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Evil, Evangelism and Ecclesiastes

Melvin Tinker

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A mother in South Carolina fastened her two children snugly into their safety belts, only to sink the car in the river in order to restore a romantic interest with a man who wanted her but not the kids. An upper-middle class college couple in New Jersey, Brian Peterson and Amy Grossberg, delivered a child in a motel room, then bashed its head and dropped it in a dumpster. Jeffrey Dahmer was a serial killer, submerging himself in cannibalism and necrophilia. The Milwaukee jury who tried him concluded that he was not insane - he was just evil.

What does the face of evil look like? A red-eyed Hannibal Lecter peering at us from the shadows? No. It looks like the young couple down the street, the old man next door, the girl on the checkout, the lecturer in the university; in other words, it looks like you and me.

The fact is, people in the West are in deep trouble. Not simply because such events which appal us are taking place with increasing frequency, such that in the USA from 1985-1991 the number of 16 year-olds arrested for murder rose 158%; the number of 15 year-olds rose 217% the number of thirteen and fourteen year-olds rose 140% and the number of 12 year-olds 100%. Rather, we are in trouble in that we have a crisis in finding a category by which to explain such things. What used to be described as evil is now not simply being explained, but is in danger of being explained away. can we honestly say evil exists as a moral category any more? Is it not it just something else like 'sickness'? Is there such a thing as pure evil?[\[1\]](#)

As evangelical Christians we are being presented with an evangelistic opportunity to engage in a thoughtful apologetic in order to enable a secular society to recognise that it is intellectually bankrupt and has no substantial answer to the question of evil. What is proposed in this paper is an exposé of two of the most common attempts to deal with

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the issue and then to turn to the book of Ecclesiastes and some related NT passages in order to provide a different framework within which to critically consider the matter of 'pure evil'.

Pure Materialism

This is the view that everything is to be understood in terms of material cause and effect. The whole of existence is a result of impersonal, blind chance - with a capital C. This is the working assumption of most TV programmes. Here the presupposition is that there is no great mind behind the universe and no ultimate purpose either - only mere mechanism. Whatever sense we have of 'right and wrong' does not reflect any objective universal moral standards - at best it is an evolutionary device to ensure the survival of the species. Putting it crudely, this means that a society which is well ordered and where people care for each other is more likely to produce the conditions conducive for survival - the passing on of our genetic material to the next generation - than one in which chaos and butchery reign.

Assume that this description of reality is correct, that as Jean Paul Sartre said - 'here we are all of us eating and drinking to preserve our precious existence, and there is nothing, no reason for existing'. Then what?

Then we are left living in a universe without morality. One person who saw the consequences of this with remarkable clarity and conveyed it through his writings was the Marquis de Sade. If nature is all there is, he argued, then whatever is, is right. There is no 'ought' - one cannot say one should or should not do certain things because they are right or wrong. The moral category simply collapses into the factual category - the 'ought' becomes the 'is'. For him the consequence was his cruelty from which he derived sexual pleasure. He wrote in *La Nouvelle Justine* (1791-97): 'As nature has made us (the men) the strongest, we can do with her (the woman) whatever we please.' And he did, hence our term, sadism.

If one were to reply that 'society defines right and wrong, what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour', it would be possible to turn around and say 'So what?' But which society are we talking about? Nazi society? Marxist society? Headhunting society? Society itself is a product of blind, meaningless chance. Its so-called judgements are ultimately meaningless and are more often than not the imposition of the will of those who have power. Indeed after de Sade, the one philosopher who saw that power is all there is left if 'God is dead' was Nietzsche. In the 1880s he proclaimed himself the 'immoralist', 'the antichrist', the 'conqueror of God'. In his *Will to Power* he said: 'The world is the will to power - and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power - and nothing besides.' Despite protestations to the contrary, Nietzsche's influence on National Socialism is manifestly evident. Might is right.

However the view that there is no external morality, only what we construct ourselves and that nature is all there is, has taken some in another direction which is hard to refute if we are going to be consistent. Ingrid Newkirk, the President of People

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for the Ethical Treatment of Animals compares meat eating to the Nazi holocaust. She says, 'Six million Jews died in concentration camps, but six billion chickens will die here in slaughterhouses.' She also says, 'a rat, is a pig, is a boy'. In other words we are all on the same ethical plane. Strictly speaking if we are nothing but the products of blind, meaningless chance, who can argue with that? We may be more complex than chickens, but who decides that complexity is of a higher value than non-complexity? Evolution? Hardly, that is just an impersonal sifting mechanism and is incapable of making any moral pronouncements.

Here, however we have a problem for this view forces us to raise the question: Where does our

moral sense actually come from? One person who has tried to answer this question from within a purely materialistic paradigm is Michael Ruse, in his book, *Taking Darwin Seriously*. Here he says:

The point about morality is that it is an adaptation to get us to go beyond regular wishes, desires and fears, and to interact socially with people ... In a sense, therefore, morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes. Note, however, that the illusion lies not in the morality itself but in its objectivity.

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Ruse is saying that morality always carries a feeling of ought - that is where its power comes from. There is, however, no objective grounding for this 'ought' for there is no God or transcendent source of value. Our genes simply play a trick on us so as to ensure the survival of the species through what he calls 'reciprocal altruism' whereby the reproductive success of an individual is increased by helping others - for instance, I see someone drowning, I dive in to help them and one day someone might do the same for me. Or it works by what Ruse calls 'kin selection'. We feel a stronger sense of moral obligation to those of the same blood because this will ensure the passing on of our family genes.

Yet if morality is to be understood simply as a self-preserving device that evolution has thrown up, and therefore a trick to make us think that we are of value, when in fact we are not - after all a cold impersonal universe is valueless - then it only works if we do not recognise it is a trick, if we really do believe there is good and evil, right and wrong. But once we have seen through it, then we can discard it and say - 'If I get pleasure out of killing, I kill. Who cares about the survival of the species? We kill rats. Dinosaurs haven't survived and the universe does not weep. Why should I?' Indeed it works in the opposite direction and the evolutionary trick has over-reached itself, for now it makes sense to ignore its claims upon my conscience. If I realise someone is trying to con me, then I should ignore the con.

