb form (*diakoneō* or 'serve'), three demonstrate the actual service rendered to Jesus by angels (1:13), Peter's mother-in-law (1:31) and the female disciples (15:41). The last two occurrences of the verb appear side by side, referring to Jesus' servanthood, in 10:45: 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.' This verse is crucial in determining Jesus' servanthood role towards the vulnerable in the narrative.

Aside from the word 'servant', the term 'slave' (*doulos*) is used, occurring five times (10:44; 12:2, 4; 13:34; 14:47). Three of these instances appear in parables that involve slaves as characters (the parable of the vineyard owner in Mark 12:1–12, and

17 Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location', 383–90.

18 Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location', 393.

19 Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location', 390. Rohrbaugh also saw the Markan use of the rural 'crowds' as a term for the poor and as an indicator of the social location of Mark's audience.

20 Elizabeth S. Malbon, 'The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 259–81.

the parable of the 'man on a journey' in 13:34–37). In addition, one instance refers to the high priest's slave, whose ear was cut off by 'a certain one who stood by' (14:47). Finally, the word appears in a paradoxical statement that connects being 'first' and being a 'slave of all' (10:44).

A definition of servanthood

In this study, servanthood refers to the discipleship motif of 'renouncing domineering power'[21] and exercising service on behalf of the vulnerable and marginalized.[22] As the essence of Jesus' ministry,[23] servanthood is to be practised by followers of Jesus on behalf of the marginalized—whether through a mighty act (e.g. exorcism) or the giving of a cup of water (9:41).[24] Moreover, servanthood is evident through 'humility in discipleship'[25] and by 'becoming free to give oneself to others',[26] especially for those who cannot give in return. Though it appears counter-cultural, having a humble heart actually commits the followers of Jesus to a life of service to other people who may appear to be of limited social significance.

Jesus' servanthood to the vulnerable

Mark shows Jesus serving the 10 percent who are marginalized in society. Mark showcases Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law, the leper, a paralytic, a man with the withered hand, a hemorrhaging woman, the Syrophoenician woman and her daughter, a deaf man with a speech impediment, a blind man and Bartimaeus. Mark highlights Jesus' exorcisms on behalf of the man with an unclean spirit, the Gerasene demoniac and the boy with an unclean spirit from childhood. He presents Jesus as interacting frequently with the sick and needy (1:32–34, 45; 3:7–10; 6:31–34, 54–56; 7:36–37). Thus, Mark rhetorically urges his readers to follow Jesus' model in ministering to the marginalized and in empowering them through humble service and sacrifice.[27]

Exorcisms, healings and miracles of Jesus

The exorcisms, healings and miracles of Jesus emphatically show his authority and ability to come to the aid of the marginalized. He was the miracle-working one who

21 John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Marquette, MI: Marquette University Press, 1983), 43.

22 Robert C. Tannehill, 'Mark as Narrative Christology', *Semeia* 16, no. 1 (1979): 76.

23 Jack D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 114.

24 Elizabeth S. Malbon, 'Disciples/Crowds/Whoever': Markan Characters and Readers', *Novum Testamentum* 28 (1986): 109.

25 Ernest Best, 'Role of the Disciples in Mark', *New Testament Studies* 23 (1977): 377–401.

26 Eduard Schweizer, 'The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark', *Interpretation* 32, no. 4 (1978): 392.

27 Mark repeatedly increases the value of serving the marginalized by using characters in the narrative—whether they have much authority, little, or none at all—who actually served others. Aside from Jesus, the 10 characters or groups who exhibit servant-like attitudes and actions are John the Baptist, the angels, Peter's mother-in-law, the disciples, the 'poor widow', the woman who anointed Jesus, Simon of Cyrene, the 'ministering' women, Joseph of Arimathea and the 'young man wearing a white robe'.

subjected unclean spirits, nature, sickness and even death under his authoritative power. He did these things to touch, with his enormous power, the people who were without power in themselves.

The Markan narrative includes four actual instances of exorcisms[28] and three summary statements that tell of Jesus casting out unclean spirits.[29] The crowds, who witnessed the exorcisms, responded in amazement: 'He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him' (1:27).[30] Even the disciples asked questions of Jesus about his authority (9:28). Those from whom the unclean spirits were cast out obeyed Jesus' authoritative instructions (5:19–20).

The Markan narrative contains nine actual instances of healings[31] and five summary statements that describe his healings.[32] In response, those who were healed reacted differently. Some served (1:28); some proclaimed freely (1:45; 7:36); some feared and trembled (5:33); some followed Jesus (10:52). The people who witnessed Jesus' healings responded in amazement, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!' (2:12) and 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear, and the mute to speak' (7:37).

The Markan narrative includes five instances of other kinds of miracles.[33] The miracle of the stilling of the sea frightens the disciples, who ask, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?' (4:41). When Jesus walks on water, the disciples are astonished and display their own lack of insight and hardness of heart (6:51–52).

Thus, the exorcisms, healings and miracles show readers that Jesus, the miracle-working one, had power and sovereignty over all natural and supernatural forces. He also exhibited authority over all inner and outer forces that brought harm and fear to all their victims. Through these acts of power and authority, Jesus served the powerless of his day.

Servanthood expressions of Jesus

Aside from his acts of exorcism, healing and miracles, Jesus modelled an attitude of servanthood to the vulnerable. In the healing contexts of the gospel, three occasions exemplify his servant-like sentiments. After a leper told him, 'If you are willing; you can make me clean', Jesus compassionately healed him, saying, 'I am willing; be made clean' (1:41). After James and John gave Jesus a command ('Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you', 10:35), Jesus asked a servant's query, 'What

28 The Markan exorcisms occur in 1:21–28 (in the synagogue on the Sabbath); 5:1–20 (the Gerasene demoniac); 7:24–30 (Syrophoenician's daughter); and 9:14–29 (demon-possessed son); cf. 9:38 ('someone casting out demons').

29 The summary statements that include exorcisms occur in 1:32–34, 39; and 6:13.

30 The word 'obey' (*hupakouō*) is used to refer to the submission of the unclean spirits in 1:27 and of the sea in 4:41 ('Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?').

31 The Markan healings occur in 1:29–31 (Peter's mother-in-law); 1:40–45 (leper); 2:1–12 (paralytic); 3:1–5 (withered hand); 5:21–24, 35–43 (Jairus' daughter; this can also be classified as a miracle of raising the dead to life), 5:25–34 (woman with hemorrhage); 7:31–37 (deaf and mute); 8:22–26 (blind man); and 10:46–52 (Bartimaeus).

32 The summary statements that include healings occur in 1:32–34; 3:10; 6:5, 13, 55–56.

33 The Markan miracles occur in 4:35–41 (sea-stilling); 6:32–44 (5,000 fed), 45–52 (walking on water); 8:1–9 (4,000 fed); and 11:12–14, 20–24 (fig tree).

is it you want me to do for you?' (10:36). After Bartimaeus repeatedly called out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' (10:47, 48), Jesus again asked the servant's question, 'What do you want me to do for you?' (10:51).

The question 'What do you want me to do for you?' seems intentionally positioned in Mark 10:36 and 10:51 to form a rhetorical *inclusio*, so as to emphasize the value of having a servant's attitude. The question shows that Jesus himself modelled this attitude on these two strategic occasions. The message reinforced by the *inclusio* (10:42–45) is that servanthood motivates asking a selfless question, out of a willingness to do what others need.

Jesus' sacrifice as ultimate servanthood

In addition, Jesus displayed ultimate servanthood for the least deserving through his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus' death on the cross (as Mark meticulously develops in the passion narrative beginning in chapter 14) was the epitome of servanthood. Jesus 'came not to be served, but to serve' (10:45a); moreover, he gave 'his life a ransom for many' (10:45b).

The twofold motif of humility and humiliation is evident in the account of Jesus' crucifixion and death (15:22–37) in two obvious ways. First, the passage repeats the words 'to crucify' and 'cross'. The verb 'to crucify' occurs four times, two of which pertain to Jesus' own crucifixion (15:24a, 25), while the other two describe the crucifixion of the two robbers on the right and left sides of Jesus (15:27a, 32b). Moreover, the noun 'cross' appears twice (15:30, 32a) in the context of the people's mockery and insults towards Jesus. The repeated use of the words 'to crucify' and 'cross' is part of Mark's shame language in the context of Jesus' cross of shame. This shame language reinforces that Mark considered Jesus' death on the cross to be the consummate expression of his humility, service and sacrifice.

Second, Mark emphasizes the theme of humility (and humiliation) through his portrayal of Jesus as a subservient sufferer. As Joel Williams observed:

> In the scenes surrounding his crucifixion, Jesus is not so much an actor as the one who is acted upon. During his crucifixion, Jesus' only actions are to cry out loudly to God concerning his forsakenness (15:34) and then cry out a second time before breathing his last (15:37).[34]

Jesus' passive role as a submissive servant is manifested in his willingness to be silent and non-retaliatory when verbally abused by the passers-by ('Save yourself, and come down from the cross!' 15:30). Jesus remained quiet when maliciously mocked by the religious authorities ('He saved others; he cannot save himself … come down from the cross now', 15:31b–32a). Jesus offered no vengeful words when insensitively insulted by the two robbers crucified beside him (15:32b). Jesus kept his composure when obtusely misunderstood by the bystanders ('Listen, he is calling for Elijah', 15:35b; 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down', 15:36b). Jesus was strikingly silent in his submission.

In this final stage of his status degradation ritual before the religious and political leaders, Jesus was meek as a sheep being led to its slaughter. Malina and Rohrbaugh

34 Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 182.

describe the extreme shame of the crucifixion: 'The ultimate humiliation, hanging naked in public on a cross, provides the occasion for the final public derision (15:29–32) and the status degradation is complete.' In his utmost humility, Jesus did not resist his people's humiliation of him. Such selfless sacrifice and servanthood provide for Mark the perfect model of ministering to the vulnerable in society. This was the pathway to becoming great and first of all—by serving the marginalized to the point of sacrifice.

Reflections on Jesus' ministry to the marginalized

Jesus' ministry to the vulnerable through sacrificial service should inspire 21st-century Christ-followers in a polarized world where hatred, inequality and discrimination prevail. We can learn three principles about ministering to the marginalized poor among us as Jesus did. Drawing on my recent experience in Canada, I will illustrate these principles with examples of church ministry to the marginalized and vulnerable realities of international refugees.

Intentional acts of mercy, service, and compassion

First, local churches can show intentional acts of mercy, service and compassion to those who are discriminated against, just as Jesus performed acts of kindness to the sick, demon-possessed and harassed. These three statements can guide such deeds: 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all' (9:35); 'But whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant' (10:43); and 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve' (10:45a). As Jesus did, those who are vulnerable can be engaged by touching them in their area of greatest need.

The Yazidis (numbering around 700,000 worldwide), members of the Kurdish ethnic group, live in northern Iraq, Syria, Armenia and Iran. Minho Song describes a traumatic season for the Yazidis almost a decade ago:

> On August 15, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) ordered everyone in the Yazidi village of Kocho in northern Iraq to gather at a school. Men were given a mere three hours to convert to Islam or face death. When they refused, all were shot to death. Women and children were rounded up and bused to Mosul, to be sold as properties. Within hours, this ethnic village became a ghost town. Young women became sex slaves and older boys were indoctrinated and trained to fight for ISIS, eventually turning their guns against their own people.[35]

Among the survivors of this massacre are 40 families who now live in Richmond Hill, north of Toronto. Minho Song's church wanted to know how to intentionally extend acts of mercy, service and compassion to these Yazidi families. As a result, the church engaged in three things: (1) understanding the Yazidi culture and worldview (especially acknowledging that they are a tribal group and a displaced people with no sense of community in Canada); (2) extending support for their integration (offering English language learning, helping them transition to urban living, and helping some families in their reunification with loved ones; and (3)

35 Minho Song, 'Mission on Our Doorstep: Responding to the Yazidi Crisis in Toronto', in Narry F. Santos and Mark Naylor (eds.), *Mission amid Global Crises: Academy, Agency, and Assembly Perspectives in Canada* (Toronto: Tyndale Academic Press, 2020), 92.

presenting the gospel in an understandable way. Church members met Yazidis' basic needs through hospitality, became part of their extended family, addressed deep concerns such as family reunification and healing of trauma, and sought to build bridges through learning about the Yazidis' beliefs and sharing Christianity.

Asking the servant's question

Second, the body of Christ can engage the vulnerable by asking the servant's question, 'What do you want me to do for you?' This question can guard the church against acting like the many who ordered the blind Bartimaeus to be quiet (10:48a) after he asked Jesus to have mercy on him. It can prevent Christ-followers from chiding and scolding a woman for her generosity, as happened to the woman who poured costly oil on Jesus' head (14:4–5a). It can restrain church leaders from speaking sternly to people who want to bring little children to Jesus (cf. 10:13) or from stopping a man who would drive out demons in Jesus' name, simply because he does not belong to their group (10:38).

In 2017, the Canadian federal immigration and refugee agency's target for government-assisted refugees was approximately 7,500; for the privately sponsored refugee program, it was 16,000, while another group of 50,390 people came to the country as refugee claimants (or asylum seekers). About 5 percent of the Canadian refugee claimants (a total of 2,335 people) arrived in the province of British Columbia, mostly in the metro Vancouver region.

Many among this unusually large influx of international arrivals were welcomed by a Vancouver church that had already been asking refugee claimants what assistance they wanted. When members of the church started asking refugees this question in 2005, the most common response involved their need for housing. As a result, a couple in the church offered their rental house in the suburban community of Surrey and, along with other church volunteers, started to care for two refugee claimant families from Afghanistan and Mexico, learning about refugee resettlement while delivering practical assistance. Later that year, the group organized a non-profit ministry called the Journey Home Community Association. During the 19 years since then, the ministry has cared for some 700 refugee claimants from approximately 45 nations.[36] All this occurred because a group of church volunteers asked the simple Jesus-inspired question, 'What do you want me to do for you?'

Serving to the point of sacrifice

Third, mission leaders can empower the vulnerable by serving them to the point of personal sacrifice. Through Jesus' example of giving his life as a ransom for many, Mark urges his readers not to fall into the trap of the prevailing self-focused value system. He instructs them not to jockey for honour and position, but to demonstrate deeds of humility and service. He calls them to yield precedence to one another, to cede their inherited social status to others and to endure treatment inappropriate for their inherited status.[37]

36 James Grunau, 'A Hidden Population on the Church's Doorstep: A Case Study of Journey Home Community', in Santos and Naylor (eds.), *Mission amid Global Crises*, 124.

37 Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 245.

In 2013, a Chinese–Canadian church in Richmond Hill wanted to carry out a sacrificial gesture for Syrian families who were displaced in Lebanon. The church learned the details of the government's privately sponsored refugee program, partnered with a refugee welcome centre in Toronto, and sought help from a Syrian church in Toronto and another church in Lebanon. In 2018, the Chinese–Canadian church welcomed seven Syrian families from Lebanon. Along the way, the church discovered three valuable lessons about sacrificial service:

1. *A service project has the potential to morph into a discipleship learning process for the church.* Since the church was new to the ministry of sponsoring refugees, it became more open to learning from other congregations that were connected with Syrian refugees and had experience in sponsoring them. It also became more willing to collaborate with like-minded mission groups that care for the marginalized.

2. *It takes much humility, wisdom and patience to serve newly arrived refugees sacrificially*. The primary challenge was to hurdle cultural and language barriers in order to communicate love to the seven families being assisted.

3. *Sponsoring multiple refugees requires a congregation to unite and serve together organizationally*. The church had to form four ministry teams and three congregation-wide committees to care for the seven families. The board, pastors and members were all involved in forming, equipping and resourcing these care teams.[38]

As followers of Jesus in the 21st century, we can become a community of willing helpers who desire not to be served but to serve the marginalized among us. May we serve the wounded in the way that Jesus ministered to the vulnerable during his time—unselfishly.

38 Narry F. Santos and Samuel Chan, 'Loving the Stranger: God's Biblical Mandate toward the Refugees and a Chinese–Canadian Church's Quest to Sponsor Displaced Syrian Families', in Santos and Naylor (eds.), *Mission amid Global Crises*, 119.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 40–52

A Biblical Theology of Singleness in an Increasingly Single World

Barry N. Danylak

All over the world, marriage rates are declining and more people have no partner. How should the church respond? This article, by a theologian and participant in the WEA's singles initiative, elucidates Paul's endorsement of the single life in the context of a broader argument that under the new covenant, marriage and family are not necessary to experience the full blessings of life in Christ.

One of my Zambian seminary students recently shared with me his eager willingness to forgo marriage and family for the prospect of serving as a dedicated church leader and global church planter. Similarly, when I taught at a school in Thailand this past year, a student told me that he considered his singleness a strategic advantage for ministry to his native Karen people in neighbouring Myanmar. The sentiments of these next-generation church leaders are not isolated cases; rather, they illustrate larger changes occurring in our modern world.

Among the most significant demographic changes today is the growing number of singles in society and in our churches. As leaders, shepherds and disciple-makers, we need to be aware of these shifting demographics and respond appropriately. Our response requires two things: (1) theological clarity on the validation of singleness and the place and contribution of single men and women within our global evangelical community, and (2) a commitment to full empowerment and support of both singles and married persons in the common mission of evangelism, discipleship and kingdom expansion.

Though the growth in the number of singles is typically associated with Western nations, it is not exclusive to the West. Singles are growing proportionately in every region of the world. The *Our World in Data* study of global trends in marriage patterns indicates that the decline in marriage is a global phenomenon.[1] Its findings show that from 1990 to 2010, marriage rates declined in most countries around the world. In some countries, the decrease of marrieds relative to singles is evident from the 1970s and 1980s onward, while in others it is a more recent trend.

Barry Danylak (PhD, Cambridge) is executive director for SEE Global (www.seeglobal.net) in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and is ordained with the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada. This paper is adapted from 'Developing a Biblical Theology of Singleness', in *Marriage, Family and Relationships: Biblical, Doctrinal and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Thomas A. Noble, Sarah K. Whittle and Philip S. Johnston (London: Apollos, 2017), 73–85.

1 Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, 'Marriages and Divorces', 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/48101.

Another United Nations study projects that the current trend is not expected to change through 2030. This study, which surveyed women of reproductive age across 232 countries, showed that the proportion of women either married or in a consensual union declined from 1970 to 2000, and again from 2000 to the 2030 projection.[2] Whereas 68.8 percent of global women of reproductive age were married or in a consensual union in 1970, the percentage was 67.1 in 2000 and is expected to drop to 63.1 by 2030. However, these global averages are somewhat skewed by data from the People's Republic of China, where the advent of the one-child policy favouring males produced a significant increase in female marriage between 1970 and 2000. Factoring out the PRC data leaves a larger and more consistent global decline, from 69.6 percent in 1970 to 64.9 percent in 2000 and 61.9 percent by 2030. It also reveals a consistent pattern of decline in every region and sub-region around the globe. As for China, data for 2013–2019 show the marriage rate falling by 33 percent. Given the growing education and economic opportunities for women, many Chinese millennials are choosing to forgo marriage and pursue other options.[3]

Beyond China, the growth in singleness among various Asian nations has been dramatic.[4] Between 1970 and 2017, the marriage rate has declined by 51 percent in Japan and 43 percent in South Korea.[5] Analysis of data from the National Fertility Study of Japan confirms that singleness among Japanese women age 18 to 39 jumped from 27.4 percent in 1992 to 40.7 percent in 2015, while among men the rate increased from 40.3 to 50.8 percent.[6] The Philippines Statistics Authority has recorded a slow and steady decline of 16.6 percent in the number of marriages between 2005 and 2019, even though the national population has been increasing over the same period.[7] A recent study shows an increase in the proportion of Filipinos who are unmarried in their forties, particularly men. This trend is accompanied by an increase in the proportion of Filipinos who are living together as more liberal attitudes

2 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *Estimates and Projections of Women of Reproductive Age Who Are Married or in a Union* (New York: United Nations, 2020), https://worldea.org/yourls/48102.