Some, like the champion of atheism Richard Dawkins openly admit that the way to answer the problem of evil is to deny its existence outright. So Dawkins writes:

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In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no other good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. And we dance to its music.[3]

In his thought, Dawkins is being consistent - that is all you are left with if there is no God, just no purpose, no value.

Are we able to live with that? Imagine telling a raped woman that the rapist merely danced to his DNA? Tell the victims of Auschwitz that their tormentors merely danced to their DNA. Explain to the loved ones of those cannibalised by Jeffrey Dahmer that he merely danced to his DNA. Any belief can be argued, even the belief of atheism, but not every belief can be lived. It is ironic that Dawkins added his name to a list of eminent scientists who wrote a letter to the 'Guardian' newspaper in 2002 calling upon the European Union to impose a grants embargo upon Israel because of her behaviour towards the Palestinians. If Dawkins were to be intellectually consistent he would simply have to say that the Israelis are dancing to their own DNA! He may not like the dance, but so what? Some like to tango, some like to waltz. Here determinism merges with

relativism.

Sometimes atheists use the existence of evil as an argument against belief in God. One scholar for whom this was a problem was the one time atheist C.S. Lewis. He writes:

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how have I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? ... Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too - for the argument depended on saying the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies.[4]

In other words, if believing in God causes us problems because of the existence of evil, not believing in God brings with it its own problems too; how do we explain the good and so by way of contrast - evil?

Which brings us to the next attempted explanation of 'evil'.

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Pure Relativism

There is a very important scene in the film *Pulp Fiction* in which the two main characters Vincent and Jules are on their way to commit a multiple murder contract. As they cruise through Los Angeles, laughing and carefree, they indulge in what appears to be small talk, discussing what hamburgers and quarter-pounders are called in France. 'Royale with Cheese' they joke. 'Is it because they go by the metric system that they have different names?' asks one of them. The point being made is a clever and serious one - what we name things is relative to culture. Words are nothing more than cultural convention. An act or a thing has no intrinsic value. We decide what to call it - the metric system of one is irrelevant to the imperial system of the other. A quarter-pounder with cheese is to one that a royale with cheese is to another. Killing the undefended to one is 'affirming the superior race to another'. Everything is relative.

Another film which spells out the problem of relativism, what is right for you is not necessarily right for me - so don't judge, is a film called *The Quarrel*. The main characters, Hersh and Chiam grew up together but separated because of a dispute about God and evil. Then came the holocaust and each had thought the other had perished. Reunited by chance after the war, they become embroiled once again in their boyhood quarrel. Hersh, now a Rabbi offers this challenge to his atheist friend Chiam.

If there's nothing in the universe which is higher than human beings, then what's morality? Well, it's a matter of opinion. I like milk; you like meat. Hitler likes to kill people; I like to save them. Who's to say which is better? Do you begin to see the horror of this? If there is no master of the Universe, then who is to say that Hitler did anything wrong? If there is no God, then the people who murdered your wife and kids did nothing wrong.[5]

And that is correct. If there are no absolutes, then one morality cannot be said to be better or worse than any other - they are just different. Some may prefer say, democratic morality, but then a fascist might prefer Nazi morality and unless there is something beyond them to which they can point and which will adjudicate between them, they cannot even say that Hitler was evil - he was just different, that is all.

Following the pure materialist or the pure relativist, why not abandon any meaningful talk of 'evil' altogether and just speak about sickness, a deviation from the norm? In other words, why not claim that there isn't morality, only therapy?

Thomas Harris posed the question of genuine evil with brutal honesty in his book, *Silence of the Lambs*. In it the imprisoned serial killer Hannibal Lecter, who cannibalises his victims, is approached by a young FBI agent, Clarice Starling who hopes to draw upon his insight to catch another serial killer who skins his victims called 'Buffalo Bill'.

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And part of the conversation goes like this:

'What possible reason could I have for co-operating with you?' asks Lecter.

'Curiosity', says Officer Starling.

'About what?'

'About why you're here. About what happened to you.'

'Nothing happened to me, Officer Starling, I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up on good and evil for behaviourism, Officer Starling ... nothing is ever anybody's fault. Look at me, Officer Starling. Can you say I'm evil? Am I evil, Officer Starling?'

In 1973 US psychologist Karl Menninger wrote a book with the intriguing title, *Whatever Became of Sin?*^[7] The notion of evil, argued Menninger, has slid from being 'sin' defined theologically, to being 'crime' defined legally, to being 'sickness' defined only in psychological categories.

However if bad behaviour is reduced to nothing but genetic and environmental forces - 'It's not my fault, judge, it's my glands' - then the idea of blame disappears altogether too. I cannot be blamed for having a limp, so I cannot be blamed for being predisposed towards cannibalism - and we are back to de Sade again who was a determinist. - 'Nature has made me bigger than women, I like to inflict pain on women, I can and so I shall.' But what is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander, because the notion of 'praise' also vanishes. If the bad things I do - the evil - are due to forces beyond my control, then why not the good? To psychologise everything away is to make us less than human - mere biological machines. (This psychologising away of everything is not the same as saying that there is no such thing as diminished responsibility. For instance being compelled to do something by the use of drugs or hypnotism but even diminished responsibility assumes real responsibility.) We cannot blame a machine for malfunctioning - nor then can we blame humans. When we start thinking of ourselves as machines we will soon treat each other like machines. If a machine is broken and cannot be fixed then we simply get rid of it. So why not people? The door is left wide open for involuntary euthanasia.

Nonetheless, deep down we know that evil exists, that we are responsible for our actions and that it is not simply a matter of whether something has an unpleasant effect on us that we deem it either wrong or evil. If someone accidentally trips us up and we fall down the stairs and are hurt, we may not like it and may think the other person clumsy, but we do not feel anger towards him - as sense of moral indignation, If, however, someone intentionally tries to trip us up and does not succeed, we do feel angry. Why? After all, we are not hurt? The answer is that we believe that people

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shouldn't behave like that, it is not fair or right, they should behave differently.

If pure materialism on the one hand and pure relativism on the other do not explain evil, but explain it away, what does provide an explanation? We might say, *pure Christianity* The account we have of God and reality as we find it in the Bible. We may not have an exhaustive explanation of why things are as they are, but we do have a sufficient explanation, an explanation which rings true.

The question was raised at the beginning of this paper as to whether *pure* evil exists. Let us consider why it does not.

Evil cannot exist purely for its own sake. It is always parasitic on the good. Take cruelty for example. Why are people cruel? Usually for two reasons: either because they are sadists, that is there is a derived sexual pleasure from inflicting cruelty; or else because of something else they are going to get out of it, power, money, the fulfilment of an ideology (which is often power dressed up).

There is however nothing intrinsically wrong with pleasure, power, or money. In as far as they go we might call them good things. The badness comes in by pursuing them the wrong way or too much. You can be good for the sake of goodness, even when it is of no benefit to yourself, for example laying down your life to save someone else. Though no one ever engaged in cruelty because it is wrong, it was in order to achieve something else - pleasure or power. Goodness is itself, badness is spoilt goodness. We might call sadism sexual perversion, but that presumes normal sex which can be perverted. Greed is the good appetite instinct gone wrong. Laziness is the good rest instinct gone wrong and so on. Now we can see why good and evil are not equal and opposite, the good is primary and superior, the bad is parasitic and derived, evil cannot exist without the good, but good can exist without the evil.[8]

Ecclesiastes - a Different Perspective

The problem with most theodicies (attempts to deal with the problem of evil) both secular and Christian, is that there is a tendency to assume that we have access to all the facts, or enough of the facts so that to allow for an element of mystery and untidiness somehow seems intellectually dishonest or at least deficient. So the name of the game each time is reductionism - pure materialism, pure relativism or some Christianised equivalent. One dominant discordant note in the book of Job is to rebel against the strand of Jewish wisdom which attempted to do the same by seeing all suffering as simply punitive - you suffer because you have sinned.[9] We still have some Christian leaders who in effect operate on the same basis today, 'You suffer because you do not have enough faith.' What Ecclesiastes does is strike out in a slightly different direction at the folly that life 'under the sun' can be fully 'taped' leaving no loose ends. It does this by propounding the view that *even wisdom has its limits*, that so-called 'keys

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to success' are notoriously ill-fitting. There is an underlying thought, sometimes made explicit, that we would be wise to accept the unease that life is messy and has an irreducibly mysterious element at its core. The case is presented that by pursuing a realistic question, against the backdrop of a realistic assessment of life and a realistic understanding of God, we are at a given framework whereby we can grasp a sufficient understanding of the problem of evil and hope for

its resolution in the future.[10]

The realistic question we are called to ask, especially in the light of so much trouble and misery in the world, is found in 1:3: 'What does man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun?' What profit is there to life? The word profit (*yithron*) is found nowhere in biblical Hebrew, in later Hebrew it is used of commercial transactions. It is as we might say the question of what is the 'bottom line?' Is it possible to make life successful (even with wisdom) and make a profit out of it? The answer to that question depends upon the nature of life and how it is to be viewed.

One of the main literary features of Ecclesiastes is the repetition of the key word 'vanity' or 'meaningless'. We need to be careful that we do not impose 21st century existential ideas onto the text. This book is not written by Sartre but by a descendant of David, the Qoheleth, the Preacher. The term 'vanity' appears 38 times. Looking at 1:2 and 12:8 it also constitutes an 'inclusio' - a literary envelope, framing the book. What is life under the sun? It is 'vanity' *hebhel*, meaning breath or vapour or, as it has been suggested, bubbles![11] It is the conclusion based upon thoughtful observation by a man whose theology is embedded in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. This is the view that we live in a world that is transitory, elusive and fallen and leaves us feeling dissatisfied. It may not be insignificant that the same word is given to the tragic figure of Abel in Genesis 4.

In other words, there is a moral fault-line running throughout the created world in which we live. Life under the sun is characterised by tragedy, irony, sorrow, evils which do not seem to meet with any tidy resolution in this life. In chapter 3:16 and 17 we read that there is injustice.

And I saw something else under the sun:

In the place of judgement - wickedness was there,
in the place of justice - wickedness was there.

I thought in my heart 'God will bring to judgement both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed'.

It is, however, clear that such judgement does not always come in this life, as those who would hold the view that God blesses the righteous and deals harshly with the

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wicked would have us believe: 'There is something else meaningless on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve' (8:14). Evil seems to be pretty indiscriminating - but that is what life in this fallen world under the sun is like. We don't have to apologise for that - like the Qoheleth we had better acknowledge it and face up to it. This does not mean we exchange one false worldview for another: a worldview of endless optimism for a worldview of deep despair. What is recognised instead is that there is still profit, albeit limited and qualified, in wisdom: 'Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun' (7:11).

There is therefore no proper understanding of reality. One which sees the world flawed but still full of goods (like the goods of work, laughter and friendships, cf. ch. 9) and this, in part, is the source of the tension we feel living in this world. One of the other sources of our problem in facing evil and trying to make sense of it is an inadequate understanding of God. As Luther once complained to Erasmus, 'Your thoughts of God are only too human'. Ecclesiastes provides a corrective to that:

I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also laid eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end (3:11).

Then I saw all that God had done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning (8:17).

Again, against the backdrop of Genesis 1-11, we are presented with a God who is transcendent, yet personal and imminent, sovereign, good and all powerful. This means that there is an inscrutability regarding his ways and purposes and so we must be very careful in our claims that we can read God's providences:

Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future (7:13).