3 Nector Gan, 'Chinese Millennials Aren't Getting Married, and the Government Is Worried', 29 January 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/48103.

4 See Albert Esteve, Ridhi Kashyap, Joan Garcia Roman, Yen-hsin Alice Cheng, Setsuya Fukuda, Wanli Nie, and Hyun-ok Lee, 'Demographic Change and Increasing Late Singlehood in East Asia, 2010–2050', *Demographic Research* 43 (2020): 1367–98, https://worldea.org/yourls/48104; Jeofrey Bautista Abalos, 'Do Filipinos Still Say "I Do"? The Continuing Increase in Non-Marriage and Cohabitation in the Philippines', *Journal of Family Issues* (June 2023): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X231182366.

5 Ortiz-Ospina and Roser, 'Marriages and Divorces'. The Japanese marriage rate declined from 10.0 per 1,000 people in 1970 to 4.9 in 2017, while South Korea's rate fell from 9.2 to 5.2. A 2018 article decried the falling marriage rate, noting that 2017 had recorded the lowest number of marriages since statistics began. See Thisanka Siripala, 'Japan's Births and Marriages Spiral to Record Low', *The Diplomat*, 4 January 2018, https://worldea.org/yourls/48105.

6 C. Ghaznavi et al., 'The Herbivore's Dilemma: Trends in and Factors Associated with Heterosexual Relationship Status and Interest in Romantic Relationships among Young Adults in Japan—Analysis of National Surveys', *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 11 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0241571.

7 The Philippines Statistics Authority recorded 518,595 marriages in 2005 versus 431,972 in 2019. Data available via the PSA website: https://worldea.org/yourls/48106. For population trends, see https://worldea.org/yourls/48107.

toward marriage and cohabitation have grown over time.[8] Declines and delays in marriage are seen in a wide range of other Asian nations as well, from Israel, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia in the west to India, East Timor and Brunei in the east.[9]

Similar patterns of increasing singleness appear in various Latin American and African nations. In Argentina, the marriage rate declined by 63 percent from 1975 to 2016. Other Latin American countries with marriage rates at an all-time low include Mexico, Uruguay, Honduras and Bolivia.[10] Contributing to lower marriage rates in Latin America is the prevalence of cohabitation in higher proportions than elsewhere in the world.[11] Africa has also experienced a decline in the percentage of reproductive-age women who are married or in a consensual union, from 70.5 percent in 1970 to 63.0 percent in 2000, with a projected rate of 59.4 percent in 2030.[12] Numerous countries across Africa mirror this pattern of individuals delaying marriage and staying single longer, including Kenya, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria and South Africa.[13]

Most Western nations today can be aptly described as 'marriage-minority cultures'. This change reflects not only the overall declining marriage rates but also the fragmentation of the concept of marriage, with the emergence and prevalence of various 'marriage-like' relationships such as registered partnerships, consensual unions and legally recognized same-sex relationships.[14] Not only are younger generations postponing marriage, but more and more are questioning the need for the institution altogether.[15] Yet marriage-like relationships are not simply recreating marriage by another name; the prevailing pattern indicates a continual increase in those who have never married and are relationally unattached.[16]

---

8 Abalos, 'Do Filipinos Still Say'.

9 All six of these nations have seen at least a 10-point drop in the percentage of women of reproductive age who are married or in a consensual union between 1970 and the projection for 2030. United Nations, *Estimates and Projects of Women of Reproductive Age.*

10 United Nations, 'World Marriage Data 2019'. The drop in Argentina was from 7.3 marriages per 1,000 people in 1975 to 2.7 in 2016. Low rates were also found in Mexico (4.3), Uruguay (3.2), Honduras (2.6) and Bolivia (2.2). The most recent marriage rate in the United States, by comparison, was 6.5.

11 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Population Facts* 2016, no. 2 (2016): 3, https://worldea.org/yourls/48108.

12 United Nations, *Estimates and Projections of Women of Reproductive Age.* The decline was from 11.6 marriages per 1,000 people in 1962 to 5.4 in 1999.

13 United Nations, 'World Marriage Data 2019'. For example, among Moroccan men in the marriageable sweet-spot 25–29 age group, 69.6 percent were married in 1971 versus only 26.9 in 2018. The rate among Moroccan women age 25–29 also declined over the same period, from 89.5 to 65.2 percent.

14 For declining rates of marriage and increased age of first marriage, see OECD, *Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), 85, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264261488-en. For the marital status breakdown among EU nations, see the Eurostat statistical database, https://worldea.org/yourls/48109. This report uses nine categories of marital status.

15 See Mandy Len Catron, 'What You Lose When You Gain a Spouse', *The Atlantic*, 2 July 2019, https://worldea.org/yourls/48110; Peter Jon Mitchell and Lita L. Day, 'For Love or Money? Why Young Adults Marry … or Don't', *Cardus*, 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/48111.

16 Mitchell and Day, 'For Love or Money?' 6, illustrates this trend in the Canadian context.

This shift has brought with it a range of other living arrangement complexities: a marked increase in divorce, cohabitation, gay and lesbian relationships, and more single-parent families. To respond properly, Christians need a solid biblical theology of singleness, which rests on careful exegesis of the relevant biblical texts. The most extended biblical discussion of questions around singleness versus marriage and the decision to marry or remain single appears in 1 Corinthians 7. But this chapter comes to us as a difficult package of exegetical challenges amidst a highly contextualized discussion.

Just as sound exegesis is necessary for sound theology, so too, sound theology can support sound exegesis. This paper offers a case study of how biblical-theological reflection can help us resolve a challenging exegetical problem and bring resolution to an important theological question. In this case, the net result is not only a more robust understanding of singleness as a whole but an understanding that provides insight for more effectively engaging contemporary global challenges and issues.

Background to the exegetical problem[17]

The problem, in this case, concerns the sticky assertion that launches Paul's discussion on marriage and singleness in 1 Corinthians 7, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman.' The statement arises as the first among a series of apparent responses to questions that the Corinthians have raised. Ascetic-minded Patristic exegetes generally took the statement as Paul's response to ascetic concerns raised by the Corinthians, although there is some disagreement about whether the issue was primarily sexual relations or marriage, whether they were motivated by maturity or naivete, and whether the root of the ascetic concern represented the Corinthians' own position or that of outside false teachers. John Chrysostom, for example, writes of Paul:

> He introduces also the discourse concerning virginity: 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman.' For if, says he, you enquire what is the excellent and greatly superior course, it is better not to have any connection whatever with a woman: but if you ask what is safe and helpful to your infirmity, be connected by marriage.[18]

Most modern exegetes, on the other hand, favour the proposal that Paul is quoting ascetic-minded Corinthians before proceeding to offer his reservations about their excessive ascetic ideals. They read the text in this way: 'Now concerning the things about which you wrote, namely: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."' In this case, the statement represents a Corinthian perspective that Paul proceeds to correct.

There is a secondary and related disagreement over whether the essential issue raised by the Corinthians concerns marriage itself or sexual relations within marriage. How we navigate these two points substantially colours how we read the chapter as a whole. On one hand, if Paul is affirming the goodness of the celibate state, this reinforces his emphasis on the legitimacy of a calling to singleness, which he then proceeds to qualify. On the other hand, if it represents the view of extreme

17 For a detailed treatment of the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7, see Barry N. Danylak, *Paul and Secular Singleness in 1 Corinthians 7* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

18 John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 19 (1 Cor. 1–2).

ascetic Corinthians advocating for celibacy within marriage, then the statement sets the stage for Paul's subsequent effort to mitigate a peculiar Corinthian preoccupation and uphold more traditional views of marriage and sexual relations within it.

The more recent consensus favours the view that the statement reflects the Corinthians' advocacy for asceticism within marriage.[19] The most compelling arguments for this position are that (1) the vocabulary of 'touch' (*haptō*) connotes sexual contact and rarely occurs as an expression for marriage; (2) the statement stands directly against Paul's Jewish heritage, which regarded marriage as a covenantal blessing; (3) the statement seems to directly contradict Genesis 2:18, 'It is not good for a man to be alone', of which Paul was surely aware; and (4) there is no corroborating evidence to suggest that Paul was ascetically oriented. In short, it seems most unlikely that such a statement could be attributed to Paul. As one recent commentator has stated, 'On his authority, Paul could not have advocated celibacy for everyone, for he would be contradicting God's utterance [in Genesis 2:18]. Then Paul would be against procreation (Gen 1:28), God's covenant blessings from generation to generation (Gen 17:7), and the growth of the church.'[20]

But the alternative that the statement reflects the Corinthians' view is not without difficulties. Although a wide number of contemporary influences have been proposed to explain the Corinthians' marriage-denigrating asceticism, including Gnostic dualism, Jewish sectarian movements, Sophia worship, Cynic or Stoic philosophy, Isis or other Egyptian cults, and medical practitioners, none have proved compelling.[21]

Internal evidence for an ascetic movement in Corinth is also scant. Paul refers to their sexual struggles four times within 1 Corinthians 7 alone (verses 2, 5, and twice in 9); in 5:1–13, he castigates them for allowing a type of *porneia* 'that does not even exist among the pagans'; he lists four different kinds of sexual sin in 6:9–10 to describe those who will not inherit the kingdom of God and then indicates that these sins characterized the Corinthians' former way of life. In 6:15, Paul condemns the culturally acceptable use of prostitutes with the emphatic *mē genoito* ('may it not be'), just before exhorting them with the imperative to 'Flee immorality' in 6:18. Sexual immorality is decried again in 1 Cor 10:1–13, most likely related to cultic feasting in pagan temples.[22] In 2 Corinthians, Paul warns of further discipline for the 'many' who have still not repented of the *porneia* they were practicing (2 Cor 12:21). We also have a later reference in 1 Clement 30:1, upbraiding the Corinthians for 'unchaste embraces' along with 'abominable desire' and 'detestable adultery'. Nor do the Corinthians exhibit typical corroborating signs of an ascetic disposition. They appear socially integrated with non-Christians around them, having dinner parties with their non-Christian associates (1 Cor 10:27), and they boast of their right to eat

19 For a discussion of this view, see Gordon D. Fee, '1 Corinthians 7:1–7 Revisited', in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict*, ed. T. J. Burke and J. K. Elliott (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 197–213; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 303–5.

20 Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 209.

21 See Danylak, *Paul and Secular Singleness in 1 Corinthians 7*, 4–26.

22 Brian Rosner, 'Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20', *Novum Testamentum* 40 (1998): 336–51.

anything in good conscience. Their mantra in 6:12 and 10:23 appears to be that 'all things are lawful.' This would seem to indicate anything but an ascetic disposition toward sexual renunciation.

The most viable possibility is that the ascetic disposition was not necessarily representative of the whole church but of a group of Corinthian pneumatic enthusiasts—perhaps, as Gordon Fee has proposed, a group of women espousing a brand of 'spiritualized eschatology' with roots in Hellenistic dualism. But corroborating evidence for such a group of women in 1 Corinthians is meagre. The statement 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' is male-oriented and hardly reads as a likely mantra for a group of Corinthian women, and Paul's second-person reference to men in 7:28 suggests that he is responding to a group of men, not women. Nor do we have a substantive indication that the individuals Paul addresses in Chapter 7 are suddenly a different group from those struggling with prostitutes in Chapter 6. In addition, the advice he gives in chapter 7 fits poorly with the likelihood that the statement of 7:1b represents an ascetic viewpoint being propagated by a group of eschatologically minded Corinthian women. Neither his qualification in 7:11 that the wife who divorces should remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband nor his eschatological argument promoting singleness in 7:29–31 makes logical sense if the problem lies in a group of ascetic women who propose abandoning their husbands to fulfil their new eschatological existence.

So we need to revisit the possibility that the statement in 7:1b is a surprising assertion by Paul validating the calling of celibate singleness and does not originate with the Corinthians. At this point, biblical theology may help to substantiate the rationale that might stand behind such a surprising assertion. We first observe that Paul uses *kalon* (good) in two sentences later in the chapter: in 7:8, where he states that 'it is good for the unmarried and widows to remain as I am', and in 7:26, where it appears twice in the comment, 'I think this is *good*, in view of the present crisis, that it is *good* for a man to remain as he is.' These statements begin new sections of discourse to the Corinthians, and they share a common theme: it is good for the one who is not married to remain so. At the same time, there is no doubt that Paul was well aware of Genesis 2:18, as just five verses before 7:1, in 6:16, he quotes Genesis 2:24 that 'the two shall become one flesh.'

What would move Paul to make a seemly ascetic assertion that stands, in the very similarity of its language, in almost direct conflict with the Genesis creation story? The answer may well lie in how Paul interprets what has happened between the Genesis account and his first-century response to the Corinthians. Accordingly, a full biblical theology of marriage and singleness may shed insight on Paul's perspective. But the key to unlocking the theological dynamic between singleness and marriage through the biblical story line is best found not through a direct examination of marriage and celibacy themselves in Scripture; rather, we can find it by reflecting on an even more powerful biblical motif that runs through the whole of Scripture—the provision of offspring as the vehicle of God's blessing to the world. God is blessing the world by reproducing his image in humankind, and the shift in *how* he does this differently through the respective covenants of the Old and New Testaments holds

the key to the parallel shift in the perspective on marriage and singleness. I turn to this exploration in the following section.[23]

Theological considerations

Genesis

The paramount importance of offspring is hard to miss in the Genesis account. 'Be fruitful and multiply' is, after all, the first commandment of the Old Testament, given initially not to human beings but to the birds and the sea creatures (Gen 1:22) on the fifth day of creation and then reiterated to humankind on the sixth day (Gen 1:27). It is given twice to Noah and his family after the flood (Gen 9:1, 7). Beyond the first human beings and the 'new Adam' of Noah after the flood, the only other individual who receives a direct command to 'be fruitful and multiply' is Jacob (Gen 35:11), the physical father of the Israelite nation, who has 12 sons via four different women. In each case, the command is associated directly with blessing; God blesses them and says, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'

The Hebrew word for 'seed' or 'offspring' (*zerah*) appears as the first messianic referent in 3:15 as part of God's pronouncement of judgement upon the serpent: 'I will put enmity between … your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.' In Genesis 4, the word again appears as a possible messianic reference and illuminates a marked contrast between the birth accounts of Cain and Seth. Upon the birth of Cain, Eve says, 'I have gotten (*kanah*) a man with the help of the Lord', and so she names him Cain. After Cain kills Abel, Eve gives birth to Seth and says, 'God has appointed (*shet*) for me another offspring instead of Abel', and thus she calls him Seth. Eve credits the birth of Cain partly to her human initiative, but the birth of Seth strictly to the provision of God. *Zerah* appears again in the case of Seth, modified by the adjective 'another' (*acher*). As in English, *acher* can be taken as 'another' either in sequence or in kind or pedigree. There is evidence that Hebrew tradition regarded 'another seed' as meaning 'a seed from another source or parentage', providing a hint that the Messiah is to share in non-Jewish ancestry (i.e. coming through Ruth the Moabitess).[24] But the text here does not specify the nature of the 'other kind' of birth that the Messiah represents.

The central drama of the book of Genesis, the calling of Abraham and the establishment of the covenant, points again to the central importance of offspring. Though the covenant is established with Abraham over a series of episodes, the promises of the covenant fall generally into a few major categories. God will bless Abraham with offspring who will become exceedingly numerous and from whom will come a great nation, kings and many nations. God will give Abraham and his descendants a tract of land occupied by Canaanite nations, along with victory over those nations. God will make Abraham's name great and he will be Abraham's

23 For a fuller treatment of the theology of singleness and offspring, see Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) or the shorter version in Barry Danylak, *Singleness in God's Redemptive Story* (Altona, Canada: Friesen Press, 2022).

24 Genesis Rabbah 23.5 (on Gen 4:25). Max Wilcox, 'The Promise of the 'Seed' in the New Testament and the Targumin', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5 (1979): 14.

reward. Virtually all the promises God gives to Abraham (many offspring, land, and a great name) depend on Abraham having a physical son and heir. Hence the focal point of the story soon gravitates toward the human-divine drama of how God will give Abraham a son, since his wife Sarah was aged and barren. And as in the case of Eve, Abraham and Sarah also have two sons—one through the result of human effort and contrivance and the other arising supernaturally through divine provision. Abraham's ultimate response of faith in God for the provision of the yet-unseen child is what Paul will later recognize as the very faith that was credited to him as righteousness (Rom 4:3).

The Sinai covenant

If the importance of offspring in the Abrahamic covenant is a marker of God's unilateral provision, its central importance in the Sinai covenant is a fundamental marker of God's blessing upon the Israelites for their obedience to the covenantal stipulations. This is evident in the 'blessings and curses' section of the covenant contained in Deuteronomy 28, but it is also prominent in the basic covenantal stipulations given in Deuteronomy 7:12–14:

> And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples. There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock.

Here again, we find physical offspring to be the fundamental marker of God's covenantal blessing. God will bless them with progeny in three different ways: in the fruit of their wombs, the fruit of their ground and the increase in their herds and flocks. Conversely, no one will be barren among them or their livestock; barrenness is a mark of divine disapproval resulting from human disobedience. God's covenantal blessing of abundant progeny presumes the condition of marriage; not surprisingly, we find no Old Testament figures who voluntarily choose to remain unmarried. Marriage is the prerequisite for covenantal blessing.

As in the case of Abraham, for the individual Israelite, physical progeny was also critical for retaining the family's allotment of land and preserving one's name beyond death. Hence we find various provisions in the law such as the case of Zelophehad's daughters (Num 27) and the institution of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5–10), designed both to ensure the preservation of the familial allocation of land and to prevent the man's name from being 'blotted out of Israel'. Having one's name 'blotted out' or 'cut off' was a judgement worse than death, because it entailed not only the termination of one's life but also dying devoid of any surviving offspring to 'remember one's name'. Moreover, every individual Israelite was accountable to the covenant. Deuteronomy 29 warns that if any individual turns away from the Lord, he or she shall be subject to 'every curse written in this book' and the Lord will 'blot out his name from under heaven'.

The threat of being 'blotted out' is illustrated dramatically by the account of Naomi in the book of Ruth. With the death of both her husband and sons, Naomi cries

in utter despair that 'the Almighty has brought calamity upon me.' Conversely, Boaz, who serves as both the kinsman-redeemer and *levir*, expresses his intentions as follows: 'I have bought [Ruth] to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place' (Ruth 4:10).

In the Sinai covenant, marriage and physical progeny were fundamental markers of covenantal blessing. To be unmarried in ancient Israel was to be not blessed and carried the implication of being under God's judgement for disobedience to the covenant. Thus God calls Jeremiah not to take a wife as a portent of judgement upon the people, since the sons and daughters born in the land were to die of deadly diseases and would not be lamented or buried (Jer 16:1–4). But with the prophets, we also see a new turn in the anticipation of a coming new work by God himself. Isaiah especially illustrates this new turn.

Isaiah

The word *zerah* occurs frequently in the book of Isaiah. On one hand, it appears as a reference to the sinful nation, the physical seed of Jacob. The opening words of the book pronounce judgement upon the nation as sinful offspring: 'Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. … Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly!' (Isa 1:2–4). Isaiah 48:18–19 later records this lament:

> Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.

Note the allusion to the Abrahamic covenant in the pronouncement of judgement based on Sinai. The people have disobeyed and now face the judgement of having their names cut off and being destroyed.