It would appear that much of the motivation and weakness of the 'Openness of God' project can be traced back to precisely this point. In an attempt to defend God of the charge of being bad, he has been reduced to the point of being incompetent. One finds the same in Process Theology, the former being an evangelicalised form of the latter. God might *want* to make things better, but he really can't. He too has his limits, even limitations in knowledge about the future. For the proponents of the 'Openness of God' project, the tensions within orthodox biblical theology are too difficult to live with and so are relieved at the expense of the 'Goodness' of God.

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The existential reality Ecclesiastes points to is the invariable tension which exists between faith and sight in this world and the call for us to acknowledge the evil which exists but without compromising our faith in either God's omnipotence or divine goodness.

What Ecclesiastes does which many theodicies do not do - secular or religious - is to call us to humbly recognise that there is more to reality than that which we experience 'under the sun'. There is the transcendent. This is what will ultimately give life purpose and direction; as we recognise that we are accountable to the One who has made us and sustains us and who will do what is right:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every *hidden thing*, whether it is good or evil (12:13, 14).

We do not have access to all the facts - many of them are hidden from us, but not to God and his judgement will be made. Everything then is not relative for there is an absolute point of reference. Neither is the material all there is to reality, there are, as Peter Berger would put it, 'signals of transcendence' all around us and one day we shall have to give an account to our Maker who has littered our world with such signals.

We would argue that part of these signals of transcendence is the reality of evil itself. John Chapman, the Australian evangelist, makes the important apologetic point that this is a world suitable for sinners. The discordant nature of reality, its frustrations, its agonies and endless disappointments - the very stuff of Ecclesiastes - reminds us that all is not well between ourselves and our Maker. That is why the Qoheleth ends with the words concerning the importance of fearing God which is the beginning of Wisdom, and obeying the commandments which embody

his wisdom. Therefore that which was overthrown and led to evil being introduced into the world, the Word of God, is the only hope we have that evil will be countered and finally destroyed, although that resolution is not found in Ecclesiastes. We are pointed beyond that, within the grand sweep of Scripture to the One in whom we do find some sort of resolution, the Qoheleth par excellence, the one who is greater than Solomon.

Qoheleth, translated teacher, or preacher, has the same root as *qahal* - assembly or the church, *ecclesia*, in the Greek, hence our title 'Ecclesiastes'. In Jesus we see the one who is not only known as the teacher, rabbi, but also the one who assembles around himself his own little group, his 'church'. He is also the personification of Wisdom, Jesus Christ is 'our wisdom from God - that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption', says Paul (1 Cor. 1:30). What is more, when we look at the life of this Qoheleth we see and hear pretty much the same frustrations and disappointments as the writer of Ecclesiastes.

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In Mark 7:31-37 we have the incident of the healing of the deaf mute by Jesus. What is striking is what we read in verse 34, 'He [Jesus] looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh, said to him, "Ephphatha". The word used for sigh is *anastenazo*. Why the deep sigh or the groan? Could it not be the audible expression of the deep sense of frustration at the results of sin, decay and misery which is in his Father's creation? In Mark 8 we come across the same verb in response to the evil of unbelief of the Pharisees - verse 12, 'He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign?" To make the connection complete, it is the same verb used by Paul in Romans 8:18-25, with its allusion to the vanity of Ecclesiastes, verse 20, 'For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope' and then verse 22, 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning (*sunstenaxei*) as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.' Does this mean that all we can do is share the frustration of living in a fallen world with everyone else? Not at all, we can be far more positive because of what the Qoheleth par excellence has achieved to defeat evil.

On reading the incident in Mark 7 we see a miracle that is shot through with significance. Mark uses a very rare word in verse 32 to describe the man's speech impediment, *mogilalos*, which the NIV renders 'Could hardly talk'. It is in fact a word that is taken directly from the Greek translation of Isaiah 35:6 which looks forward to the breaking in of God's reign when everything will be different. It states: 'Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue [*mogilalos*] shout for joy.'

What is more striking is the response of this non-Jewish pagan crowd when the man goes back to them: 'He has done everything well', they say to each other in utter astonishment. What they didn't realise was that they were claiming more than they knew, for this is the Greek translation of Genesis 1:31: 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good'. The lesson is clear, the very same God who made the world and pronounced it good is the same God who in Jesus is redeeming the world and that too is good. The one who was promised in Isaiah and longed for by the Jews is the very same one who is performing Messianic miracles in the middle of this Gentile crowd. Far from God being indifferent to evil and the suffering it occasions, in his Son he opposes it. This of course is the basis for Christian involvement in medicine and the caring professions, providing the rationale as to why one can fight against sickness and not fight against God.

In his novel, *The Plague*, Albert Camus confronts the reader with a dilemma. The town of Oran is infested with a plague of rats. It is the doctor who fights against the plague and so, it is viewed,

against God, whereas it is the priest who does not take action and so is forced to take an anti-humanitarian stance. The Christian cuts through the dilemma. God is sovereign, but he is also against evil. In Jesus he taken steps to redeem that which is fallen - that is what the miracles point to and what the cross and resurrection achieve (Heb. 2:10-15).

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Romans 8 follows on from Romans 1-7 and the programmatic presentation of the gospel in which the righteousness of God is displayed in the cross where God did what man could not do. He dealt with the root cause of moral evil in the world - sin; and the ultimate source of frustration - death. 'Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (8:1). There is also a future glory to be revealed, marking the removal of all frustration and evil. That is why Paul can write: 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed' (8:18). In the meantime God's Spirit has been given to God's people, so that they can be empowered to fight against sin and the sinful nature (8:9-16).

We do not have access to the complete picture and one reason for that, apart from our finitude, is that the drama is not yet complete. All the main events of the drama, bar one - the Lord's return - have already taken place. And that one event is literally going to make all the difference in the world. It is then that the final resolution will take place.