On the other hand, we have a most unusual reference to the 'holy seed' (*zerah qodesh*) at the end of Isaiah's commission in 6:13: 'The holy *seed* is its stump.' The verse serves as a final note of hope in the judgement that Isaiah is commanded to prophesy against the nation. This verse is an exegetical landmine that is beyond the scope of the present inquiry to explore sufficiently, so I will add only a few observations to the mix. Typically, the referent of 'holy seed' is read as the post-exilic remnant of the Israelite nation. The difficulty with this interpretation is that the modifier *qodesh* is almost universally associated in the book of Isaiah with the holy God of Israel and never with the sinful people. And as in its other occurrences, 'seed' could be taken here as either a singular or a collective. So it is especially telling that following 6:13 we have numerous prophetic 'signs' linked to special, divinely provided progeny. In 7:14, we have a virgin who will be with child and bear a son; in 8:18, the prophet has children as a sign and portent from the Lord of hosts; in 9:6, unto Zebulun and Naphtali a child is born; and in 11:1–2a, a shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse. We can detect in Isaiah an implicit parallel with the contrast between the two types of offspring in Genesis: one symbolizing the failure of human effort and the other the supernatural product of divine provision.

The word *offspring* occurs again at the climax of the fourth servant song in Isaiah 53:10, where the text reads, 'When his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring.' But what kind of offspring does the servant see here as the result of his death? As most scholars have concluded, the most plausible understanding of the text is that the Servant's offspring are spiritual rather than physical.[25] For elsewhere in the Old Testament when we find blessing associated with *seeing* rather than *having* progeny,[26] it generally refers to grandchildren or great-grandchildren rather than one's immediate offspring; the blessing of a long and fruitful life is in view. One is blessed by having one's own offspring and by seeing one's offspring's offspring. But here the Servant sees his *own* offspring. Moreover, 53:8 says of the servant, 'As for his generation (or progeny) … he was cut off out of the land of the living.'[27] He has no physical children. The servant has died suffering the double indignation of dying without children, yet in his death he suddenly sees his offspring.

Strikingly, immediately following the servant's death, the text portrays the restoration of two unmarried and barren figures—the female barren woman in Isaiah 54 and the male eunuch in Isaiah 56. In 54:1–5, three verses after the death of the servant, we read of the barren woman whose children will be more than the children of the one who is married. But these children are born not physically but supernaturally, for she has not been in labour (54:1) and is without a human husband (54:5), and her children will be extensive so as to possess the nations (54:3). As Alex Motyer has concluded, 'The barren woman sings, not because she has ceased to be barren but because the Lord has acted in his Servant with the effect that his "seed" become her *children*'s "sons"'.[28] The picture is not of a woman once barren who now gives birth, but of a still-barren woman who gives birth to innumerable spiritual children.

Isaiah 56 gives similar hope to the eunuch who, like the foreigner, was cut off from access to the temple. The eunuch is no longer to regard himself as a 'dry tree', but God will give them in his house 'a monument and a name better than sons and daughters that shall not be cut off'. It is a picture of the restoration of communion, place and remembrance for those once considered cursed and cut off from the community of God's people. Acts 8 records an amazing fulfilment of this passage in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch who encounters Philip as he returns from worshipping in Jerusalem. How coincidental that he was reading Isaiah 53:7–8 on the suffering servant not having offspring. One wonders what his reaction was when he read of the restored foreigner-eunuch only a few chapters later.

---

25 Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 440; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 402; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:355; Jan Leunis Koole, *Isaiah Three* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 324; August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40–66* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979), 450–51.

26 Gen 50:23 (Joseph); Job 42:16 (Job); Ps 128:6. See Koole, *Isaiah Three*, 324.

27 A helpful parallel is found in 4Q219 2:26, 27, which says that God will 'cut you off [from the earth] [and your seed from] beneath heaven. … Then your name and memory will perish from [the] enti[re earth.]' Translation in Donald W. Parry and E. J. L. Tov, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, vol. 3: *Parabiblical Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 59.

28 Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 440.

Paul

Paul too seems aware of the distinction between the two kinds of offspring in Genesis and Isaiah. This first becomes apparent in his interpretive shift in Galatians 3:16, as he claims that the Abrahamic promises were given to Abraham and his singular seed rather than to Abraham and his collective seed. The move is not grammatical but theological—it is the unique, divinely provided seed, of which Isaac serves as a type, through whom the promises are realized and to whom they are given. Paul reroutes the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises not through the multitudinous physical progeny of Abraham via Jacob but through the divinely provided, supernatural offspring who is Christ. He can then declare in Gal 3:29 that all those who are 'of Christ'—that is, those who are offspring of Christ not physically but spiritually—are the true offspring of Abraham and heirs according to the promise.

While Paul's opponents could concede that Jesus Christ himself as a Jew was a physical descendant of Abraham and therefore Abraham's seed, they would not possibly concede Paul's assertion that the Galatian Gentiles were also Abraham's seed. For the historical record was undeniable. Abraham had two sons: Isaac, who was the father of the Jews, and Ishmael, the father of the Gentiles. But only Isaac and his offspring received the promises and the law, and therefore only the Jews could be heirs of the promises. In Galatians 4:21–31, Paul responds with an allegorical interpretation of the Hagar and Sarah account. Paul is not engaging in interpretive sleight-of-hand but in theological (as he puts it) 'listening to the law', with an awareness of the distinction between the two kinds of birth typified by Isaac and Ishmael. For Paul, the fundamental difference between Hagar bearing Ishmael and Sarah bearing Isaac is that the first was a birth by normal physical processes, whereas the latter was a birth by supernatural, divine provision. Insofar as the Jews are characterized as Abraham's physical descendants by conventional human means and the Galatian Christians are characterized as Abraham's spiritual descendants through the divinely provided offspring of Christ, the Galatians rather than the Jewish legalists are the true descendants of Isaac. The prooftext Paul cites from the Old Testament to confirm this is Isaiah 54:1: the barren woman now sings. The barren woman parallels Sarah only in the fact that both women produce their child through supernatural provision; there is a fundamental contrast in the birthing process.

But did Paul see himself, ostensibly unmarried and without issue, in the pattern of the barren woman bearing spiritual children on behalf of the suffering servant? Only two verses before the Hagar-Sarah allegory, Paul describes the Galatians as 'my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you'. Such language is not unique to Galatians. In 1 Corinthians 4:15, he writes, 'For I begat you in Christ Jesus through the gospel.' He describes himself both as a nursing mother and as a father with his children when writing to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:7, 11). To Philemon, Paul appeals 'for my child, Onesimus, whom I begat (*egennēsa*) in my imprisonment' (verse 10). In four different places in the Pastoral Epistles, we find Timothy and Titus addressed as Paul's child (2 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 2:1) and in two cases as his 'lawfully begotten (*gnēsiō*) child' (1 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4). Paul surely sees himself as a spiritual father to his converts, begetting them in Christ through the gospel in the pattern of the barren woman.

Moreover, whereas physical offspring had been a fundamental expression of God's blessing under the conditional terms of the Sinai covenant, it no longer functioned in the same capacity under the new covenant, in which all the covenantal blessings are realized through union with Christ, the uniquely provided offspring of God. This message is poignantly expressed in the opening words of Ephesians, where Paul says that God the Father is to be praised because he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing *in Christ*. The single life thus testifies to the essence of the gospel itself, which declares that the sweet blessings of marriage, family, children and grandchildren are not necessary for one to be fully blessed with the promises and inheritance of the new covenant. On the contrary, Christ, the offspring of God, is completely sufficient.

Resolution of the exegetical problem

Returning now to the statement of 1 Corinthians 7:1b, is it possible that Paul's theology of a singleness fully sufficient in Christ and incorporated into the new family of God informs his counsel here to the Corinthians on the question of marriage? Paul is not affirming that *it is good for a man to be alone*, which would be a contradiction of Genesis, but that *it is good,* in some circumstances, *for a man to refrain from marriage and sexual union*. This is not a singleness lived alone, for Paul recognizes that thanks to the new family of God, in which Paul is the spiritual father, mother and brother of his converts, his life as a single person is not lived alone.

But we must also address what we might call the lexical objection raised by Gordon Fee and others. If Paul's statement here is about marriage, why does he use the strange verb 'touch' (*haptō*), which seems to suggest that sexual relations, not marriage, are in view? In other words, isn't the issue sexual relations in marriage rather than the marriage question itself? Perhaps the right answer is 'yes and no'. First, we have observed that in 1 Corinthians 7:8 Paul reiterates the 'it is good' language as he addresses the unmarried and widows, before proceeding to the married in 7:10 and people in mixed marriages in 7:12. Everything from verse 8 through the end of the chapter has to do with the marriage question and not sexual relations. But what is the point of the first seven verses *before* Paul proceeds to the main discussion of the chapter, which entirely concerns the question of marriage? I think the answer emerges when we consider that Greco-Roman views of marriage tended to dissociate the question of marriage—which had to do with personal freedom over and against social duty and responsibility—from the locus of one's sexual activity. Before he addresses the question of marriage, Paul must make it clear to the Corinthians that sexual expression as God intended belongs in marriage and *only* in marriage. How can Paul communicate that point while also acknowledging a legitimate calling to singleness? He responds to their question concerning the necessity of marriage with the shocking statement, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman.' In other words, it is good for a man not to marry if and only if he is also ready to commit himself to sexual abstinence. With such language, the point could not be confused. Marriage and sexual expression are a package as God intended; neither should exist without the other.

Conclusion

I have suggested that Paul's response to the Corinthians that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' is grounded in his understanding of the nature of the new covenant, the sufficiency of Christ, and the new spiritual family of God.

As the proportion of single adults grows around the globe both outside and inside the church, it raises questions that need to be addressed. A robust biblical theology of singleness provides a foundation for effectively engaging some of these questions. First, it clarifies that singles are not unblessed or second-class within the new covenant. In Christ alone, we are full participants in all the spiritual blessings of the new covenant and the kingdom of God. Having Christ alone is sufficient to be fully blessed in the new covenant, irrespective of whether God also grants wealth, property, marriage or children. Singleness is not a problem to be fixed. As my Zambian and Thai students now understand, being fully blessed through Christ in the new covenant means that we are all fully empowered for kingdom service irrespective of whether we are single, married or single again.

A theology of singleness also shows us the power of the new spiritual family of God that supersedes the biological family as the eschatological locus for intimate relationships. It reminds us that our union with Christ is corporate as together we become the perfected bride of Christ. We will live forever together without marrying or giving in marriage, but simply as the consummate bride of Christ. The World Evangelical Alliance community is a powerful expression of this spiritual family which supersedes alliances of family, clan or race. One key initiative to foster an inclusive vision for singles is the WEA Singles Advocacy Team. This group of single influencers, which includes single and single-again persons from Zambia, Canada, Costa Rica, India, Israel, Malaysia, Nepal and the USA, is advancing a paradigm that fully values, engages and empowers the sizable demographic of evangelical singles emerging within the global Christian family. The team achieves its mission by creating awareness through social media;[29] presenting a biblical theology of singleness in seminars to evangelical churches, seminaries, and WEA national and regional leadership;[30] and making written resources available in the form of articles, books and curriculum. The aim is to enable the evangelical church to maximize the gifts, capabilities and talents of all its leaders and practitioners for kingdom service, whether they are single, single again or married.

Finally, a theology of singleness clarifies that neither marriage nor sexual consummation is fundamentally necessary to be a complete and fully realized male or female human being. Rather, our fundamental identity is grounded in the *imago Dei* as fully expressed by the incarnate Christ. The single Saviour, Jesus Christ, has fully expressed the image of God and is the basis for our identity as fully complete human beings (Col 1:28).

---

29 As of January 2024, WEA media will be posting regular singles-related resources on its social media platforms. For an introductory post from 25 November 2023, see https://worldea.org/yourls/48112.

30 A WEA Singles Advocacy Team visited Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia and the Philippines in early 2023. This visit included sharing in various churches, meeting with national and regional WEA leadership, and presenting a seminar on marriage, family and singleness. See 'WEA Singles Initiative Finds Global Partners', 30 August 2023, https://worldea.org/yourls/48113.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 53–59

Civil Government and Political Authority: Calvin's Commentary on Romans 13

Israel A. Kolade

This article examines Calvin's commentary on Romans 13:1–7, in contrast with early church and Reformation expositions of the text, to show how his conception of political authority provides nuance to the political theology expressed in his Institutes*, particularly around the sticky question of obedience to an unjust or tyrannical government.*

Scholars considering Calvin's political theology typically look first to the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his famous work of systematic theology. Chapter 20 of book 4 is the section of the *Institutes* that gives the greatest attention to political theology. As a theologian, Calvin arranged the *Institutes* to present systematic accounts on key theological topics. However, Calvin was more than a theologian; he was also a biblical expositor, preacher and pastor. Accordingly, to understand his perspective fully, we must also pay attention to his reflections on specific biblical texts, as found in both in his commentaries and his sermons.

This article establishes the benefit of just such an endeavour. By offering a close reading of Calvin's commentary on Romans 13:1–7 in comparison to early church and Reformation expositions of the text, it elucidates the unique features of his conception of political authority and enhances our understanding of his political theology as expressed in the *Institutes*.

Calvin on the historical context of Romans 13:1–7

Calvin's discourse on Romans 13:1–7[1] begins with a display of his humanist influence. He considers first the context in which Paul writes—namely, the political

Israel A. Kolade (MDiv, Fuller Theological Seminary) teaches natural sciences and theology at Maranatha High School in Pasadena, California, USA, and is a transitional deacon in the Anglican Church in North America.

1 Romans 13:1–7 is not an isolated text. It is situated in the grammatical context of Romans 12 and the rest of Romans 13 (verses 8–14). Calvin makes only one direct reference to this passage when discussing the adjoining passages: when commenting on Romans 13:9, he applies Paul's words to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' to obedience to the civil government. Calvin writes, 'Paul intended to prove, by things of a like nature, that the import of the whole law is, that love towards one another ought to be exercised by us, and that what he left to be implied is to be understood, and that is, that obedience to magistrates is not the least thing which tends to nourish peace, to preserve brotherly love.' See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. and trans. John Owen (hereafter Calvin, *Romans*; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 485–86.

situation that leads Paul to speak on the topic of the Christian's relationship to civil government.[2] Calvin writes:

> It appears that he was constrained to do so by some great necessity which existed especially in that age, though the preaching of the gospel at all times renders this necessary. There are indeed always some tumultuous spirits who believe that the kingdom of Christ cannot be sufficiently elevated, unless all earthly powers be abolished. … There was also another thing which alienated the Jews no less than the Gentiles from their rulers, because they all not only hated piety, but also persecuted religion with the most hostile feelings. Hence it seemed unreasonable to acknowledge them for legitimate princes and rulers, who were attempting to take away the kingdom of Christ, the only Lord of heaven and earth.[3]

In considering the political backdrop that led to Paul's discourse, Calvin identifies two schools of thought that seemed to be spreading among Christians in Rome at the time of Paul's writing. First, some may have believed that Christianity was necessarily antithetical to the idea of civil government; second, some Christians would have wondered how they could rightly acknowledge a government that was actively opposed to Christianity. Calvin's understanding of Paul's context appears correct, as these concerns about the Christian's relationship to government persisted (in a lesser degree) into the early church period. Early church fathers remained perplexed as to how a 'pagan and persecuting ruler might have his power from God.' Early church leaders such as Theophilus of Antioch (in the second century) accepted Paul's words at face value, even though they often struggled to figure out how this message could be true.[4]

By beginning with a brief word on the context of the writing of Romans 13, Calvin shows his concern for authorial intent.[5] This stands out as a unique interest of the Reformer when contrasted with Luther's *Lectures on Romans*. Luther was more taken by his own historical context, particularly his battles against the corruption of ecclesiastical authority.[6] Calvin, in contrast, gives no apparent consideration to his own historical context, seeking rather to use the tools of humanist hermeneutics to interpret the passage. Furthermore, Calvin pays close attention to philology and grammar. David Steinmetz writes, 'He appeals to the causative *gar* in Greek (13:3a), mentions the Hebrew usage of the word *praise* (13:3b), and alludes generally and vaguely to the political teaching of "the philosophers" (13:3b).'[7] This attention to philology and grammar is not as well refined in the commentaries of Luther and Melanchthon.[8]

---

2 Calvin shares this view with Philip Melanchthon. See G. Sujiin Pak, 'Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin on Romans 5 and 13: Three Reformation Approaches to Reading Romans', in *Reformation Readings of Romans*, edited by Kathy Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holder (New York: T&T Clark International, 2008), 134.

3 Calvin, *Romans*, 477–78.

4 Wilfrid Parsons, 'The Influence of Romans 13 on Pre-Augustinian Christian Political Thought', *Theological Studies* 1 (1940): 341.

5 Pak, 'Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin on Romans 5 and 13', 125.

6 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Pauck (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 360; Pak, 'Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin on Romans 5 and 13', 133.

7 David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 201.

8 Pak, 'Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin on Romans 5 and 13', 124–25.

Calvin's concern for authorial intent was also most likely influenced by Augustine's thoughts on the passage. Augustine explained Paul's comments on Christians' relationship to civil government as 'due to his fear that his teaching on Christian liberty might have led some Christians to refuse obedience to secular rulers'.[9]

Calvin's understanding of political authority

In this main section of the paper, I will offer six observations regarding Calvin's conception of political authority that substantiate the important contributions of his commentary on Romans 13 to his broader political theology.

1. For Calvin, civil government is divinely ordained, through the providence of God. Commenting on verse 2, he writes, 'The reason why we ought to be subject to magistrates is, because they are constituted by God's ordination … he who attempts to invert the order of God, and thus resist God himself, despises his power; since to despise the providence of him who is the founder of civil power, is to carry war with him.'[10]

This positive divine ordination (via providence) is not to be confused with the providence of God in ordaining 'pestilence, and famine, and wars, and other visitations of sin'.[11] In clearly and sharply distinguishing the providential ordination of civil government from the providential ordination of sin, Calvin moves away from the early church's understanding. For example, Irenaeus considered the creation of the state to be a result of man's sin,[12] a view also shared by Augustine[13] and further promulgated in the medieval era by Gregory the Great.[14] However, Calvin adds a caveat. Although the inherent ordination of the civil government is intrinsically good, he acknowledges that in some cases, a wicked ruler is put in power so as to be 'the Lord's scourge to punish the sins of the people'. In these cases, 'this excellent blessing of God is turned into a curse.'[15]

Calvin interprets the 'higher powers' in verse 2 as the civil government alone. Among Reformation readings of Romans 13, he thus sides with Thomas de Vio Cardinal Cajetan,[16] Girolamo Cardinal Seripando[17] and Melanchthon. This interpretation of 'higher powers' is opposed to Luther's interpretation of 'higher powers' as both secular (civil government) and spiritual (ecclesiastical authorities),[18] a position that gave Luther justification to address the corruption of the ecclesiastical authorities in his lectures on Romans 13.

---

9 Parsons, 'The Influence of Romans 13', 338.

10 Calvin, *Romans*, 478–79.

11 Calvin, *Romans*, 479.

12 Parsons, 'The Influence of Romans 13', 342; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, lib. 5, c. 24, 1–4.

13 Parsons, 'The Influence of Romans 13 on Christian Political Thought II: Augustine to Hincmar', *Theological Studies* 2 (1941): 328; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 15.

14 Parsons, 'The Influence of Romans 13 II', 338; Gregory, *Moralia in Job*, XXI, 22. Cf. also Gregory, *Regula Pastoralis*, II, 6.

15 Calvin, *Romans*, 480.

16 Thomas de Vio Cardinal Cajetan, *Epistolae Pauli et aliorum* (Paris: Carola Guillard et Jean de Riogny, 1540), 83–85.

17 Girolamo Seripando, *In D. Pauli Epistolae ad Romanos et Galatas Commentaria* (Naples, 1601; rpt. Farnborough, England: Gregg Publishing, 1971), 220–24.

18 Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context,* 201–2.

2. The design of the civil government is intrinsically good. Calvin calls the institution 'noble and salutary'[19] while speaking of its frequent marring through the sin of individuals. Although civil government can be and often is corrupted, an intrinsic nobleness exists within its very design. The goodness of the design of civil government is further seen in the goodness that it brings to those who are present under the government's authority. Calvin writes, 'The Lord has designed in this way to provide for the tranquility of the good, and to restrain the waywardness of the wicked.'[20] In contrast, Luther gives no direct attention to this concept. Given his understanding of 'higher powers' as both secular and spiritual, Luther's discourse on the spiritual 'higher powers' is so negative that one could easily derive the impression that the powers have become altogether corrupt. A preoccupation with the plight of the spiritual 'higher powers' does, however, seem to allow him to paint a better picture of the secular 'higher powers'. This perspective helps Luther to argue for the concept of intrinsic goodness in the design of civil government in his *Lectures on Romans*.[21]

Calvin's view of the intrinsic goodness of the design of civil government is further seen in his discussion of 'tyrannical justice'. Calvin writes, 'Princes do never so far abuse their power, harassing the good and innocent, that they do not retain in their tyranny some kind of just government: there can then be no tyranny which does not in some respects assist in consolidating the society of men.'[22]

Calvin sees an inherent justness in civil government that is immovable, present even in the worst of tyrannies. Even when civil government implements its rule and reign in a destructive way, by virtue of retaining the design ordained by God, the tyranny retains a form of justness. This, prima facie, could seem problematic for Calvin's political thought, but again, nuance is provided. Calvin writes that 'tyrannies and unjust exercise of power, as they are full of disorder, are not an ordained government.'[23] The added dimension of non-ordained tyrannies keeps Calvin clear of the potential charge of absolutism—i.e. of conceiving the civil government as an institution that, irrespective of its outworking, can always be called just. It is possible to have a specific civil government that is not ordained by God and therefore illegitimate and unjust in its work. By virtue of this caveat, Calvin implicitly addresses another potentially problematic question: is a Christian obligated to obey the state in all instances, regardless of the extent to which it has become tyrannical? His answer would be no. Although that answer isn't complete in providing practical prescriptions as to when resistance is justified, it does clear Calvin of the charge of absolutism.

3. The duty (and by implication, the policies) of the civil government fall into two main categories: (1) the promotion and protection of the peace of those who do good, and (2) the restraining and punishing of those who do evil. These two duties come under the single rule or rubric of the 'public good'. Calvin provides a framework for the civil government to understand its duty towards its people: those in

19 Calvin, *Romans,* 480.
20 Calvin, *Romans*, 480.
21 Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 362.
22 Calvin, *Romans,* 480.
23 Calvin, *Romans*, 479.

power do not govern according to their own interest but shape their actions according to the interests of the public. Melanchthon takes a slightly different path here. He agrees with Calvin with regard to the main tasks of the civil government, but he offers a different rubric by which these tasks are to be interpreted. For Melanchthon, the 'flourishing of spiritual matters' is the purpose of the duties, as opposed to the 'public good'.[24] Melanchthon writes, 'God put forth these external matters as opportunities in which faith, calling on God, fear of God, patience, and love might be exercised.'[25] This is partially rooted in Melanchthon's reading of Romans 13 through the law-versus-gospel paradigm.[26]

4. The limit of the civil government is seen in its limited power, duty and ultimate accountability. In interpreting 'higher powers', Calvin notes that these powers are necessarily supreme powers. This has implications for how the civil government should view the extent of its powers. Its limits can be found, he says, in the restrictions placed on their legitimate tasks. The civil government has not been given the right to do that which is outside its divine tasks of upholding peace and restraining evil. The rubric of public good is vitally important in reinforcing this understanding. For example, with regard to taxes, Calvin comments that taxation should not go beyond what serves the public good; thus, he denounces any use of taxes to gratify private indulgences.[27]

The limit of civil government officers' authority is ultimately found in their accountability to God. Calvin writes, 'They are responsible to God and to men in the exercise of their power.'[28] David Steinmetz suggests that this statement makes the civil government, since it is accountable to God, also accountable for any abuses of power.[29]

Calvin's understanding of the civil government's accountability to God is an extension of his unique political theology. The application of the theological concept of 'the Lordship of Christ' to political thought not only permits no separation between religion and state (consistent with the separation of church and state as understood today) but also means that the state is not 'autonomous' since it is accountable to God.[30]

5. Calvin has an appropriately nuanced understanding of the nature of the obedience to be given to the civil government. His initial comments could suggest an absolutist approach to obedience. Calvin goes on to offer a few qualifications on this point, as noted above, but his apparently absolutist position is intentional. He writes,

24 Pak, 'Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin on Romans 5 and 13', 132.

25 Pak, 'Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin on Romans 5 and 13', 142.

26 Pak, 'Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin on Romans 5 and 13', 134. Though both Melanchthon and Calvin use the law-gospel paradigm in their reasoning, they show divergence by way of emphasis and discretion. For more on the contrast between Melanchthon's and Calvin's use of the law-gospel paradigm, see I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1992), 158; Michael S. Horton, 'Calvin and the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic', *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997): 32; Thomas K. Johnson, *Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures*, vol. 2: *Culture, Hermeneutics, Natural Law, Islam, and Missions* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2022), 35–37.

27 Calvin, *Romans*, 483.

28 Calvin, *Romans,* 481.

29 Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 205.

30 Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology: A New Introduction* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), 64–65.

'It is remarkable, that often in Scripture things are stated broadly and without qualifying terms, and yet they have limits, as it is clear from other portions. This peculiarity is worthy of notice.'[31]

The basis for obedience in Calvin's commentary is utilitarian. This utilitarian basis begins with a grammatical parsing of verse 3, referring to the causative *gar* (for),[32] and it consists principally in the duties of the civil government—'the tranquillity of the good, and to retrain the waywardness of the wicked'.[33]

Calvin appears to be influenced by Chrysostom in the formulation of this utilitarian basis. Chrysostom, too, bases the obligation of obedience upon the utility of the civil government 'for the sake of order, justice, and the general good'.[34] Melanchthon takes a different approach to providing a basis for obedience to the civil government, anchoring it in reason and natural law;[35] however, Calvin considers Melanchthon's position to be in 'the realm of vain curiosity'.[36] This is because Calvin finds Melanchthon's view neither necessary nor useful.

What about obedience to tyrannies? We must first acknowledge the way in which Calvin frames his approach to this issue. Since he accepts that Paul writes in broad terms, Calvin is confident in asserting that 'He [Paul] does not enter into the subject of tyranny and oppression. And this is probably the reason why he does not set limits to the obedience required: he contemplated no other than the proper and legitimate use of power.'[37] Calvin then offers qualifications that would suggest a place for legitimate civil disobedience, but he first wants to acknowledge the textual requirements of Romans 13 in its broad statements. For example, as shown elsewhere in Scripture, obedience is not to be given when it requires disobeying the will of God. Additionally, Calvin asserts that some tyrannies are not ordained by God and therefore do not have the right to claim the divine authority that would call the people to be subject to them; in such a case, disobeying the civil government would not constitute opposing God.

6. The civil government has rights, which are divinely given. God's ordination of government is not just with respect to its existence, but to its *right* to exist. This right carries with it an implicit right of authority, in contrast to Calvin's assessment of the private individual who does not hold the right to take away the government's authority since it is derived from God's ordination.[38] Calvin's lack of clarity regarding the nature of the individual's relationship to the government could pose problems in cases of tyranny. Are there no instances in which individuals can justifiably seek to remove a government's authority? We have seen that Calvin is nuanced in his

31 Calvin, *Romans,* 478.
32 Calvin, *Romans*, 480.
33 Calvin, *Romans*, 480.
34 Parsons, 'The Influence of Romans 13', 356; Chrysostom, *Homily 21 on Empire, Power, and Glory*.
35 Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context,* 202; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed. T. H. L. Parker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 285; see also Melanchthon, *Römerbrief-Kommentar 1532*, ed. Rolf Schäfer, in *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl 5* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1965).
36 Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context,* 206.
37 Calvin, *Romans,* 478.
38 Calvin, *Romans*, 482.

understanding of unjust governments, sometimes asserting that in certain cases unjust governments are not the result of the ordination of God; however, the absence of detail and examples leaves much to be answered.

Calvin illustrates the government's right of existence and, by implication, authority by discussing its other rights, such as to use force.[39] Again, he does not go into precise detail, but these rights can be seen in the government's entitlement to punish the wicked.[40] In keeping with his brief comments on rights, Calvin asserts the right of government to collect taxes and tributes, without discussing how much is lawful or when the amount taken becomes a form of tyranny.[41] In contrast, Melanchthon delves into the details, even commenting on matters of 'enforceable contracts, and litigation'.[42] It is likely that Calvin's exegetical method kept him away from proposing more contemporary applications as Melanchthon did.

Conclusion

These observations regarding Calvin's political theology in his commentary on Romans 13:1–7 offer unique insights into the influence of Augustine, the early church fathers and Renaissance humanism on his exegetical method and his political theology. Since the purpose of his commentary is markedly different from that of the *Institutes*, Calvin stays within a narrow field of topical discourse. His discussion around the design of government in the commentary is useful in helping us understand book 4, chapter 20, section 7 of the *Institutes*, where he discusses the need to recognize the civil government even in the context of its potentially 'coercive character'.[43] It can thus be argued that Calvin's commentary on Romans 13:1–7 offers distinctive and practically significant nuances or clarifications of his broader political theology.

39 Calvin, *Romans*, 481.
40 Calvin, *Romans*, 481.
41 Calvin, *Romans*, 483.
42 Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context,* 204.
43 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 968–88.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 60–62

Poetry and Theology

D. S. Martin

If you are wondering what poetry has to do with theology, you may recall—even before you finish reading this sentence—that much of the Bible is written in the form of poetry. Why might that be? One answer may suggest itself through what Welsh poet and clergyman R. S. Thomas once wrote: 'Poetry is that / which arrives at the intellect / by way of the heart.' Poetry may seem to be a less direct way of speaking, but it is more direct in touching the affective, relational part of you; it is the language of the heart for those who have ears to hear. And Christ's parables are among his many poetic utterances.

Poems often engage in conversation with earlier poems—such as with the Psalms, or lines from familiar hymns. The two poems included in this issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* are from a series of poems inspired by poets from the past. In the same way that you may appreciate reading someone's thoughts on sayings from one of the desert fathers whose writings you have not read, you may enter these poems having no familiarity with the works alluded to.

I have recently been immersing myself in the 17th-century metaphysical poets, of whom George Herbert and John Donne (both Anglican clerics) are the most famous. This has led to writing many new, and hopefully fresh, poems of my own.

My poem 'Frame' relates to what a fairly obscure poet, Joseph Beaumont (1616–1699), wrote in his poem 'The House of the Mind'. It is not necessary to check out Beaumont's poem to read my new one, and might even be more of an academic exercise to do so; even so, I want to give credit where credit is due for a lesser-known writer such as Beaumont. It is also of no consequence if readers do not catch my allusion to Walt Whitman in the seventh stanza; that's more of a treat for poetry geeks like me. The poem is designed to draw the reader into thinking about their human bodies in a certain way, as a setup for spiritual truth; this, however, is not all it does.

Similarly, my poem 'Curved Beauty' also rises out of an earlier masterpiece, this time a famous poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889). The connection between the two poems may be effective only for those who already know Hopkins's piece, and might merely be a distraction for others. Obviously I encourage you to read his poetry because it is well worth reflecting upon, but my poem, I believe, can stand on its own.

Since much of the Bible is written in the form of poetry, it is profitable for Christians to become familiar with how poetry works, to help them understand Scripture. Besides this, the reading of Christian poetry is a spiritual discipline which opens us

D. S. Martin is Poet-in-Residence at McMaster Divinity College. Canada. His most recently published book is *Angelicus* (Wipf & Stock, 2021), a poetry collection written from the point of view of angels. For more of his work, visit his weekly blog, Kingdom Poets (https://kingdom-poets.blogspot.com) and his website (https://dsmartin.ca).

to valuable ways of thinking. I would be honoured if I might influence readers to make this part of their spiritual practice.

Frame

with a tip of the hat to Joseph Beaumont

My human frame
though small when compared
with rhinos & hippos

contains some sixty thousand
miles of vessels
circulating blood

That's twice the Earth's girth
worth of skinny tubes
Although as my body's

most obvious tenant I find
it's far larger on the inside
than it might otherwise seem

an ocean the rivers
can never fill a vastness
the whole world never will

My mind holds near & distant cities
& various landscapes preserving
their moods

& my heart since it swells
with contradictions
contains multitudes

Ignore the outward appearance
Within these fleshy temple walls
mysteriously the Infinite dwells

Curved Beauty

The seeds of geometry as seen through flowers
& hives through webs & shells suggest
possibilities beyond themselves almost made manifest
for the perfectly straight infinite line described by Mister Singh
in Math class

doesn't exist Even a sunbeam starts with the sun
& either fades or is broken & what seems straight
admits variance the horizon line the shaft of a feather
the bowing branch the bending river none of which
goes on forever

Glory be to God for the dance of willows in the wind
the swerve & swoop of swallows in flight the arc
of a crescent moon the curve of a tusk the crook in a brook
the undulations in sand dunes the refractions
& reflections of light

ERT (2024) 48:1, 63–67

The Case for Creative Cultural Engagement

Ted Turnau

What can Christians do in contexts where the culture seems to be moving away from the gospel? Ted Turnau, an expert on engagement with popular culture, argues—starting, appropriately, with a creative parable—for unleashing our imagination in ways that enchant others and attract them to oases of the imagination.

The parable of the oasis that was really a portal to another universe

Once upon a time, there was a traveller who habitually trekked throughout a dry and hostile land. It didn't bother him much, for it was all he knew. One day he saw in the distance a patch of greenery. That much colour in a land of unbroken dust-brown enticed him, and he set out for it. As he drew closer, the patch of green revealed more detail to him. This was a place of tall trees, lush undergrowth, and wildflowers.

He entered into the shade. In the centre of the oasis, he found a still pool of crystal-clear water.

But he found he was not alone, for there was a man across the pool from him, staring intently at the bottom of the pool.

The traveller inquired why the man was staring so. Perhaps he had seen a fish. 'No', the man replied. 'No fish. Something more remarkable. See for yourself.'

The traveller stared intently and saw something glimmering at the bottom of the pool. It might have been simply the shimmering sunlight refracted onto the rocks below. But no, it was something more. He couldn't see it clearly, but he found the light mesmerizing. It fascinated him in a way he could not put into words.

He cautiously asked the man across the pool about the glimmering light, what he thought it was. They talked about it until the sky grew dark and it was time for the traveller to move on.

But he was so intrigued that he came back the next day, both to gaze into the pool and to continue his conversation with the stranger. The stranger had brought food, and so they shared a meal together as they continued talking, sharing ideas and theories about the mysterious light at the bottom of the pool. The traveller resolved to return again the next day. And so he did. This became his habit for some time.

Ted Turnau (PhD, Westminster Seminary, USA) is Chair of Arts, Culture, and Literature at Anglo-American University in Prague, Czech Republic, where he teaches on culture, media, religion and social theory. He is author of four books including *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective*. This essay is excerpted with permission from the introduction to his book *Oasis of Imagination: Engaging Our World through a Better Creativity* (IVP-UK, 2023).

Gradually, he found that he had become more and more dissatisfied with the dry and hostile land. He much preferred the cool shade of the oasis and the company offered there. Eventually, the stranger lost his strangeness and became a trusted friend and discussion partner.

And all the while, the light at the bottom of the pool came more and more into focus, as if someone were adjusting a hidden lens. Whole cities full of light and life began to take shape before his unbelieving eyes. The traveller knew it was impossible, for cities do not reside at the bottom of ordinary pools. Nevertheless, he continued to study the image. He sensed in it a piercing beauty that entranced and drew him magnetically, almost more than he could bear. He loved his time gazing into the pool. And yet he felt a profound sadness, for the light stirred in him deep grief as well as deep gladness.

It became increasingly obvious that this was no ordinary pool. It was rather a doorway to another world, another way of being. It also became clear that the man who had been a stranger and was now his friend had in effect become his guide. It was only a matter of time before the traveller would take the plunge to the bottom of the pool to begin the most improbable, miraculous journey he could have ever imagined.

Why we need oases

How are we to relate to and contribute to a culture largely estranged from Christ? How do we invite in those who have grown accustomed to the desert?

Culture is a conversation. Creative culture-making can help the Christian church enter into and contribute to this conversation in ways that build bridges, ways that heal rifts, even in a world that might no longer welcome Christian commitments.

Christian cultural creativity done well creates 'oases' for the imagination. Oases are open, porous spaces that invite the stranger in—spaces that refresh the soul, provoke conversation, challenge assumptions, and lead the imagination to a new place. The landscape today is littered with false oases, spiritual paths that lead to shallow, toxic pools that lead nowhere.[1] Most in the West are no longer enchanted by the gospel. They are enchanted by something, anything else.

Our world needs Christian creatives who can plant true oases.

Our world needs churches that understand and can draw alongside its creatives to support and encourage those planting oases.

Theologically conservative Christians have spent too much time and energy either fighting non-Christian culture (culture warring), withdrawing into safe spaces (the 'Christian bubble'), or just trying to keep their heads above water spiritually.

1 I recommend two fascinating studies of the current US spiritual landscape. Tara Isabella Burton presents a landscape dominated by intuition-driven, made-to-order spiritualities (what she calls the 'Religious Remixed') in *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2020). She argues persuasively that the decline in American institutional religions does not mean that religion *per se* is disappearing. Rather, faith commitments are being displaced into other forms. Religion isn't something that evaporates from human life; it shape-shifts into more culturally acceptable forms. Pastor David Zahl, in *Seculosity: How Career, Parenting, Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do about It* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), argues that even secular pursuits can be invested with a religious weight—by them we hope to achieve 'enoughness', a sense that our existence means something. But these secular religions simply place us on hamster wheels—achievement anxiety without end, amen and amen.

There is a better path forward. And every Christian—artistically gifted or not—has a part to play.

But have we played our part? If culture is a shared conversation that runs between and through us, many Christians simply try to opt out, or try to force the conversation one way or another. If culture is a piece of music, some Christians seem terribly tone deaf. Our musical ear for culture-making shapes how the surrounding culture sees the Christian faith, as beautiful or ugly. The Christian church in the post-Christian West is in danger of defaulting on its aesthetic calling. You might never have thought of the church as having an 'aesthetic calling', a responsibility not only to proclaim truth but to show its beauty. That's part of the problem.

Thomas à Kempis, the medieval writer of *The Imitation of Christ,* wrote, 'All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace.'[2] We all long for the Christian faith to be seen as beautiful. We all desire oases for the imagination. We need to seek out ways to encourage those things that make for oases, that make for a powerful and beautiful aesthetic witness.

Oases engage cultural hopes and fears, building bridges into the inner lives of those far from Christ, as well as those struggling with their faith in Christ. I teach university classes in culture, media, social theory, worldview and religion. I hear the questions and struggles of my students. University is an odd time of life, a dress rehearsal for adulthood. Many students wrestle with questions like these: 'How much may I hope? What childhood dreams must I release? What can I realistically expect out of life? What will my desires—for myself, my loved ones, my world—come to?' The answers the world has to offer often prove empty.

These questions linger far beyond graduation. I am old enough to understand the midlife crisis. I didn't really want the expensive sports car or extramarital affair that stereotypically goes with midlife crises. But I do understand the restlessness that comes with catching sight of one's own death. Life is so brief. What is left for me? Now that I'm closer to the grave than to the cradle, what have my life and aspirations amounted to? Has it been worth it? In what may I still hope? Where does my true home lie?

This is the human condition: chained to desires we cannot presently fulfil, unsure if we may realistically hope they ever will be. The Germans call this *Sehnsucht,* a yearning for an unknown far-off country that is our truest home.[3] Well-made, well-planted oases raise questions, summon hopes, and reveal possible paths homeward. They stir desire for something better.

And desire is the engine that shapes what I call the 'imaginary landscape', the aspirations and anxieties that lie back of cultural works.[4] Oases can set up resonances

2 Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ,* book 3, chapter 25.