In the meantime our calling is to combat evil in whatever forms we find it. Supremely this is to be through the proclamation of the gospel, which alone has power to redeem. Also through social action, for we have a reason to engage in good works (Eph. 2:10). While in this world Christians will feel the full weight of living in a world subject to vanity. Students of theology, if they are wise, will admit gaps in their knowledge but will also look forward to a world to come. A world in which all such transience and moral corruption will be a thing of the past and evil will be banished forever.

Let us end with that magnificent vision of John in Revelation 21 as a counterpoint to and fulfilment of much of the angst and hope of Ecclesiastes:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

References

[1] See Charles Colson, 'The Face of Evil', in *How Shall We Now Live?* (Marshall Pickering, 1999), 184-202.

[2] M. Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[3] Richard Dawkins, *Out of Eden*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 133.

[4] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Fount, 1978), 41-42

[5] See Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil*, (Word, 1996), 200-202.

[6] Thomas Harris, *Silence of the Lambs*, (London: Mandarin, 1989) 20.

[7] Karl Meninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (Hawthorn Books, 1973).

[8] See C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* This is an expression of St Augustine's principle of evil being *privatio boni* - the deprivation of the good.

[9] See Melvin Tinker, *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* (Christian Focus, 1997).

[10] See John Kendall, *Ecclesiastes and the Subversion of Success*, L'Abri Lecture No 7.

[11] See Melvin Tinker, *Wisdom to Live By* (Christian Focus, 1998) ch. 1.





The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ (Part 2) - Approaching Sonship

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How are we to interpret the declaration of the sonship of Jesus Christ on the mount of transfiguration?[1] As a declaration of deity?

The fact that this question is put will appear to many as a sign of being considerably behind the times as far as NT scholarship goes. It suggests not only a flattening out of the language of sonship in the NT, but its flattening out on a scheme not derived from the Synoptic Gospels. Discussions of NT Christology over the last two decades, including the theology of sonship, have often taken as their starting-point James Dunn's volume on *Christology in the Making*. [2] Dunn concluded that the only clear NT affirmation of belief in Jesus Christ as the incarnate second person of the deity was found in John. The language of sonship deployed elsewhere, and certainly in the Synoptics, predicated of Jesus high things that made him unique and unsurpassable, the redeemer and the revealer. But it did not constitute a theology of incarnation.

Quite apart from exegetical challenges which this interpretation naturally faced, it was flawed at the level of method. [3] Dunn regularly asked the question of how NT language would sound in first century ears, in a Jewish or a Graeco-Roman context. The outcome of his investigation, however, should never have been dependent on the preponderant use of that criterion. This is because the language of the NT is also one that is grounded in ecclesial use, presupposing community, worship and theology,

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potentially modifying, if not transforming, background theology. Dunn's thesis could not be delivered as long as it did not take this into proper account, although its renewed statement in the second edition was not formulated in response to such an objection.

Methodological problems persist even when there is heightened sensitivity to the interweaving of historical and theological questions in interpretation. N.T. Wright's two volumes on *The New Testament and the People of God* and *Jesus and the Victory of God* have received well-deserved recognition for their achievement in charting and tackling fundamental issues in NT theology. [4]

In the latter volume the author wrote as follows towards its conclusion (he had touched on transfiguration just before that):

I suggest, in short, that the return of YHWH to Zion, and the Temple-theology which it brings to focus, are the deepest keys and clues to gospel christology. Forget the 'titles of Jesus, at least for a moment; forget the pseudo-orthodox attempts to make Jesus of Nazareth conscious of being the second person of the Trinity; forget the arid reductionism that is the mirror-image of that unthinking would-be orthodoxy.[5]

Tom Wright goes on to summarise what he has been positively arguing for, and when he enjoins us to forget, he is rehearsing what he has been arguing against, as well as what he has been arguing for, over the course of the whole volume. But, for all the considerable and impressive achievement of this work, there is a logical difficulty in its method.

It is certainly the case that recapturing the Jewishness of Jesus, and deep and informed sensitivity to the structures of Jewish life and thought, has considerably enhanced our reading of the gospels in the course of the twentieth century. It is also the case that the imposition of the theological categories of Nicea or Chalcedon on the NT data as a kind of unconscious, semi-conscious, unthinking or dogmatic *a priori* can produce distortion. Yet our reading of gospel christology cannot bracket the ontological question of divine sonship, as it was classically treated. Suppose that for whatever reason, I conclude that the historical Jesus *was*, in fact, God incarnate. (Suppose too, that I read Nicea and Chalcedon as aiming at no more than the statement of this, albeit in a distinctive conceptuality, or, at least, distinctive language.) If I so conclude about Jesus, I *ought* to read the Synoptic Gospels in that light. If, years after a student had left a college, it turned out that he was the Crown Prince of an Arab state, something that was not known at the time, it would be perverse not to read the record of his student days in the light of this fact. It might not, and should not, be the only way to read it. Indeed, it might be read in that light but read distortedly. However, the logical point is this: the actual historical identity of the student is that of the Crown Prince. We then have to ask whether that fact contributes anything to our understanding of the Prince's

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self-awareness, and what light is thrown on his whole student career by the fact and its implications.

If Jesus was God incarnate, we are dealing with a datum, - a fact as far as faith is concerned - that cannot be marginalised in the interpretation of the gospel records, whether or not Nicea and Chalcedon in particular impose on them unhelpful categories of interpretation. Tom Wright's methodical omission leads him to conclusions that go far beyond what is warranted.

Jesus did not ... 'know that he was God' in the same way that one knows one is male or female, hungry or thirsty, or that one ate an orange an hour ago. His knowledge was of a more risky, but perhaps more significant sort: like knowing one is loved. One cannot 'prove' it except by living by it.[6]

We cannot ask here how it is that we know that we are male or female, or ate an orange etc. Yet the attempt to derive this sort of conclusion by an examination of the synoptic accounts, against their historical background, in the way the author has done is doomed to fail. The evidence considerably underdetermines the conclusion. If for any reason we believe Jesus to have been and to be God incarnate, we must ask what, if anything, follows from this for our interpretation

of the gospel accounts. That is not an alien imposition on them. The point is a logical one in relation to methodology. Actually, in his Preface, Tom Wright undermines the force of his own conclusions. Explaining that he is omitting consideration of the Gospel of John, he says: 'Even if, in the long term, this is judged a weakness, it sets a limit for which readers of an already long book may perhaps be grateful.'[\[7\]](#) But consideration of John's Gospel has at least the potential to upset his conclusions about Jesus' self-knowledge, unless it is decided that the way John should be read cannot give us any guidance about the way the Synoptic Gospels should be read. That is the sort of decision that needs a theological defence, especially in light of the issues surrounding canonical and theological readings of Scriptural books.

Hermeneutical questions easily spiral off into a world of their own, yet they cannot pass unmentioned in the present context. Nevertheless my choice to refer to them means that I am failing to afford space in what follows so as to give balanced attention to the synoptic witness to the transfiguration. To ask what is the significance of the divine declaration of sonship is not to ask a simple question. Reference to 'glory' and 'exodus' in the first part of this article must be fed into the themes of theophany and apocalyptic, messianic hope and enthronement on Zion of God's appointed king, which constitute a cluster of themes that direct us in an interpretation of the transfiguration.[\[8\]](#)

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However there remain different levels: there is a significance for Jesus; for his disciples at the time; for disciples in retrospect; for the individual synoptists; for author and readers of 2 Peter (see 1:16-18). Whether or not it is apt to think of concentric circles of interpretation, a plenitude of significance and a plenitude of meaning attaching to the outermost circle, it is both legitimate and important to read accounts of the glory of transfigured sonship *both* in terms that do not presuppose incarnation *and* in terms that do.[\[9\]](#)

There is no contradiction here. Reading the story of transfiguration in terms, for example, of the manifestation of the messianic king does not require reference to incarnation. However it permits it, and if such a reference is justified, the reading is enhanced. Again, to read the story in terms of a revelation of the glory of deity does not exclude attending to it in terms of the strict messianic context of the synoptic accounts.[\[10\]](#) It permits it; indeed, requires it, I believe, so I can sympathise with a great deal in Tom Wright's approach and analysis. It is also possible to judge as inappropriate some questions that are asked on the basis of a traditional conviction of deity, such as whether Jesus shone with the light of his essential deity or of his earthly humanity infused but not confused with the principle of deity.[\[11\]](#) Here, however, we must leave questions of this sort, leaving with them a host of questions which may or may not be appropriate and which might be mentioned, for example: did Jesus shine with the light of his own future glory? Did he shine with the light of the future glory of the saints? It is time to return to the narrative.

In the Company of Elijah

According to Matthew and Mark, the voice heard on the mount of transfiguration referred to 'the Son whom I love' (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7). In Luke, it is 'my Son, whom I have chosen' (9:35). In all these cases, we are directed back to the baptism of Jesus Christ, and the words heard when Jesus was baptised are commonly taken to echo the words of Isaiah 42:1: 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight' and Psalm 2:7: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'.[\[12\]](#) There is a wealth of allusion here, without even going into the rich

possibilities of Genesis 22:2 I just note that the Lucan account of the transfiguration points us back with particular

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deliberation to the Isaianic passage. It is one of the 'servant songs' of Isaiah, where suffering and servanthood are brought together. Suffering is the theme of Jesus' teaching prior to transfiguration, but it is Luke's account that indicates most distinctly the salvation-historical context of filial, servant suffering.

The interpretation of NT theology in terms of salvation history was given its most sustained and prominent exposition in the twentieth century, by Oscar Cullmann.[13] Cullmann's work came in for considerable criticism and has long been out of fashion in many quarters.[14] Yet even his critics accepted that what he attributed to the NT (wrongly, they said) could be attributed to Luke or Luke-Acts in particular. A mighty movement in the history of salvation, and not just a declaration of what Christ is like, is the current that bears along the transfiguration accounts here. Cullmann certainly brought out well the way NT christology highlighted the principle of vicarious suffering, the one for the many, in the historical movement from the whole (the cosmos) to the nation (Israel) to the one (Jesus) whose lordship through the church (the many, like Israel) would extend to the whole (the cosmos in the eschaton).[15] The backward and forward 'reach' of the transfiguration narratives emerge not just in the vocabulary of sonship and servanthood and the connection with the coming of the kingdom in Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27. It is apparent too in the figures of Jesus' two companions and this is brought out particularly by Luke.

A version like the NIV, for example, renders Luke 9:30: 'Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared'. The omission of a Greek word from the translation risks our missing a connection which Luke apparently wants us to make. Translations like the AV and RSV rightly include a preparatory word: 'Behold, two men appeared'. [16] There is a connection with Luke 24:4 where, on the third day after the crucifixion, at the tomb, while the women were puzzling about the disappearance of Jesus' body, 'behold, two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them'. In Acts, when Jesus had ascended, to the bewilderment of the onlooking disciples, 'they were looking intently up into the sky ... when behold two men dressed in white stood beside them' (1:10). What is dramatically enacted in earthly history is dramatically accompanied by heavenly witnesses. There are two of them. Transfiguration, resurrection and ascension are joined as holy history. What, however, are we to make in particular of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration? We touched on Moses in the first part of this article. Now it

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is the turn of Elijah.