3 On *Sehnsucht* and the longing for home that drove the younger brother in Jesus' parable and still drives us, see Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 92–95.

4 Readers may notice a similarity to Charles Taylor's concept of 'social imaginary', broadly shared background assumptions about reality that make beliefs plausible or implausible. 'Imaginary

within the musical conversation of culture, giving people ears for something richer than the tired old tunes they are used to.

The things that make for oases: imagination

So what are these 'things that make for oases' that lead to positive contributions to the cultural conversation? The key ingredient is imagination. Here is a brief working definition:

> *The imagination is a human power that orients us—mind and body—in the world and through which we perceive and create. It orients us both individually and collectively, so we can speak of a 'collective imagination' or 'imaginary landscape'. The imagination inspires us to create, and it also colours our experience of the world and our assumptions about reality. The imagination mediates: we shape our world through it, and through it our world shapes us.*

Think of the imagination as a permeable filter between us and the world. But unlike, say, a coffee filter, this filter is active, dynamic, flowing. It shapes our sense of place in the world, our identity, who we are, or think we are. It can shape oases, true and false. And it is shaped by oases, true and false.

Imagination is always in conversation with faith (or unfaith). Each informs the other. The playground of the imagination is the place where issues of belief and unbelief are decided. Faith struggles are often less intellectual than aesthetic and imaginative, less about arguments and evidence, more about imaginary horizons inherited from culture. We dwell within those horizons, and what lies beyond feels literally beyond belief. For this reason alone, the imaginative and aesthetic witness of Christians matters greatly.

Christians need to develop a better understanding of imagination and what it does so that our communities can live robust imaginative lives as they encourage and support those who plant oases. These creative cultural works form imaginary worlds that welcome both Christians and non-Christians in for refreshment, recalibration, and conversation. Creative cultural involvement is all about using the imagination to construct worlds for both the church and the common good, reversing spiritual confusion and 'desertification' of our post-Christian world.[5]

We should be exploring questions such as these: How can we, in this day and age, best enter our cultural conversation for the common good? What kinds of imagination are best suited to creatively expressing the Christian faith (in all its stunning, multifaceted glory) in a culture that is both suspicious and tired of the Christian faith? How can we set creatives free by encouraging and supporting those who plant oases?

---

landscape' is more focused on how individual creative cultural works penetrate our shared (and fragmented) cultural consciousness. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 23–25. For a good summary of the social imaginary, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 65–68.

5 As indicated in note 1 above, when a society becomes disenchanted with the gospel, it becomes enchanted with other things. For a detailed study of what this looks like in the West, see Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Christian cultural creativity could become a game-changer and a productive step away from complacency, the divisive culture wars, and the self-protective bubble-Christianity so common now. We can create communities of imaginative flourishing that radiate healing light out into the broader culture.

Becoming a part of the cultural conversation in a way that builds bridges rather than erects walls is necessary work.[6] This conversation shapes our shared imaginary landscape, our shared cultural narratives, hopes, fears, and desires. If we do not enter in and contribute in a meaningful, healing way that resonates past our own communities, we have no right to complain when the imaginary landscape becomes a desert, or becomes choked with weeds that tangle people, will o' the wisps and enchantments that lead away from God into quicksand. Like nature, the imaginary landscape abhors a vacuum. In the absence of a winsome, honest Christian creativity, it will inevitably become enchanted by other things, other visions of the world.[7] Like Jesus' parable about the formerly demon-possessed man whose house is 'swept clean' (Lk 11:24–26), the collective imagination never stays unoccupied for long.

Consider the call to contribute imaginatively to the cultural conversation as part of the privilege of serving as ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:14–21). For Christ's love compels us to rethink how we use and enjoy the imagination so that we might connect with non-Christian friends and neighbours more deeply, that the gospel might shine all the brighter. We will also learn how to love and serve our Christian brothers and sisters more fully. Along the way, we ourselves are richly blessed, surrounded by imaginatively robust Christian communities. Contributing creative cultural works that resonate in our shared culture (oasis-planting) isn't just about loving and serving others. It is about being fully and joyfully human, alive to all the wonder that God has woven into this world around us.

6 Of course the gospel will remain a stumbling block and foolishness for many (see 1 Cor 1:23). But cultural insensitivity makes the stumbling block worse and makes the gospel look *more* foolish and repugnant. That does not honour Christ.

7 Because our current cultures are so fragmented, it would be more accurate to talk in terms of competing imaginary *landscapes*. But mapping the multitude of post-Christian landscapes is a challenging and complex work. In any case, the calling of the Christian imagination is the same: engage in a way that refreshes, encourages, challenges, and creates space for conversation.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 68–85

The Parable of the Vineyard Workers and Migrant Labourers in India

Esa J. Autero

Despite its simple story line, the parable of the vineyard workers (Mt 20:1–16) is difficult to interpret. This article compares the parable to a contemporary setting with remarkable similarities—the experience of India's migrant workers. The comparison yields new insights into this parable and challenges churches to work for God's justice in India and elsewhere.

Over 90 percent of India's labourers work in the informal sector.[1] Many of them are migrants who moved from villages to cities in search of work and livelihood. Others have escaped caste discrimination, religious violence or natural disasters. It is estimated that around 300,000 people gather every morning in Mumbai's *nakas* (street corners) in search of work.[2] Some are picked up while others wait hours each day without any employment. Many women resort to sexual favours to secure employment or engage in prostitution either intermittently or permanently.

What hope does Christian faith offer, if any, for day labourers in Mumbai's slums, or in other megacities around the world? What does the Scripture say about their plight? Does it offer something of substance to them or for believers in their midst? What does it mean to read the New Testament in the context of vulnerability, poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and threats of violence?

Biblical scholars (predominantly in the West) have produced enormous amounts of commentaries and articles in recent decades. This scholarship focuses almost exclusively on the historical, literary and linguistic aspects of biblical texts. Unfortunately, much of the material, especially in evangelical commentaries, reproduces or rehashes existing scholarship. There are precious few that consider wider

Esa J. Autero (DTh, University of Helsinki) is dean and professor of biblical studies at South Florida Bible College and Seminary, Deerfield Beach, Florida, USA. A native of Finland, he has taught in various Bible colleges and seminaries in Asia and Latin America. This article is abridged and slightly revised from the version that appeared in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 66, no. 1 (March 2023): 91–111.

1 J. John, 'COVID-19: Apparent Oddities in the Articulation of Rights of Migrant Workers', *NCC Review* 140, no. 4 (May 2020): 11–22; see also Deepak K. Mishra, 'Introduction: Internal Migration in Contemporary India—An Overview of Issues and Concerns', in *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*, ed. Deepak K. Mishra (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 7–8.

2 Svati Shah, *Street Corner Secrets: Sex, Work, and Migration in the City of Mumbai* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 44.

hermeneutical perspectives or pressing issues of today,[3] especially those of interest to the wider global Christian community.[4]

This article reads the parable of the vineyard workers (Mt 20:1–16) in dialogue with the plight of migrant labourers in India. I hope to contribute to the conversation concerning the interpretation of this parable, the present-day appropriation of the Bible generally, and missional implications of the church's role among migrants and day labourers in India and beyond.

First, I present the major interpretative paradigms of Matthew 20:1–16 and the methodological approach used in this article. The next section explores internal migration in India, followed by an exegetical investigation of Matthew 20:1–16. The final section explores the message of the parable in dialogue with the experiences of Mumbai's migrant workers and draws theological and practical implications for the church and society.

Interpretive paradigms of Matthew 20:1–16

Hermeneutical perspectives

Klyde Snodgrass states that the parable of the vineyard workers is one of the most difficult parables to interpret.[5] According to him, there are seven main options espoused by recent scholarship, as well as a number of nuances within each.[6]

The parable was commonly allegorized among church fathers and up to medieval times.[7] Ulrich Luz calls this interpretation the soteriological-allegorical paradigm.[8] Irenaeus, for example, saw the parable as an allegory of history of salvation. In his view, the day represented all of history, the landowner the triune God, the denarius eternal life, the vineyard the church, and so on (*Adv. Haer*. 4.36.7). From Origen onward, the hours were associated with epochs in the history of salvation.

3 There are some notable exceptions, such as Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); M. Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013); Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018), 485–505. Most commentaries or standard introductions do not demonstrate concern with these topics.

4 Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For a survey of Latin American hermeneutics, see Esa Autero, *Reading the Bible across Contexts: Luke's Gospel, Socio-Economic Marginality, and Latin American Biblical Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 9–48; for a brief survey of global hermeneutics, see Esa Autero, 'Seeing the New Testament through Asian Eyes', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 46, no. 2 (2022): 180–84.

5 Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), Kindle loc. 8157.

6 Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 8339–62.

7 J. M. Tevel, 'The Labourers in the Vineyard: The Exegesis of Matthew 20:1–7 in the Early Church', *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 356–80; Ulrich Luz, *El evangelio según San Mateo: Mt 18–25*, vol. 3, trans. Manuel O. Gaztelumendi (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 2003), 185–202; Francis J. Caponi, 'Thomas Aquinas on the Parable of the Late-Come Workers (Matt 20:1–16)', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12, no. 1 (2018): 100–107.

8 Luz, *El evangelio según San Mateo*, 202; similarly Tevel, 'The Labourers in the Vineyard', 358.

The first comers were the Jews, and Christians were the last.[9] These interpretations do not comport well with the Matthean text. Rather, they were 'new paradigms' made possible by the sense of the presence of the living Christ in the new situations.[10]

The Reformers largely continued to allegorize the parable. According to Luther, the first workers were priests and nuns who served for pay whereas the eleventh-hour workers represented those who served with joy. Calvin, on the other hand, repudiated boasting on the part of the faithful as he emphasized God's goodness and sovereign election of those who lacked good works.[11] The Reformation works-versus-faith paradigm was often applied salvation-historically to mean that first workers were Jews (from Adam to Jesus) and the eleventh-hour workers Gentiles.[12] Unfortunately, this interpretation took on anti-Jewish tendencies. Judaism was caricatured as a works-based religion in contrast to the unmerited grace of Christianity.[13]

In contrast, Catholic interpreters defended the idea of reward. Giving the same pay for unequal work, as depicted in the parable, was considered problematic. As a result, scholars saw superior interior motives and greater faith in the last-hour workers.[14] The debate over works versus faith and the problem of just reward is still present in today's scholarship. Many commentaries address these issues at least in passing; others have written full-length articles on it.[15]

Adolf Jülicher (1857–1938) is usually credited with moving the scholarship away from allegorizing. His approach to parables was to identify one main point for each parable.[16] However, many have justifiably criticized him for an overly rigid approach. Therefore, today it is more common to see parables as extended metaphors that may contain allegorical elements.[17]

Many recent scholars have identified the vineyard owner with God (or Jesus), usually because of the OT background (e.g. Isa 5:1–7; Jer 12:10) and/or narrative

9 Joachim Jeremias, *Las parabolas de Jesus*, 3rd ed., trans. Francisco J. Calvo (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1974), 37–38; Tevel, 'The Labourers in the Vineyard', 356–63. Origen, however, did not think that the Jews lost their salvation as a result, just that the Gentiles received it last. See Luz, *El evangelio según Mateo*, 201–2.

10 Luz, *El evangelio según Mateo*, 202.

11 John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Ethereal Library, n.d.), 347–50.

12 This view is evident also among the church fathers. Tevel, 'The Labourers in the Vineyard', 356–80.

13 Luz, *El evangelio según Mateo*, 185–87.

14 Luz, *El evangelio según Mateo*, 188–89. Aquinas also tried to reconcile merit, justice and the grace of God. See Caponi, 'Thomas Aquinas', 90–109.

15 See e.g. Jeremias, *Las parabolas de Jesus*, 41–42; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 751; Craig L. Blomberg, 'Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35, no. 2 (1992), 159–72; Caponi, 'Thomas Aquinas', 90–109.

16 See e.g. Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 13.

17 Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 13–14; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 706–76.

connections between the uses of 'good' (*agathos*) in both 19:17 and 20:15.[18] According to this perspective, God is good, merciful, and generous with varying emphases. He, like the landowner in the parable, gives the eleventh-hour workers full pay regardless of the time spent in the vineyard.[19] God's goodness and mercy are often compared with negative human qualities or works. Some of the most common are Jewish legalism and merit-seeking,[20] envy[21] or injustice.[22] The parable is variously seen as directed at the Pharisees or Jewish leaders, the disciples or Jesus's original peasant audience.[23]

In Ernesto Cardenal's Bible study, Latin American popular readers from the ecclesial base community (Nicaragua)[24] were divided in their opinion about the meaning of the parable. Despite the group's Marxist leanings,[25] only one participant thought that the landowner's payment was unjust.[26] The majority viewed the landowner positively because he paid "not according to work [done] but according to needs."[27]

Scholars within the social-scientific paradigm attempt to situate the parable concretely within Palestinian social realities.[28] For this purpose, they draw from ancient Mediterranean anthropology, ancient papyri and archaeology, in addition to Jewish and Greco-Roman sources.[29] Despite the reluctance to identify the vineyard owner with God, some admit the close connection between the two, either in Matthew's

18 E.g. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 570; Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 70–74; Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 483; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 34–46; Luz, *El evangelio según Mateo*, 195–97; Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), Kindle loc. 4281–4410; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 8312, 8390.

19 Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 34–46; Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kindle loc. 4352–81; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 8478–8522.

20 Jeremias, *Las parabolas de Jesus*, 166. Calvin, *Commentary*, 348 also stated that Jews seek salvation by merit, which is impossible.

21 Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 8427–78.

22 Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 42–44.

23 For Pharisees and Jewish leaders, see Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 33–46; for the disciples, see Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 8427; for the peasant audience, see William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1994), 79–97; Erin K. Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity: A Socio-economic Interpretation of the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–15)', *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010), 199–236.

24 Ernesto Cardenal, *El evangelio en Soletiname* (San José: DEI, 1979), 96–98.

25 See Autero, *Reading the Bible across Contexts*, 10–11, 21, 84.

26 He said that 'he [the landowner] was robbing everyone, because he should have given them profits, not just a payment.' Nevertheless, the unnamed individual adds that the parable is really about God's love, not money.

27 Cardenal, *El evangelio en Soletiname*, 96–98.

28 For the social-scientific paradigm and the parables, see especially Ernest van Eck, 'Interpreting the Parables of the Galilean Jesus: A Social-Scientific Approach', *HTS Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 1–12, doi: 10.4102v65i1.308; see also Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'; Van Eck and Kloppenborg, 'An Unexpected Patron'.

29 Others prefer to use sociological and anthropological models; see e.g. John H. Elliott, 'Matthew 20:1–15: A Parable of Invidious Comparison and Evil Eye Accusation', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22, no. 52 (1992): 52–65.

literary context or in the parable's original setting.[30] Erin Vearncombe's sophisticated study proposes that the parable's focus is on the reversal of worldly values and criticism of the prevailing socioeconomic system. This is seen particularly in the way that the landowner demonstrates reciprocal solidarity with the labourers.[31]

Brad Young's reading prioritizes rabbinic parables and sees them as an indispensable interpretative grid.[32] He correctly repudiates interpreters (including the Reformers) who mischaracterize rabbinic teachings as monolithic and merit-based.[33] From a slightly different angle, Kenneth Bailey reads the parable in light of Middle Eastern cultural realities, drawing from early Arabic interpreters and present-day cultural patterns (e.g. day labourers outside the Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem), in addition to ancient Jewish perspectives.[34] Bailey highlights the unusual kindness of the landowner (God) and his generosity to the eleventh-hour workers.

Finally, Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole aims to read the parable across contexts, or interculturally. According to him, 'intercultural exegesis [is] an attempt to understand different meanings of a biblical text while interacting' with the original context, canonical perspectives, church/theological traditions and present-day contexts.[35] His particular focus is to search for 'a right biblical paradigm for alleviating poverty, empowering the poor, and promoting justice' in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where 'talk about "right wages" is a daydream.'[36] For him the focus of the parable is 'another level of justice … which consists of granting more than what he or she deserves' and working courageously to help the poor and furthering God's kingdom on earth.[37]

Reading strategy and methodology

Many biblical scholars acknowledge that parables by virtue of their genre are multivalent and open to more than one interpretation.[38] Anthony Thiselton has pointed out that narratives in general and parables in particular function as story worlds into which readers or hearers are invited. They do not convey 'self-evident truths' but rather have the potential to establish, affirm or subvert existing traditions and thought patterns.[39] As such, parables are 'open' and 'suggestive' rather than precise

30 Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'; Van Eck and Kloppenborg, 'An Unexpected Patron'.

31 Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'.

32 Brad H. Young, *The Parables*, 3–38.

33 Young, *The Parables*, 76–81.

34 Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kindle loc. 4281–4414.

35 Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, 'Beyond Just Wages: An Intercultural Analysis of Matthew 20:1–16', *Journal of Early Christian History* 4, no: 1 (2014): 113–29, esp. 113–14.

36 Loba-Mkole, 'Beyond Just Wages', 113, 117.

37 Loba-Mkole, 'Beyond Just Wages', 126–29.

38 Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 114–20; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 35–59, 331–35; Van Eck, 'Interpreting the Parables of the Galilean Jesus', 10. For Thiselton's nuanced conclusion, see especially *Hermeneutics*, 58–59; also Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 14–17; W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 148–53.

39 Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 566–75.

and predetermined.[40] They are invitations to think anew about God's rule. In light of parables' inherent ambiguity and polyvalence, I hope to exploit the narrative gaps and meaning potential to engage with the realities of India's migrant workers.

In addition to modern critical methods, I use migration hermeneutics as a critical lens to foreground the realities of India's vulnerable migrants as dialogue partners with the biblical text. The principal source of information for the plight of India's migrant workers is Svati P. Shah's ethnographic study of the day labourers on *nakas* (street corners) in Mumbai.[41] I hope that reading the parable together with narratives of vulnerable migrants as mediated by Shah (and others) will enable one to hear both in a new light.

Finally, biblical scholars generally acknowledge that entering the world of the New Testament is a cross-cultural experience. Nevertheless, when interpretation involves self-consciously intercultural appropriation of biblical texts in a context other than one's own, new interpretive difficulties emerge. Since the present article includes multiple cultural contexts and horizons, I follow the path laid out by Cosgrove, Weiss and Yeo,[42] who read Paul not only through the lens of their own culture but also of a culture not their own.[43] Having written previously about the Indian context,[44] I endeavour to be sympathetic to Indian sociocultural realities while acknowledging my status as an outsider. Nevertheless, I am hopeful that an outsider perspective may also contribute something of value or at least give a different perspective on critical issues related to Indian religious and social realities.

Aside from critical self-awareness, I am convinced that hermeneutics is not just an intellectual endeavour but a spiritual exercise that involves careful listening to God's Spirit. He can not only bridge the historico-cultural gap between the 'then' and 'now' (whatever one's location may be) but also guide in the process of appropriating the text in new sociocultural contexts.

Internal migration in India

According to the *India Migration Report*, as of 2011 there were approximately 309 million *internal* migrants in India.[45] Most of these are intra-district migrants who do

40 Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 333. However, it is important to keep in mind that parables are not one-size-fits-all (see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 58–59).

41 Svati P. Shah, *Street Corner Secrets: Sex, Work, and Migration in the City of Mumbai* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

42 Charles H. Cosgrove, Herold Weiss and K. K. Yeo, *Cross-Cultural Paul: Journeys to Others, Journeys to Ourselves* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1–32. See also Hand de Wit et al., *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (Vrije Universiteit: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004).

43 Cosgrove et al., *Cross-Cultural Paul*, 1–32.

44 Esa Autero, 'The Book of Acts', in *An Asian Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. Johnson Thomaskutty (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), 157–82.

45 R. B. Bhagat, 'Internal Migration in India: Are the Underclass More Mobile?' in *Migration, Identity, and Conflict: India Migration Report 2011*, ed. S. Irudaya Rajan (London: Routledge, 2011), 33–34. See also Deepak K. Mishra, *Internal Migration in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016). Estimates vary somewhat.

not cross state lines.[46] However, interstate migration has continued to increase at a rapid pace particularly since India's economic liberalization in 1991.[47] The majority of internal migrants move out of poverty-stricken and less developed states (especially Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) to more developed areas (Maharashtra, Haryana, Delhi, Punjab and Gujarat).[48] Great numbers of migrants come from rural areas and move into the great metropolitan areas of Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore in hopes of jobs and better livelihood.[49] While many migrate to cities to escape gruelling poverty, hunger and lack of clean water, others are forced to move as a result of natural disasters, communal violence or environmental factors.[50]

India's interstate migration is relatively small due to a number of obstacles that migrants face, including cultural and linguistic differences across states. Crossing a state border puts migrants in a condition of vulnerability similar to that of international refugees.[51] Both generally lack a social protection net at their destination. Interstate migrants often lose access to state-administered social services and programs.[52] Despite the recently developed Federal Aadhar system designed to give India's internal migrants access to various services regardless of their place of origin, many interstate migrants are unable to access it. They do not know how to take advantage of it or lack proper documentation. In fact, many poor migrants from rural areas do not have a documented place of residence anywhere.[53]

Despite the Emigration Act (1983) and the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act (1979)—the most important legislation concerning internal migration in India—many migrants remain highly vulnerable.[54] This is particularly the case for seasonal and circular migrants.[55] They usually work for short periods in construction, brick

46 According to R. B. Bhagat, 'Nature of Migration and Its Contribution to India's Urbanization', in *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*, ed. Deepak K. Mishra (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 35, only 15 percent of migrants crossed state boundaries.

47 Bhagat, 'Internal Migration in India', 34–38, indicates a 54 percent increase in interstate migration between 1991 and 2001 compared to previous decades.

48 Bhagat, 'Internal Migration in India', 35–40.

49 Bhagat, 'Internal Migration in India', 35–40. See also Arup Mitra and Mayumi Murayama, 'Rural-to-Urban Migration in India: A District-Level Analysis', in Rajan, ed., *Migration, Identity, and Conflict*, 55–89.

50 Ranabir Samaddar, *The Postcolonial Age of Migration* (London: Routledge, 2020), 95–102, 111–24; Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 9–14, 58–60, 414–16; Autero, 'New Testament Interpretation'.

51 Babu P. Remesh, 'Migration and Marginalization: A Study of North East Migrants in Delhi', in *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*, ed. Deepak K. Mishra (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 71–95; Samaddar, *The Postcolonial Age*, 97–102, 104–7.

52 Hamsa Vijayaraghavan, 'Gaps in India's Treatment of Refugees and Vulnerable Internal Migrants Are Exposed by the Pandemic', Migration Policy Institute, 10 September 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/48114.

53 Anjali Borhade, 'Internal Labour Migration in India: Emerging Needs of Comprehensive National Migration Policy', in *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*, ed. Deepak K. Mishra (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 295–306.

54 N. R. Madhava Menon, 'Can the Licensing-Inspection Mechanism Deliver Justice to Interstate Migrant Workmen?' in Rajan, ed., *Migration, Identity, and Conflict*, 108–11; Borhade, 'Internal Labour Migration in India'.

55 Circular migrants temporarily and repeatedly move between their home and host areas. The movement usually coincides with established migratory patterns and agricultural and other seasonal cycles.

kilns, stone quarries, fisheries and various agricultural activities. They are mostly poor, unskilled workers from scheduled tribes and castes (ST/SC),[56] which are the lowest segments of Indian society. Some scholars estimate the number of seasonal migrants at around 10 million, though Indian census and migration reports cannot capture real figures due to these migrants' high level of mobility.[57]

India's state governments have not, for the most part, implemented laws or even enforced existing ones to protect vulnerable migrants, including women and child workers.[58] This is particularly the case with the seasonal migrants, leaving them at the mercy of middlemen and contractors who often take advantage of them.[59]

In many locations, migrants are harassed by the police; access to legal restitution through courts is often impossible due to their lack of access, finances, and patronage or influential friends. Trade unions and labour department officials are seldom interested in the plight of migrant workers.[60] Moreover, poor and unskilled migrant workers are often treated with outright hostility in cities. Local populations fear loss of jobs, so migrants become easy scapegoats for every woe, from deteriorating transportation systems to environmental and sanitation problems.[61] There are numerous reports of violent attacks against migrants by those who fear loss of cultural identity in addition to jobs. Various political parties, such as Shiv Sena and Maharashtra Navanirman Sena (MNS), have used the ensuing polarization between locals and migrants for political gain or even instigated attacks on migrants.[62]

Exegesis of the parable

What does it mean to read the New Testament in the context of vulnerable migrant workers in India? How do the realities of vulnerability, poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and threats of violence influence our reading of Matthew 20:1–16?

The basic story line of the parable is simple. It starts 'For the kingdom of heaven is like' (20:1) and then proceeds to describe a landowner who goes out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard (20:1–2). After hiring some, he returns to the marketplace (20:3) at various intervals and sees workers standing idle. The landowner employs additional workers throughout the day until the late afternoon (20:3–7). At the end of the day, the landowner pays each worker a denarius, regardless of how many hours they have worked (20:8–9). Those who laboured the whole day grumble about the pay, thinking that they should receive more (20:10–12), yet

56 The terms 'scheduled tribes' (ST) and 'scheduled castes' (SC) are official nomenclature used in the Indian Constitution (e.g. Articles 13–16, 342) to refer to the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups. The groups derive from the ancient hierarchical caste system that is officially abolished but in practice exerts an enormous influence in India today, particularly in the villages.

57 Bhagat, 'Internal Migration in India', 36–42; Vijay Korra, 'Short-Duration Migration in India', in Rajan, ed., *Migration, Identity, and Conflict*, 66–81.

58 Menon, 'Can the Licensing-Inspection Mechanism Deliver Justice', 109–11; Borhade, 'Internal Labour Migration in India'.

59 Ajay Bailey, 'In Search of Livelihoods: Migration and Mobility from Karnataka to Goa', in Rajan, ed., *Migration, Identity, and Conflict*, 165–79; Mishra, 'Introduction', 1–26.

60 Menon, 'Can the Licensing-Inspection Mechanism Deliver Justice', 155–57.

61 S. Irudaya Rajan, Vijay Korra, and Rikil Chyrmand, 'Politics of Conflict and Migration', in Rajan, ed., *Migration, Identity, and Conflict*, 142–50; Bhagat, 'Nature of Migration'.

62 Rajan, Korra and Chyrmand, 'Politics of Conflict and Migration'; Bhagat, 'Nature of Migration'.

the landowner responds by saying that he pays the agreed sum (20:13–14). The parable concludes with a pithy saying: 'So in this way the last will be first and the first will be last' (20:16).

Those who are familiar with the socio-cultural and economic realities in India immediately notice many similarities with the parable: a place where day labourers gather each morning for employment, whether in villages or cities; agreement or negotiation of a daily wage; day-to-day realities of the poor and vulnerable labourers, including the uncertainty of finding employment; the presence of large landowners (or contractors) and middlemen (the manager in the parable). These features in the parable are part and parcel of the realities of millions of day labourers in India today.

The setting of the parable is Jesus's ministry as mediated through the evangelist Matthew. Many scholars have noted that the parable portrays the conditions of day labourers in first-century rural Galilee realistically.[63] Galilee, like most ancient societies, consisted of large numbers of peasants and a tiny minority of well-to-do landowners.[64] These landlords were often absent and delegated supervisory tasks to various estate managers (cf. Mt 21:33–41; Jam 5:1–5).[65] Many peasants were subsistence farmers with a small plot of land; others were landless day labourers in constant search of work.[66] The situation of the landless day labourers was precarious, at times worse than that of slaves, because they were disposable and no one cared for their well-being (Marcus Terentius Varro, *On Agric.* 1.17.2–3).[67] They were hired on a daily basis for agricultural tasks, particularly during harvest time (*m.Peah* 5:5; *m.BM* 7:5–7; Varro, *On Agric.* 1.17.2–3).[68]

According to Josephus, more than 18,000 people were without work after the completion of the Temple (*Ant*. 18.219–220). Other sources depict how landowners attempted to manipulate day labourers to keep wages low and hire as few workers as possible (Cato, *Agr*. 1, 3; Columella, *De re rustica* 3.21. 9–10).[69] The parable itself presupposes chronic unemployment as it depicts day labourers waiting around in the marketplace (20:3, 5–7).

As noted above, many features of the parable correspond to a rather ordinary course of events in first-century rural Galilee: going to a marketplace to contract day labourers; choosing from an excessive pool of potential workers; being paid a denarius per day; working a long day under a hot sun and being paid at the end of the day;

63 See esp. Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'; Van Eck and Kloppenborg, 'An Unexpected Patron'.

64 Gehard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 210–82; Esa J. Autero, 'Social Status in Luke's Infancy Narrative: Zechariah the Priest', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41, no: 1 (2010): 36–45; David A. Fiensy, *Jesus the Galilean: Soundings in a First Century Life* (Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2007), 29–83.

65 Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 481; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'; Van Eck and Kloppenborg, 'An Unexpected Patron'.

66 Fiensy, *Jesus the Galilean*, 44–46; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'; Van Eck and Kloppenborg, 'An Unexpected Patron'.

67 Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 84–89; Carter, *Matthew and Margins*, 396; Louise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 212–13.

68 Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 482. In addition to harvesting and pruning, day labourers were needed to guard the crops from thieves and animals. Others were needed as donkey drivers. See also Carter, *Matthew and Margins*, 396; Fiensy, *Jesus the Galilean*, 45–46.

69 Schottroff, *The Parables*, 213; Carter, *Matthew and Margins*, 396.

and the presence of the landowner and manager who pays the wages. Nevertheless, there are also atypical features that would have caught the attention of the ancient audience. First, why is the landowner himself involved in hiring the labourers, especially since a manager is mentioned in the narrative (20:8)? Second, why does the landowner go back and forth (four times!) between the vineyard and marketplace in search of workers—in scorching heat (cf. 20:12)? Does not the landowner know how many workers are needed for one day? Is he particularly stingy, employing a minimal number of workers at first, only to hire more as the day draws to a close? Or is there some other reason for the repeated hires? Third, why is the landowner concerned about the day labourers sitting idle all day? Is he not aware that most day labourers remain unemployed each day? Would he not be considered a fool by his wealthy peers for hiring workers at the last hour and then paying them for a full day's work? Finally, why does the landowner pay the workers in reverse order? Is he attempting to pit the workers against each other or perhaps to teach them something?

The parable does not give explicit answers to most of these questions; rather, the answers must be gleaned from hints, gaps and echoes in Matthew's narrative and socio-cultural context—and potentially from similar experiences across cultures, like present-day India. As such, the realities and experiences of Indian migrant labourers may become a way to entertain various interpretive options and possibilities.

Many scholars have highlighted the highly unusual behaviour of the landowner.[70] First, wealthy absentee landlords were very concerned for honour and status. They did not run the day-to-day business of their vineyards, especially in the blistering heat. That was the manager's job (cf. 20:8). Even if the landowner was not part of the super-rich elite, the status gulf between him and the day labourer would have been enormous.[71] For him to personally hire workers in the bustling marketplace demonstrates his care and willingness to engage with them.[72] This action might have been considered dishonourable by his peers. Even more astonishing is his desire to go back again and again to hire more workers.[73] Unless the landowner is totally incompetent, the reason for repeatedly returning to the marketplace seems to be his desire to provide the remaining day labourers with much-needed work.

For a newly arrived Indian migrant worker sitting on a busy street corner waiting to be employed, perhaps for the first time, this would truly be good news. It would provide not only a sense of achievement but also release from the gruesome

70 Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kindle loc. 4283–4410; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 8312–26; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'; Van Eck and Kloppenborg, 'An Unexpected Patron'. Others note the feature in passing but do not give much weight to it: Carter, *Matthew and Margins*, 395–96; Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 87–91.

71 Fiensy, *Jesus the Galilean*, 34–46; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity', 232.

72 Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kindle loc. 4310–14; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity', 201–3, 209–14, 232–33.

73 Some scholars (Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 84–90; Schottroff, *The Parables*, 210–16) assume that the landowner was opportunistic and hired a minimum number of workers to begin with. Then later, when he realized he needed more workers, he hurried to hire more. But if that is the case, why would he give a full day's pay for one hour of work? He was under no obligation to do so.

humiliation and shame that comes from sitting around in a public place without being employed.

The landowner agrees to pay a denarius for those who start early in the morning (20:2). A denarius was a standard living wage for day labourers as well as for soldiers (*m.Peah* 8:8; Tob 5:14–15; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.17).[74] It was sufficient to feed a family for a few days.[75] The landowner then promises to give 'what is just/right' (*ho ean ē dikaion dōsō humin*) to those who start working at the third hour (20:3–4) as well as at the sixth and ninth hour (20:5).[76] According to the common standard of calculation, a just wage for the latecomers would be based on the reduced hours of work and thus lower (cf. *m.Baba' Meṣi'a'* 7.1; Cicero, *Off.* 1.150–51).[77] There would be no need to spell this out explicitly, although the labourers would need to trust the landowner's word and notion of justice. There is no trace of haggling for lower pay on the part of the landowner.[78] The workers seem happy to find employment even if only for the remainder of the day.

Though the landowner's motive for hiring more labourers is not explicitly mentioned, what seems to prompt him to do this is his observation: 'He saw others standing idle in the marketplace' (20:3; implied in 20:5).[79] Since excess of day labourers was an all-too-common sight (as on India's street corners today), mentioning this observation would otherwise seem redundant. Furthermore, the landowner discovers the eleventh-hour workers standing idle without work. It is remarkable that anyone would wait this long to obtain work. Were the workers foolish, remarkably persistent or particularly desperate? There is no hint of laziness (or foolishness) in the text. Rather, idleness (*argoi*) here indicates inactivity due to un(der)employment.[80] The landowner's surprising gesture to hire them is prompted precisely by the workers' inability to find any work (20:6–7). One wonders whether any sensible foreman would have hired labourers so late in the afternoon. How much work could be accomplished in one hour (especially considering the journey to the field)? What would the landowner's peers say? Would he lose his face or be praised as generous? Verncombe's suggestion that the landowner invites the eleventh-hour workers into a new sort of relationship (in addition to being compassionate) seems correct, even if that becomes apparent only later in the parable.[81]

On the other hand, the workers demonstrate extraordinary endurance in waiting around until the end of the day. They must have been desperate to accept the call to work so late. Landowners were not always trustworthy employers (Jam 5:1–5; Lev

74 Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Kindle loc. 8333; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'; Van Eck and Kloppenborg, 'An Unexpected Patron'.

75 For particular calculations of how a denarius would sustain a peasant family, see Ekkehart W. Stegemann and Wolfgan Stegemann, *Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 81–93; Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008), 40–45; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'.

76 'What is just' is implied in v. 5.

77 Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 570; Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity', 211–13.

78 Curiously, this is suggested by Herzog (*Parables as Subversive Speech*, 86) and Schottroff (*The Parables of Jesus*, 211–14) without any evidence.

79 This is not mentioned when the landowner hires the first group of workers in the early morning.

80 Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 571; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 482; Carter, *Matthew and Margins*, 396–97; contra Jeremias, *Las parabolas de Jesus*, 163–64.

81 Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity', 214, 232–35.

19:13; Deut 24:14–15).[82] As such, it is surprising that the labourers trusted the landowner's promise to 'pay what is just'.

The final scene depicts the payment of the workers. As mentioned above, it is odd that those hired last are compensated first (20:8). Moreover, the parable does not highlight—as one would expect—the delighted response of those who were paid a full day's wage for working just one hour. In fact, the entire transaction is narrated matter-of-factly. Yet the point is driven home, and Matthew's audience is expected to be astonished at the landowner's goodness.[83] The narrative focuses on those who worked the entire day. They expect to receive more and grumble when they do not (20:10–11). They voice their anger because they are treated as equals with those who came later (20:12). Matthew's audience, as well as present-day audiences including India's day labourers, would certainly sympathize with this reaction.[84]

Why did the landowner choose to pay the eleventh-hour workers first—and that right in front of the rest of the labourers? Some scholars have suggested that the parable deliberately plays the workers against each other in a sort of divide-and-conquer manner.[85] This reading would highlight the colonial tactics by which the colonizer pits various colonized groups against each other. In India, Brahmins and other upper-caste groups still use this tactic to manipulate low-caste people and Dalits[86] against each other.[87] Although the divide-and-conquer model remains common today, this reading does not fit the parable well. The landowner's concern for the workers, his goodness (v. 15) and his extension of surprising justice (v. 4) mitigate against this reading.

On the contrary, the landowner wants to display his goodness to the eleventh-hour workers (and other latecomers) and to teach what justice and compassion look like for those who come last and find themselves in a desperate situation. Yet the parable is not just about generosity. In fact, the landowner is not extravagantly generous, as he pays each person merely a denarius. As indicated, the landowner's 'unanticipated goodness' toward the latecomers should be viewed as a way to initiate new forms of social relations.[88] Instead of operating on the basis of maximum profit and taken-for-granted social hierarchy, the landowner treats the eleventh-hour workers more like friends or family members. The social distance is thus lowered (not eliminated), workers' needs are considered, and a new way of imagining social relations is opened up.[89] As a result, there is a 'disruption of economic expectations', and the entire socioeconomic system is called into question.[90]

---

82 Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'.

83 This point is strengthened by the fact that only the eleventh-hour group and the early morning group are specified in the narrative.

84 See also Cardenal, *El evangelio en Soletiname*, 96–98.

85 See Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 84–90; Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, 210–14.

86 Dalits are the lowest segment of Indian's hierarchical caste system. They are considered unclean and traditionally placed outside the entire caste system, even lower than the lowest caste.

87 James Massey, 'Dalits: Indian Context', in *One Volume Dalit Bible Commentary: New Testament*, ed. T. K. John and James Massey (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2010), 11–12.

88 Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity'.

89 Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity', 201–33.

90 Vearncombe, 'Redistribution and Reciprocity', 203, 234–35.

This landowner's offer to relate to the eleventh-hour workers in a new way invites criticism from the other workers. To deflect the grumbling, the landowner appeals to his contract with the earlier workers. He did nothing that could be considered unjust. Quite the contrary, he demonstrated subversive justice. He pays a living wage for everyone, so that each may return home with dignity and feed their families.[91]

The parable moves toward a close by way of two open-ended rhetorical questions. These questions highlight the landowner's freedom with regard to his possessions, in contrast to the 'evil eye' or envy of the first workers (*ho ophthalmos sou ponēros estin hoti egō agathos eimi*).[92] The workers do not respond, and the scene is left open-ended. Will the labourers take their money and leave, as the landowner suggests? Will they continue to argue and disregard the landowner's goodness? Or will they perhaps come to appreciate his surprising act of kindness to the eleventh-hour workers? The latecomers certainly rejoiced over their generous pay for an hour's work, but the revised social relations with the landowner no doubt elicited greater hope for the future. Perhaps the landowner is willing to relate to the early workers in a new way as well (cf. 'I am good')?

The parable concludes with a pithy saying that highlights the theme of reversal. Scholars often dismiss it or consider it Matthew's awkward addition to the parable.[93] Nevertheless, it is a fitting conclusion by which Matthew highlights the reversal theme. Furthermore, it connects the parable to the previous and following sayings (19:30; 20:27) and to the larger narrative context (18:1–20:33).[94] In fact, 18:1–20:33 focuses precisely on various aspects of social relations in the kingdom, with a particular emphasis on the vulnerable.[95] Reimagining social relations is an important aspect of the narrative context. The parable would have challenged Matthew's audience regarding the practice of existing social hierarchies as well as critiquing their envy and unwillingness to see the needs of the vulnerable.