If any OT figure attracted the attention of Jews in the period before Christ, it was Elijah.[17] He enjoyed plenty of roles in the literature of the inter-testamental period and was one of the biblical characters who had a book written about him under the title of 'Apocalypse', a book which spoke of things 'which the eye has not seen nor the ear heard'. [18] Although we cannot confidently date the Apocalypse of Elijah, if anyone in first century Jewish lore was a potential recipient of such seeing and hearing, it was Elijah. No one was more likely than he to turn up on a mountain, unannounced. His very entry into the OT narrative is intriguing enough, announcing drought and defying monarchs (1 Kings 17:1). His confrontation with the priests of Baal, in the name of Yahweh, is one of the most dramatic tales in the historical books of the OT. His departure from

the world was as startling as his arrival on the narrative scene for, according to 2 Kings 2, he did not die but was taken up into heaven. Jesus spoke of those who would not taste death: Elijah was an example of this *par excellence*, and it is interesting to speculate on a possible link between Jesus' words and Elijah's story.

Where does the connection between Moses and Elijah lie? The difficulty with a definite answer is that there are several candidates, and the nature of biblical typology is such that we might integrate a number of them without doing violence to the synoptic reports.[19] Both received privileged revelations of God on Sinai. Both were great contenders against idolatry. While Moses died and Elijah did not, it was speculated in some quarters that Moses had not died either, and the mode of Moses' departure from the earth was certainly mysterious (Deut. 34:6). Moses can stand for the law, Elijah for the prophets. Moses was the lawgiver and Jesus was accused of transgressing the law; Elijah was the great opponent of idolatry and Jesus' enemies were troubled by the excessively close proximity to God in which he placed himself. Then we can read of Moses as informant (teacher) and Elijah as reformator (reformer); of one opening the (Red) sea, the other the (barren) heavens. Two witnesses appear in Revelation 11:16, often identified with Moses and Elijah.[20] Both were great men of prayer and Jesus, Luke tells us, was praying when he was transfigured.

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These suggestions move between the poles of identifying explicit connections in Scripture and proposing edifying associations. My view is that those suggestions that show how Moses and Elijah signified Jesus and which emphasise revelation on Mount Sinai deserve to be accorded special weight.[21] However as we explore the theme, one decisive fact must be placed in the foreground: the expectation that Elijah would return. The relationship of this to the appearance of the Messiah was variously conceived at the time of Christ, but that there was some connection between the reappearance of the one and the coming of the other was widely believed. While other figures could sometimes be expected to return in the messianic age, particular speculation was attached to Elijah.

This was not just because he had not tasted death. It was on account of the prophecy which brought to its conclusion the prophetic literature of the OT, before the voice of prophecy was stilled, a stillness, as it is often put, shattered by the cry of John the Baptist in the Judaean wilderness. So we read in Malachi 4:5: 'I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes'. 'Who can boast of such deeds' as those of Elijah?, we are asked in the intertestamental book of Ecclesiasticus. 'It is written that you are to come at the appointed time with warnings, to allay the divine wrath before its final fury, to reconcile father and son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob' (see 48:1-14). In literature known as the Sibylline Oracles, not precisely datable, Elijah is pictured returning 'driving a heavenly chariot at full stretch from heaven' (II.187-89).[22] Elijah was no slave of the commonplace.

In the gospels, John the Baptist and Elijah are identified, and Jesus' ministry provoked speculation about his relationship to both figures. Both prior and subsequent to the transfiguration, Gospel writers record Jesus' sayings that John the Baptist is to be identified with Elijah (e.g. Matt. 11:14). This was in one respect unsurprising, since John's clothing resembled that of Elijah, as described in the OT narrative. John's Gospel records the denial by John the Baptist that he should be so identified (1:21), but the most natural explanation of this is that in the context and in that geographical region, there was a danger that the significance of identification should be misunderstood or that it might be taken as a case of reincarnation. Luke made explicit in the first chapter of his gospel that the identification was functional; John is not

actually Elijah, but fulfils the role of Elijah, possessed of his spirit and power (Luke 1:17). Of course John himself wondered at times about his own role, as he did about that of Jesus and his relationship to it (Matt. 11:3). At all events, the appearance of Elijah on the mount of transfiguration

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in conjunction with the ministry of John the Baptist cleared the way for believing in Jesus as Messiah, for the early church could now forestall any objection to the claim that Jesus was Messiah made on the grounds that Elijah had not yet come.

Just as the God-fearing life of Moses resembled, in its way, that of Jesus, so did the God-fearing life of Elijah, and they both, whether during or subsequent to their life on earth, were signifying the one who is to come, the Messiah. Yet, just as a contrast is drawn between Moses and Jesus in passages cited in the first part of this article, so a contrast emerges between Elijah and Jesus as we read the transfiguration stories in context. The vocabulary of Luke 9:51 which speaks of Christ's departure echoes that of 2 Kings 1-11, where it describes Elijah's departure and of course the ascension furnishes us with a further connection.[\[23\]](#) But in the case of Jesus death precedes ascension. No one can be sure why Peter suggested that three shelters or booths should be built for Jesus, Moses and Elijah but given the transfigured appearance, it would not be surprising if he thought that Jesus was about to be assumed into heaven in the company of Elijah and that he was trying to detain the heavenly company for a little longer. As it was, Jesus would die, unlike Elijah, and die in agony, unlike Moses.

There is however another contrast. Just prior to his assumption into heaven, Elijah called down fire from heaven on the messengers of Ahaziah, king of Samaria (2 Kgs 1). It consumed a number of men. In language clearly resonant of this, the disciples asked Jesus whether they should do the same when Samaritan villagers failed to welcome his messengers (Luke 9:54). This occurred shortly after the transfiguration. The suggestion came from James and John, two of the three disciples who had witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus and they received a rebuke, just as did the third, Peter a few days before the transfiguration. Peter tried to thwart a plan that involved a cross; James and John tried to perpetuate Elijah's strong-arm approach. Jesus will have neither. Suffering cannot be avoided, but vengeance must be. This is not necessarily to condemn what Elijah said and did in a different space and time. It is to declare that it is not the way of God for Jesus and his disciples in this day and hour.