As this exposition indicates, the focal point of the parable is the surprising justice of the landowner toward the latecomers and the reimagining of social relations between the landowner and the workers.[96] Consideration of the marginalized (19:11–12, 13–15, 21, 27) and the importance of social relations are highlighted in the preceding narrative context (18:1–35; 19:1–13, 18–22). The latter part of the parable (20:11–16) and the following sayings (20:17–28) confront the disciples' (and the audience's) unwillingness to consider the marginalized. It is in these aspects that we

91 Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kindle loc. 4323–48.

92 Elliott, 'Matthew 20:1–15', 52–65.

93 Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 84–90; Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, 211–14.

94 Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 361–406; Margaret Davies, *Matthew. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 147–59.

95 This section of Matthew's Gospel covers the greatness of a 'lowly child' (18:1–6); care for the 'little ones' (18:6–14); relations within the community of Jesus' followers, including forgiveness and compassion (18:15–35); marriage, with a special concern for retaining marriage intact and inclusion of eunuchs (19:1–12); another saying highlighting lowly children (19:13–15); and the reversal of fortunes that confounds the rich man as well as the disciples (19:16–30). See Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 361–406.

96 In a sense, the landowner is like king Josiah who treated workers justly, and unlike Shallum/Jehoahaz who failed to pay workers their due (Jer 22:1–17, esp. v. 13). Of course, the landowner is not just paying a regular wage but goes above and beyond in compassion and generosity.

should locate the meaning of the parable and the manifestation of the kingdom of heaven.

The parable and migrant workers in India

With this exegetical background, let's look at how the parable and present-day situation of India's migrant workers may shed light on each other.

Most migrant workers in Mumbai's urban slums come from the poverty-ridden rural areas. They are largely landless agricultural workers from tribal and low-caste communities. They have migrated from the western districts of Maharashtra, rural Karnataka, West Bengal and even Nepal.[97] They venture to the city in search of livelihood, access to clean water and housing, and (of course) work. Some are escaping various degrees of caste violence prevalent in rural areas, while others hope to gain access to the city's municipal services such as schools, water and hospitals.[98] Also, many poor farmers in India have committed suicide in recent years due to crop failure, loss of land, the political economy and/or ecological disasters.[99] As such, it is often difficult to differentiate neatly between voluntary and forced migrants.[100]

Most newly arrived migrants in Mumbai look for work at *nakas*. *Naka* is a term used in Mumbai for a street corner or intersection where people meet. It is an informal yet clearly designated space where people gather each morning 'to solicit day wage labor contracts'.[101] *Nakas* are 'visually marked by throngs of people standing around'.[102] Some estimate that there are about 300,000 people in Mumbai's *nakas* each morning; the largest ones have more than 500 people vying for opportunities that range from small-scale repair and construction work to infrastructure development tasks for municipalities. Hiring is done by verbal contracts without any enforceable regulations for pay or working hours.[103] Only a handful of men and women in the *nakas* are actually contracted each day.[104] The overabundance of day labourers desperately looking for work is similar to that depicted in the parable.

Due to the overabundance of low-skilled labourers, competition for work is fierce. Caste and sub-caste hierarchies as well as regional affiliations are important. Groups use various tactics to gain the upper hand in the precarious labour market; verbal shaming and undercutting standard pay rates are commonplace. Women are often forced to provide sexual favours to middlemen and contractors.[105] The high officials (like the landowner in the parable) are located nowhere near the *nakas* and

97 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 6, 46, 58–60.

98 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 40–42; Samaddar, *The Postcolonial Age of Migration*, 113–15, 180–81.

99 Shah. *Street Corner Secrets*, 9; Samaddar, *The Postcolonial Age of Migration*, 92.

100 For the difficulty of neatly differentiating between forced migrants and voluntary migrants, see Samaddar, *The Postcolonial Age of Migration*, 26–31. He states, 'There is little to choose between death by genocide or hunger, and in fact, most conflicts at the end are conflicts over resources' (p. 29).

101 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 43.

102 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 43.

103 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 44.

104 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 45–46, 105.

105 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 55, 85, 89, 104.

do not concern themselves with the day-to-day operations or with the well-being of the labourers.

Seasonal migrant workers are in a particularly precarious situation and are often accused of accepting sub-standard pay or haggling with contractors.[106] The key to obtaining day labour at *nakas* is relationships. This means relationships within a particular group—'having a *rishta* [i.e. recognition or acquaintance] of some kind with a potential employer, or someone who could arrange employment'.[107] Even then, many are able to obtain work consistently only about eight to ten days per month.[108] This puts labourers in a particularly precarious position and diminishes livelihood options significantly. In addition, occasionally the contractors underpay the day labourers, overwork them or fail to pay the wages altogether.[109]

If the situation is difficult for men, it is even more so for women. Since much of the *naka*-based work in Mumbai is construction-related, women are not viewed favourably in the labour market. They are paid considerably less than men even if employed in the same tasks.[110] Women are not, regardless of their experience or expertise, considered skilled labourers but rather *begari kam* or 'helpers'.[111] As a result, women often need to trade sexual favours for work.

Nakas generally fill with aspiring workers around 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. and function until noon. After that, the workers disperse and are replaced by street-based prostitutes. Any woman staying as late as noon risks losing her reputation.[112]

Finally, though the predicament of the migrants is somewhat better than in the villages, the precarious labour market and working conditions are not the only woes. Most *naka* workers live in sub-standard housing in the many slums of Mumbai. Unannounced slum demolitions are commonplace. Access to communal water is scarce and intermittent, and often controlled by the water mafia.[113] Police accept bribes routinely and often use violence or excess force to remove *naka* workers (and other slum dwellers) from areas designated for business and commerce. Sometimes, police confiscate slum dwellers' documents to prevent them from benefitting from any resettlement programs.[114]

It is ironic that the city depends on the day labourers to function, yet they are treated as outsiders or worse. Access to citizenship in the proper sense of the term is not granted to them. There is a demand for cheap labour, and an excess of workers is needed to keep the capitalist wheels rolling. At the same time, there is little interest in welcoming day labourers as co-dwellers in the city, let alone providing them a

106 One seasonal migrant stated that they were kicked out of a *naka* because 'we don't live here the whole year … [and they] accuse us of working for just fifty rupees [per day].' Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 105.
107 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 106.
108 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 106.
109 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 71.
110 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 45. According to NGO reports, men are paid around 125 to 150 rupees per day whereas women receive only 100.
111 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 4, 45–46.
112 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 92–93.
113 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 41–42, 62–67.
114 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 60–61, 133–34, 180–82.

space to fit in.[115] They have even become scapegoats for the many ills of the city and political pawns in the hands of Shiv Sen and other nationalist parties.[116]

This description of the Mumbai *naka* workers' plight highlights many additional features that resonate with the parable and prompts further reflection. The plot of the parable focuses on the landowner who goes out to the marketplace to hire workers. As the exposition indicates, the landowner shows extraordinary compassion and care for the labourers' well-being. He personally goes back and forth to ensure that the remaining workers are hired.[117] In that sense, he represents God (and Jesus).[118] He is good, compassionate and generous. He wants the last labourers to avoid public humiliation and gives them a chance to work, even if for just one hour.[119]

The fact that there is work for everyone, giving each person the dignity of earning their daily wage, is remarkable. As Bailey aptly asks, 'What is justice for an unemployed man [or woman], eager to work … [to] those willing to stand in a public place all day long and endure the humiliating glances of the financially secure?'[120] The call for justice becomes even more pressing when the woes of *naka* workers' sub-standard housing, institutional violence, exclusion from citizenship and forced sexual favours are considered. Neighbour love compels followers of Jesus to act with justice (Mt 5:6, 33; 23:23), hospitality and solidarity (25:19–31) in the economic and socio-political sphere.

Sitting around idle and humiliated without work militates against the very reason why migrant workers left the village in the first place—no work, no livelihood, no dignity, no hope. Kingdom justice means work and dignity for workers, not mere charity or alms. Shame associated with lack of employment is not an individual choice as much as a structural sin and form of injustice. When the kingdom of God is manifested, workers will have enough to feed their families and even send remittances back to their village (Mt 7:9–11). Unfortunately, work in the *nakas* is at best sporadic and often obtained through dubious means. Women, Dalits, STs and SCs, circular migrants and newcomers are particularly vulnerable in this regard. In the kingdom of God, there is little need to resort to duplicity or shameful schemes, nor is anyone left out due to social position, gender or lack of skills. This is the reality of the kingdom that God's people ought to promote and strive for.

The most surprising aspect of the parable comes at the end, as the last are paid an equal wage to the first. Rather than seeing this as an antagonistic gesture on the part of the landowner, it is better to view it as an important dimension of the kingdom. Since the landowner is depicted as God-like,[121] the real issue is not the assumed

115 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 133–45.

116 Shah, *Street Corner Secrets*, 151.

117 That *all* the workers in the marketplace were hired merely highlights the fictional nature of the parable.

118 The status difference between the landowner and the labourers highlights the power and glory of God compared to the workers. The clearest textual connection between the landowner and God is at 19:17 and 20:15. In both instances, the word 'good' (*agathos*) is employed, forming an intertextual link between the parable and the preceding story about the rich man. Both texts are also linked with the pithy saying at the end (19:30; 20:16).

119 Similarly Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kindle loc. 4310–27.

120 Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kindle loc. 4332–40.

121 Of course, not in every aspect since this is a parable, not an exhaustive theological treatise.

wealth of the landowner or the exploitative economic system of first-century Galilee.[122] As such, the landowner-God does not stand in a symmetrical relationship with an exploitative system. Rather, the parable highlights the surprising justice of the kingdom and the respect that the workers have (or ought to have) vis-à-vis the landowner (and perhaps also the power and mercy of God in contrast to human beings). From that angle, the landowner's invitation to re-envision social relations in terms of family or kinship—at least for the eleventh-hour workers (and perhaps later on for others too)—is all the more remarkable. In India, this reading of the parable could pave the way for reimagining social relationships in the socio-economic sphere. What could happen if employers at the *nakas* (and elsewhere) would start to relate to labourers in a new way—perhaps in a way that is more kin-like? The church as God's people could or should be the community that models a new way of relating, which in turn has the potential to impact wider society by encouraging others to do the same.

The parable does acknowledge the vulnerability of day labourers with respect to obtaining work, as well as the competition and antagonism among them. In this context of internal division, the landowner wants to teach something important about the kingdom. He is willing to demonstrate surprising justice and generosity to the last and most vulnerable workers. He took the initiative and engaged the labourers, even enduring the heat of the day, to ensure that everyone was employed. In this sense, he is a Jesus-like figure who cares for the least and the lost. At the same time, compassion, justice, dignity and generosity towards some are not done at the expense of others. Everyone is given work and no one is left out. Rather than complaining and showing an evil eye, the other labourers are challenged to acknowledge how the kingdom operates.[123]

In today's India, the plight of migrant day labourers is partly dependent on their (and the church's) collective cooperation and ability to shed caste, ethnic and gender antagonism. Socio-political and economic powers want to divide and conquer and to maintain the status quo. In some ways, the oppressors have already won; socio-cultural and caste division hampers cooperation within the church and society. Organizing migrant day labourers together with various NGOs in India is particularly important, and churches play a major role in this. The parable challenges the day labourers, and all those in solidarity with them, to unite and work for a better community and society where there is work, justice and dignity for everyone.

Finally, the wider context of the parable prompts reflections on the vulnerability of migrants with respect to unjust societal structures. As mentioned above, caste, ethnic and regional divisions continue to cause discrimination, inter-ethnic strife and gender violence throughout India today, not just at Mumbai's *nakas*. These historic and systemic structures are deeply embedded in the society and cultural systems. This parable challenges past and present injustices and calls for 'compensatory

122 Contra Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 79–97; the story line is better seen as something that the audience can relate to and, as such, a foil for teaching about the kingdom.

123 John R. Donahue, *Seek Justice That You May Live: Reflections and Resources on the Bible and Social Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 178, further notes regarding the misplaced attitude and evil eye of the workers (20:15) that 'the eye is the lamp of the body' (6:22) and should be 'plucked out' if it causes one to sin (5:29).

discrimination' for the most vulnerable in order to 'correct a historic unjust condition'.[124] This is the only way to ensure justice in the form of 'equal distribution of resources and opportunities'.[125]

The reason for large-scale migration by STs, SCs, and other disadvantaged Indians to the cities is not just individual or family desperation but systemic and historic discrimination and oppression, accompanied by political unwillingness to address it. Though they are citizens of India, they are not afforded the rights or dignity of citizenship. As day labourers, they are an integral and irreplaceable part of cities' economic apparatus, but they are excluded not just from minimal benefits but often even from minimal dignity.

Challenging oppressive systems is risky. It not only antagonizes the powerful but elicits disgruntlement from those who feel that they have 'borne the heat of the day'. Yet Jesus was willing to confront the powers of his day as he embodied the kingdom of God and lived in solidarity with outcasts. This is the call of the kingdom for the church today as well, however risky it might be.

Conclusion

This article has reviewed various interpretive paradigms of Matthew 20:1–16. Not many interpretations consider the present-day implications of the parable for analogous situations. I have attempted to take seriously both the ancient context of the parable and the present-day realities of Indian migrant workers. The focal point of the parable is the goodness and justice of God's kingdom as manifested through the actions of the landowner. The parable challenges Christians to be agents of God's kingdom together with and on behalf of migrant workers in India. Though the reading focused on migrant workers in India's *nakas*, analogous situations are occurring around the world—including street corners not far from your home.

124 Monodeep Daniel, 'The Gospel According to Matthew', in *One Volume Dalit Bible Commentary: New Testament*, ed. T. K. John and James Massey (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2010), 139; Donahue, *Seek Justice That You May Live*, 177–79.
125 Daniel, 'The Gospel According to Matthew', 139.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 86–93

Faithfulness in an Asian Multi-Faith Context

Richard Howell

This article, originally a presentation at a 2022 ecumenical consultation of the Global Christian Forum, reflects on the challenges Asian Christianity encounters, through the lenses of the author and other experienced observers and the testimonies of prominent Asian converts to Christianity.

Affirming our identity

Asian Christianity has its share of responsibility to affirm its identity born out of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. It must hold together twin themes of immanence and transcendence as it seriously engages with what Stephen Bevans observes as the experience of the past (recorded in Scripture and preserved and defended in tradition) and experience of the present, that is, context (individual and social experience, secular or religious culture, social location, and social change).[1] The need to recognize the distance between established interpretations of Scripture and the Scriptures themselves will help recover and add layers to historical consciousness, leaving plenty of room for hospitality and dialogue, concretizing the meaning of the gospel and raising new forms of Christian consciousness which are both local and universal. This process embraces local Spirit-led, Christ-centred spiritualities that do not reflect Western theological trajectory and thus break free from what Robin Boyd termed the Latin captivity of the church.[2]

Foundational text

Faithfulness in a multi-faith context finds its basis in the foundational text of Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom of God. 'The time has come', he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!' (Mk 1:15). The offer of forgiveness of sins is at the heart of the good news Jesus proclaimed in word and deed. The gospel must be faithfully proclaimed and lived with cultural sensitivity as it addresses contextual needs, holding together the twin themes of transcendence and immanence.

Richard Howell (PhD, Sam Higginbotham University), formerly General Secretary of the Asia Evangelical Alliance and a founding member of the Global Christian Forum, is principal of Caleb Institute, a Christian college in Gurugram, Haryana, India. This article initially appeared in Casely Essamuah and Richard Howell, *Faithfulness in a Multi-Faith Context* (Gurugram, Haryana, India: Caleb Institute for Global Christian Forum, 2023).

1 Stephan Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), xvi.

2 Robin Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church: The Cultural Context of the Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 151.

The kingdom is both a future event (Mt 13:36–43, 47–50) and present reality (Lk 11:20; 12:32). Miroslav Volf comments, 'Jesus' healing miracles are a sign of the in-breaking kingdom. As deeds are done in the power of the Spirit, healings are not merely symbols of God's future rule but are anticipatory realizations of God's present rule. They provide tangible testimony to the materiality of salvation.'[3] Considering the foundational text, the praxis of ministry must affect everything in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. An exemplary witness to the transforming power of the gospel is found in Sadhu Sundar Singh's testimony.

The testimony

The testimony of the Asian saint Sadhu Sundar Singh, the 'apostle of bleeding feet' and a missionary to the West, reveals how Sadhu's encounter with Jesus ignited transformation, and his life story is a witness to our times.

Sundar Singh developed a dislike for Christians and even burnt a Bible in public. When he was fifteen, he issued an ultimatum to God: 'O God, if there is a God, show me the right way, and I will become a sadhu; otherwise, I will kill myself.' On 18 December 1904, something shocking happened.

Towards half-past four, a great light shone in his little room in Rampur, Punjab state. He thought the house was on fire and opened the door, but there was no fire. He closed the door and went on praying. Then there dawned upon him an amazing vision; in the centre of a shining cloud, he saw a man's face, radiant with love. At first, he thought it was Buddha, Krishna, or some other divinity, and he was about to prostrate himself in worship. Just then, to his great astonishment, he heard the words … 'Why do you persecute Me? Remember that I gave My life for you upon the cross.' Utterly at a loss, he was speechless with astonishment. He noticed the scars of Jesus of Nazareth. … Then the thought came to him: 'Jesus Christ is not dead; He is alive, and this is He.'[4]

He then woke his father, exclaiming, 'I am a Christian!' His frustrated father replied, 'You're off your head, my boy … just now; you were going to kill yourself.' Sundar replied, 'I have killed myself: the old Sundar Singh is dead: I am a new being.'[5]

Sadhu Sundar Singh's encounter changed the mode in which he lived in the world. We learn from his testimony that 'Asian theology, with its rich religious and cultural resources, can draw out a new appreciation of transcendence and mystery.'[6]

In 1920, Sadhu became a missionary to the West. People were drawn to him because he matched the image of an Indian holy man, a mystic with a turban, saffron robes and a dark beard. The amazing Corrie ten Boom of the Netherlands, whose life was shaped by a diversity of encounters, then a young woman, eagerly went to

3 Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 104.

4 Friedrich Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927), 38.

5 Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, 43–44.

6 Sebastian K. H. Kim, ed., *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xiii.

hear him. C. S. Lewis took an interest in Sadhu and referenced him in at least two books.[7]

Sadhu's message continues to speak and inspire devotion to God even now, including among migrant South Asians[8] who have made the West their home, shaped by the norms, values and secular epistemologies of modernity. As Heiler has pointed out, 'Singh had a special mission to Christian theology and the Christian Church of the West: theological research needs to be constantly balanced by living Christian piety if it is not to degenerate into presumptuous speculation, destructive criticism, or empty dialectic. Theology without prayerful piety is like a fountain whose water has run dry.'[9] Hearing God's Word is vital for Christian witness.

The importance of hearing the Word

The Bhakti (way of devotion to God), writes Alison Hari-Singh, is to read Scripture to experience union with God, which is spiritual, contemplative, devout, transcendental, universal, mystical and blissful. Christian devotion is Christocentric.

Sadhu also believed the reader must surrender completely to God and the authority of God's Word for the meaning to be clear. Sadhu's three-way method of reading Scripture was 'faith-filled, prayerful reading, and surrendered reading.'[10] Will the theologians and church leaders whose minds are shaped by European ecumenical secularized theology create room in their life to read the Bible as God's Word, the way Sadhu has shown?

Many church leaders and theologians consider the Bible to be only a contextual book, and they search for the text in the context. For those who reject the Bible as text, the written Word of God, and chase only after the predominant Eurocentric paradigm, their hegemonic and normative way of interpretation is stifling. Cheryl Bridges Johns points out that Pentecostals view the Scriptures as 'a living word of the Spirit for the present time'. Instead of being a text to be analyzed, the Bible becomes experienced as the Spirit-Word. For Johns, experiencing the Scriptures as the fusion between the Spirit and the Word is in keeping with the ancient practices of 'hearing' the Word, which is prevalent in Pentecostal churches.[11] Hearing the word in our context is vital for our witness, for other religious traditions also emphasize hearing the word.

Our witness must engage with the issue of identity and otherness in the context of social realities. Considering the weakening of Western Christianity, Vengal Chakkarai, a Hindu convert to Christ, wrote in 1937, 'I fear that paralysis is creeping into the missionary message in India not as the result of the Indian atmosphere alone but

7 Robert Hudson, *Seeing Jesus: Visionary Encounters from the First Century to the Present* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2021), 250.

8 Alison Hari-Singh, 'Bhakti, Sadhu Sundar Singh, and the Art of Reading Scripture', in *Reading In-Between: How Minoritized Cultural Communities Interpret the Bible in Canada*, edited by Nestor Medina, Alison Hari-Singh, and Hyeran Kim-Cragg (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019): 79–95.

9 Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, 259.

10 Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, 259.

11 Cheryl Bridges Johns, 'When East Meets West and North Meets South: The Reconciling Mission of Global Christianity', in *Pentecostal Theology and Ecumenical Theology: Interpretations and Intersections*, edited by Peter Hocken, Tony Richie and Christopher A. Stephenson (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 98.

mainly of the religious disintegration in the West.'[12] Western Christianity also encounters a multi-religious context of Eastern mysticism including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. As Jan Jongneel explains, although today most people 'point to the challenges the churches are facing, Christianity is, or ought to be, primarily a challenge to others.' And indeed, 'The message, or the proclamation (Greek *kerygma*), of Jesus as Lord is the primordial challenge.'[13]

Asian Christianity encounters a de-contextualized gospel presentation which is insensitive to local cultures and presents Jesus in a way which is hard to comprehend. This is why one of the biggest challenges in Asia is overcoming the notion that Christianity is a foreign religion and the perception that we worship a foreign God who does not belong in Asia. Many missionaries expect Christianity to be foreign since it is the only form of Christianity they know. And the lack of appropriate contextualization has led to the feeling among many Asians that 'Christianity doesn't belong here.' To overcome this perception, Peter Phan vigorously stresses: 'Nothing in the church must be left untouched by this process of inculturation so that Christianity can truly become not only in Asia but also of Asia.'[14]

An excellent example from Punjab state, in India, is the way newer movements worship the living God. The gospel is 'catered to devotees in more familiar ways, freely using Punjab's cultural markers—turban, langar, tappa, gidda.' Also, 'Their Satsangs could feel like group prayer sessions from any of the popular religions Punjab has known: Sikh, Hindu, Sufi.'[15] Punjabi culture has accepted the gospel as its own; Christianity is no longer in Punjab but is of Punjab. The stigma that the Christian faith is not of Indian soil is no longer tenable. There is no escape from contextualizing the gospel that is the true gospel and not some caricature of it, as is visible in the 'health and wealth gospel' which combines belief in God with individualistic pragmatism and degenerates into a 'name it and claim it' mentality, which is far from the true meaning of taking up our cross and following Jesus.

Caste system a hindrance to witness

The caste system is one of the most rigid and institutionalized brutalities of Indian society. While the agenda for political freedom was achieved in 1947, the freedom to emancipate the masses from perpetual exploitation and oppression remains to be won. Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar kept advocating that 'a society divided by social oppression could not constitute a genuine nation.'[16] Vengal Chakkarai, a 'high caste' Hindu convert to Christ, advocated that the church should 'confront Hinduism on the plains of life'. By this, he meant confronting caste oppression and exploitation. The household of Jesus Christ is duty-bound to spread social equality, and the

12 Vengal Chakkarai, *The Guardian*, 527.

13 Jan A. B. Jongneel, 'The Challenge of a Multicultural and Multireligious Europe', in *Mission is a Must: Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church*, edited by Frans Jozef Servaas Wijsen and Peter J. A. Nissen (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 179.

14 Peter C, Phan, 'The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910: Challenges for Church and Theology in the Twenty-First Century', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 2 (2010): 106.

15 Aroon Puri, *India Today,* 14 November 2022, 3.

16 Gail Omvedit, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1994).

practice of caste divisions in the church runs counter to the teachings of Jesus Christ, who said, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ' (Gal 3:28). We cannot have separate tables for each people or caste group for practising hospitality. We all eat from the same food 'in the presence of God' (Deut 12:7; cf. Ex 18:12).

Addressing gender issues: Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati

In our multi-faith context, we must address gender issues. The Bible teaches that we are created equal, redeemed equally and gifted equally. This kingdom reality is illustrated in the life of Pandita Ramabai.

Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922), who converted to Christ, was a social reformer and a pioneer in the field of education and emancipation of women who confronted nearly every rule and tradition that restricted the life of an upper-caste Hindu woman in 19th-century India. Pandita Ramabai opened Mukti Mission at Kedgaon, in Maharashtra, where she cared for hundreds of child widows and famine victims. At 3:30 a.m. on 29 June 1904, the girls' dormitory matron rushed to the quarters of Minnie Abrams and told her that one of the girls had suddenly awakened 'with the fire coming down upon her'. Having prayed before going to sleep that she might receive the baptism in the Holy Ghost, the woman related how she 'saw the fire and ran, and ran across the room for a pail of water, and was about to pour it on her when I discovered that she was not on fire.' When Abrams arrived, 'all the girls … were on their knees, weeping, praying and confessing their sins. The newly Spirit-baptized was in the midst of them telling what God had done for her and exhorting them to repentance.' One of the most celebrated events of the great revival in India (1905–1906), this 'case of the burning bush' prompted confessions of sin and repentance.[17]

Public confessions of sins and 'prayer storms' (hours of public worship spent in loud and fervent prayer) were the most notable features in the awakening across India. Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, Lutheran, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and other missionaries respond to unusual occurrences. These included visions, dreams, angelic visitations, the 'burning' sensation (experienced first at Mukti), laughter, exorcisms, prophesying and even miraculous food provisions.[18] In our multi-faith witness, we must present what Sebastian Kim observes: 'Asian theology, with its rich religious and cultural resources, can draw out a new appreciation of transcendence and mystery.'[19]

Gospel witness includes justice, peace and creation care

In a multi-faith context, an integration of our witness is an imperative. An example of integration is the ministry of Fr. Benigno Beltran, who served for 30 years as chaplain and encountered the scavengers who depended on the gigantic Manila's

17 Minnie F. Abrams, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire,* 2nd ed. (Kedgaon, India: Mukti Mission Press, 1906).

18 Gary B. McGee, 'Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire! The Mission Legacy of Minnie F. Abrams', *Missiology* 27, no. 4 (1999): 515–22.

19 Kim, Christian Theology in Asia, xiii.

Smokey Mountains garbage dump for their livelihood and saw their lives transformed. Beltran writes, 'I realized that theology should not only be a faith seeking understanding, a purely cognitive approach to theological inquiry. In today's world, theology should also be linked to social concerns as faith seeking justice, faith seeking peace, and faith seeking life.'[20] That is why some of the most profound theologies are done not by academically trained theologians but by the faith community and pastoral workers ministering on the ground. As Jonathan Bonk says, 'The affluent church—by abandoning the incarnation as a model for its own life and mission—has demonstrated its fundamental spiritual impotence.'[21] Creation care is no longer a luxury subject but is urgent for the survival of the human race.

God and creation

In 2005, I had the privilege of participating in a seminar organized by the Indian Philosophical Society in Kanpur. The best learning for me took place when two Hindu philosophers started speaking. Christianity was criticized as follows: 'The religious beliefs of Semitic religions and scientific strides have provided enormous material comforts to human beings, but we should not feel any hesitation in confessing that they have brought human existence on the brink of disaster.'[22] Christianity 'secularises nature and when it is secularised, it becomes easy for human beings to objectify nature and control it.' The criticism against Western philosophy 'that is certain about the history of western consciousness is that the world progressively disenchanted or dislodged.'[23] Eurocentric Enlightenment assumptions about autonomy, individualism and rationalism allow the reader to control what is to be known.

The speaker further stated Hindu belief that all that exists has been created by the Supreme Being, comes from the Supreme Being, and will return to the Supreme Being, which is an adequate basis for veneration of the natural world in which man finds himself.[24]

Then during the discussion, a Hindu philosopher raised a question: 'Both you and I believe the Vedas are eternal, and so the problems Vedas are addressing are also eternal.'

There was a moment of silence, and the answer was: 'Yes, the problems we are addressing are also eternal.' If all is divine, this raises the issues of evil and human rights. Another philosopher said, 'If we consider all divine, how do we protect our crops from rats?' He further said we should have a worshipful attitude. Indeed, creation is God's gracious gift to his creation, and along with the gift comes the presence of the giver.

---

20 Benigno P. Beltran, *Faith and Struggle on Smokey Mountain: Hope for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 35.

21 Jonathan J. Bonk, *Mission and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 8.

22 Sanjay Kr. Shukla, 'Hindu Dharma as Panacea for Environmental Crisis', in *Readings in Environmental Ethics: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Dinesh Chandra Srivastava (Jaipur, India: Rawat Publications, 2005), 115–16.

23 Shukla, 'Hindu Dharma', 119–20.

24 Shukla, 'Hindu Dharma', 120.

By following the way of Karma Marga, one can go up or down the ladder in coming reincarnations. Karma is not against God; the accumulated good or evil deeds are weighed in balance to decide future reincarnations.

Miroslav Volf's criticism is valid: 'Following philosophers like Plato and Descartes, Christian theologians have for centuries stripped the human spirit of everything corporeal and emptied corporeality of everything spiritual.'[25] If Christians do not view creation as God's garden where God dwells, they 'not only are forsaking the God they claim to worship, they will also be forsaken by growing millions who cannot conceive of a God who does not desire to save the world.'[26]

In January 2017, on a flight from Jabalpur to Delhi, I sat next to a white American with an MBA degree who comes to India every year to upgrade his yoga practice and return to teach yogic techniques. Our conversation was soon about the reality of the living God and how life moves. To my surprise, he answered, 'Nothing moves. Even the flight we are travelling on is not moving; it's an extension of silence.' My co-traveller friend believed in the assumptions of Advaita Vedanta, whose goal of salvation rests in an awareness that reality is one, impersonal and actionless. On further discussion, I asked him: what happens if you do not get salvation? His answer was 'transmigration of the soul'. I replied, 'Then do you admit karma is real, for the transmigration of the soul is based on the karma of the previous births?' His answer was, 'Karma is not real, and ultimately even transmigration of the soul is not real.' Then, to my surprise, as I read a book on Christian spirituality, he asked that I teach techniques about how to practise Christian spirituality as well. He further stated, 'Sometimes I go to church and hear sermons which are only cerebral and are not helpful for living.'

The theological goals and worldviews of Hinduism and Christianity are different and need to be accepted as such. Any attempt to Christianize Hinduism, however sincere, is suspicious.

Caution to fulfilment theology

The dominant theology of religions in Edinburgh in 1910 was 'fulfilment theology', which conceives its primary task as the humble enquiry into the identification of 'points of contact' in non-Christian religions, using them to draw adherents of other faiths toward the full revelation of truth found in Christ. While Vengal Chakkarai was aware of the need to utilize the ideas of the religious thought of India for the expression of Christian truths and welcomed the presentation of Christianity as 'the crown of Hinduism', he also warned of the risk in such an approach lest 'the modern eclectic spirit of the Hindu may rest content in the similarities and neglect the revolutionary ideas of Christianity.'[27] The revolutionary idea is the historical incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, who is also the exalted Christ of faith. Chakkarai was confident that Hinduism will not manage to incorporate Christianity

25 Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 143.

26 Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Future Faith: The Challenges Reshaping Christianity in the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 84.

27 Vengal Chakkarai, 'The Educated Hindu and Christianity', 6.

into it, as it did with Buddhism, because the Lord, instead, will include the best aspects of Hinduism into Christianity by 'his living influence'.[28]

Need to listen and collaborate

The church in Asia must create an open space for all followers of Jesus Christ for conversations even as it engages in dialogue with people of all faiths and ideologies. God's particular focus on the church has as its purpose the blessing of the nations (Gen 12:1–3; 15; 17; Isa 42:6). The church is called to exist for the sake of its Lord and for the sake of humankind (Mt 22:32–40). There is a diversity of entry points to the mission; 'however, the Spirit is present and active, the Spirit leads to Jesus Christ, the Son who reveals the Father, the origin of all things.'[29] Discerning the work of the Holy Spirit demands that we look for signs in the world—the arena of the activity of the Spirit. Listening, seeing, discerning, understanding, accepting, loving, rejoicing and obeying are all aspects of discerning the work of the Holy Spirit in our common witness. For Christians, the benchmark of discernment of the Spirit to witness faithfully in a multi-faith context must always be Christological.

28 Chakkarai, 'The Educated Hindu and Christianity', 6.

29 Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 181.

ERT (2024) 48:1, 94–96

Book Reviews

The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 869–70
Richard Price (trans.) and Federico Montinaro (introduction and notes)

Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022
Hb., 466 pp., bibliography, maps, indices

Reviewed by Andrew Messmer, Academic Dean, Seville Theological Seminary and Associated Professor, Facultad Internacional de Teología IBSTE; Affiliated Researcher, Evangelical Theological Faculty

Price's translation of the Acts of Constantinople (869–870) offers what appears to be the penultimate work in his nearly 20-year project to render into English the acts of early church councils, for which he is owed many thanks. This translation, the first into English, is based on the modern critical edition recently published in 2012.

The Council of Constantinople, little known to moderns, is important to understand the long-standing conflict between East and West that ultimately led to the schism of 1054. While on the surface the council was debating the election of Photius to the primacy of Constantinople, the discussions also revealed deeper issues such as ecclesiastic primacy, geographical disputes between Rome and Constantinople, and the involvement of the state in church affairs. One major achievement of this council was the deposition of Photius as primate of Constantinople and the confirmation of Ignatius in his place. Although it has become customary to speak of the seven ecumenical councils (the last of which, Nicaea II, is contested by most Protestants), this council, along with the subsequent Constantinople council of 879–880, is an example of an 'ecumenical' council that took place after Nicaea II and before the schism of 1054 (although its legitimacy was never sanctioned by the papacy and the deposition of Photius was annulled in Constantinople ten years later).

The book contains a general introduction followed by translations of Anastasius' preface, the ten sessions of the council, and six letters sent after the council. The introduction is well-researched and comprehensive, providing such information as historical background to the council, summaries of the council proper and its reception, and discussion of the Latin text and English translation. Everything that one would expect to find in a work of this sort is present. If I had to suggest any criticism, perhaps it would concern the brief space given to theological matters, but for a book belonging to a series entitled 'Translated Texts for Historians' that translates the proceedings of a council that did not do much theology, this seems hardly a fair criticism.

The translations are prefaced by brief introductions, and those of the ten sessions also contain Athanasius' summary, 'letting, so to speak, the Librarian himself first introduce the reader to each session in turn' (69). Price has decades of experience in translating Latin and Greek texts from this period, and this translation, like previous ones, reads quite nicely. Original languages—Latin, Greek, and even Arabic—are relegated to footnotes, where readers will also find copious biblical citations,

interesting digressions with appropriate scholarly citations, and helpful intra-book references that assist readers in identifying and understanding recurring themes throughout the various sessions.

As with other books in this series, the formatting facilitates reading and comprehension, the bibliography is comprehensive, and there are very few typographical errors. This book will be of interest to students and professors of Middle Ages history and theology, and all research libraries that specialize in history and theology should acquire this book.

Pauline Theology as a Way of Life: A Vision of Human Flourishing in Christ
Joshua W. Jipp

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023
Hb., 241 pp., bibliog. and indices

Reviewed by Benjamin Marx, Lecturer of Bible and Theology, Instituto Bíblico Sinodal Arequipa, Peru

'Human flourishing' and the 'good life' have become popular subjects in recent publications. One can think, for example, of Jonathan T. Pennington's *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* or (more similar to the book reviewed here) Julien C. H. Smith's *Paul and the Good Life: Transformation and Citizenship in the Commonwealth of God*. Joshua W. Jipp, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and director of the Henry Center for Theological Understanding, has added this work to the category.

Jipp's prior works have demonstrated depth and breadth, and this one does not disappoint either. Jipp sets up a three-way conversation between ancient philosophy, contemporary positive psychology and 'the apostle of the heart set free' (to borrow from F. F. Bruce's title). Whereas most Pauline theologies focus on the thought world of Paul (his doctrines) and are descriptive in nature, Jipp organizes his analysis around the pursuit of the good life. Paul, as Jipp understands him, invites his readers to pursue their true *telos*—a flourishing life in Christ. In his description, Pauline letters do not so much depict abstract ideas but 'console, rebuke, exhort, and encourage—in other words, they all have the rhetorical aim of producing real transformation among his churches' (9). Jipp does not deny that doctrinal elements should be gleaned from Paul's writings, but he emphasizes that 'Paul's theological discourse always serves to enable his churches to reach the goal of conformity to the person of Christ' (9).

Jipp's primary argument is that 'for Paul, sharing in God's life through Christ and the gift of the Spirit involves a death to sin and a transformation of one's moral agency whereby one becomes more and more like Christ and is, thereby, enabled to share in eschatological resurrection life' (1). This is the *summum bonum*—union with Christ, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, and glorifying God the Father. As Christ is the true human, only through union with him and the *imitatio Christi* can humanity achieve its *telos* (2).

In the first part of the book (chapters 2–3), Jipp sets forth ancient philosophy's and current positive psychology's quests for human flourishing. Ancient philosophy, as 'both a way of life and a discourse that must help people navigate the difficult terrains of human existence' (21), was a good conversation partner for Paul. Philosophical reasoning is like '"pastoral care" in that philosophy provides wisdom and guidance to humanity for living well' (53). In view of the recent turn to virtue ethics among positive psychologists, this discipline and its pursuit of human flourishing offer a suitable third partner in this conversation.

In the four chapters of part two, Jipp describes Paul's letters as emphasizing transcendence and the sharing in Christ's resurrection life; moral agency and the sharing of the mind of Christ; love and the body of Christ; and, lastly, spiritual practices and the cultivating of the character of Christ. At the end of each chapter, Jipp clarifies overlaps and differences between Paul and his conversation partners. One of the most crucial differences in the conversation concerns what humanity's *summum bonum* constitutes. Paul knows only one answer: the crucified and risen Christ.

Participating in the life of God through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit leads our vista to the transcendent. By transcendence, Jipp argues for a 'a quest for meaning outside oneself or other people' (110–11). So human flourishing looks to the divine. As death and sin still prevail in this fallen world, human flourishing cannot be fully achieved in this life. Nevertheless, although human flourishing is oriented toward the future (sharing entirely in Christ's resurrection life), we can live a truly good life here and now. This can occur through a transformed moral agency by which we gain the capacity to think, feel and act rightly in 'conformity to the character of Christ' (120). Being joined to Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Christian 'is increasingly progressing toward worship and love of God' (121).

Love is a communal endeavour, and accordingly Jipp addresses Paul's understanding of solidarity and hospitality specifically within the group of Jesus-followers. 'Paul shares with both positive psychology and ancient philosophy the rather basic and obvious commitment to the good life as entailing good social relationships, friendships, and even institutions. But Paul's vision of human flourishing operates with the deepest conviction that persons-in-Christ only flourish together in the body of Christ' (193).

Finally, Jipp contends that to achieve the supreme good of sharing in the life of God, 'one must learn about the specific practices that facilitate growth toward humanity's telos' (201). Jipp examines four fundamental spiritual exercises: pursuit of Christ-like character, sharing resources generously with others, faithful endurance with patient hope in the promise of the resurrection amidst the adversities of life, and corporate worship of the triune God.

Jipp's book is clearly written, well-argued, refreshing and thought-provoking. Readers do not need prior familiarity with ancient philosophy or positive psychology (or detailed knowledge of Paul's letters) to appreciate this inspiring guide to human flourishing for both the individual and the community.