Contrast, as well as continuity marks the relationship of Jesus to Moses and Elijah, something highlighted by the transfiguration of him who alone was transfigured. Contrast, as well as continuity, also marked the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist. Both preached the kingdom of God and Jesus does not eliminate the element of judgement involved in that. But where John baptises with water Jesus will baptise with the Spirit. Jesus' time is especially the time of grace. 'There has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist' Jesus declares, 'yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he' (Matt. 11:11; cf. Luke 7:28). Something here transcends both Moses and Elijah. The fact that Paul can speak of Moses' ministry of 'death' (2 Cor. 3:7)

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and that Jesus can refuse fire from heaven both suggest that with the coming of Christ there is fulness of grace. Moses, as Allison Trites put it, could not remove the hardness of people's heart, nor was it Elijah's part to combat vindictiveness.[\[24\]](#) Transfiguration ultimately discloses and

signifies grace and a special era of grace. This comes to light the more when we consider the function of Elijah according the prophet Malachi.

Jesus, John, Elijah

According to Jesus, in a declaration immediately following the transfiguration, it is the work of Elijah to 'restore all things', a function fulfilled by John the Baptist (Matt. 17:11; Mark 9:12). What exactly does that mean? The book of Malachi, while rich in suggestion, does not yield answers on its surface. Quite apart from addressing the question of how to interpret the ending of that book, the relationship of Lord and messenger in Malachi 3:1ff needs to be sorted out. If we ask what might be involved in restoration, by starting from the ministry of John, rather than from Malachi, we still have puzzles. What does Luke mean when, in language clearly echoing that of Malachi, he speaks of John in his Elijah role turning 'the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous' (1:17)?

It is widely supposed that when all these passages, from Old and New Testaments, are taken in conjunction, the restoration of family relationships is at the heart of the restorative ministry of John/Elijah. However while the language seems to lend immediate support to that interpretation the gospel accounts of John's ministry do not bring out that fact. Is an alternative explanation possible? It seems that there is. The verb used for 'restore', in both Matthew and Mark, though used in different Greek tenses by the two evangelists, echoes the language of the Septuagint version of Malachi. This contrasts interestingly with the Hebrew text on certain points. In the Septuagint, we read not of the restoration of the hearts of the fathers to the children and then, parallel to that, of the hearts of the children to the fathers, but as parallel, the hearts of fathers and children towards their neighbours. This actually fits what we know of John's ministry better than the more narrowly familial emphasis. John is promoting neighbourliness in general within Israel, rather than concentrating on more specifically family disunity.^[25] Luke does not refer to restoration in his account of transfiguration, but there is a case for saying that Luke's actual wording in 1:17, is a rather free paraphrase of the Septuagintal Greek.^[26] One should at least note, in this connection, that in some pre-Christian interpretation of the role of Elijah, he would be beyond solving intra-familial

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disputes when he returned. He would take on the task of expounding law and ritual certainly a wider role.

Our line of interpretation is strengthened by broadening our understanding of what is said about families in the prophecy of Malachi. Fundamental to that writing is the concept of covenant: the one who is to come is 'the messenger of the covenant' (3:1) the notion of God as a great and covenant king is stamped distinctively on this book. The relationship of fathers to children is set squarely within the covenant. Famil relationships have gone awry, but the context is the more general breakdown of relationships within the covenanted community. Long after the death of the great patriarchs of the book of Genesis, Isaiah laments the state of the nation of Israel in these terms: 'Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us' (63:16).^[27] The hearts of disobedient posterity (children) are sundered from those of their faithful progenitor (fathers). The covenant has been trans-generationally ruptured.^[28] On this note in Malachi, the OT prophets sign off. So the role of Elijah is restoration of social or community order within the context of restoration of covenant relationships, with its trans-generational significance. One problem after

the return from the exile, during the epoch in which Malachi was prophesying, was that intermarriage with non-Israelites was destructive of the religious unity and faithfulness of the nation. And, of course idolatry was Elijah's bugbear.

How does this take us to John the Baptist and the transfigured Christ? Elijah's function is centrally covenantal, as is that of John the Baptist. If we could be sure of the exact social context and possessed of more sociological detail in relation to John's ministry (though strides have been made over the last decades), we should be able to highlight its features more precisely than we can. Certainly, a desert fraternity a Qumran held covenant renewal ceremonies, assiduously studied the law^[29] and sought to 'prepare the way of the Lord'. A summons to repentance and forgiveness would in this, and wider Israelite context, have overtones of national and covenant renewal, not just of individual responsibility and blessing. John offered a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, preparatory to the fullness of salvation that Messiah would bring. He summoned the people to rectitude within the covenant at the time when God would act to deliver his covenanted people. His ministry is the passage from the old to the new. Its desert location recalled the passage of Israel from Egypt to Canaan. Of the many possible associations of the cloud at the mount of transfiguration, we should at least keep in mind the notion that the cloud would make an eschatological

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reappearance (Is. 4:5). Covenant grace is not only near in Jesus. It is at the heart of what the transfiguration discloses.^[30]

It was Paul's office to develop the notion that gentiles were included in the covenant. Once Christ has come, his ministry and work become the measure of what God requires and Moses and Elijah, law and covenant, are all to be interpreted from this centre. At transfiguration Christ is revealed in his authoritative role. 'Listen to him.' We have embarked on a preliminary interpretation of transfiguration, but these words are written large on the entrance to the port of embarkation. While the enlightened mind is to play on the truth that was revealed to the enlightened eyes, the biblical account bends the mind as much in the direction of obedience to the object of divine witness as to the contemplation of theological truth. Before we interpret Moses and Elijah; whatever our theology of sonship and servanthood; listen to him. Israel was trained to obey as a basis for comprehension. In the opening chapters of Joshua, for example, with its thematic wealth - conquest after Exodus; Jordan after the Red Sea; the produce of Canaan after the manna; above all, God, the great deliverer - there is a remarkable focus on the person of Joshua.^[31] 'Listen to him; God has exalted him' - Joshua, as well as Jesus. The contemplation of truth, however glorious, is placed in the context of the summons to humble and obedient listening, the acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus is prior to grasping all that the lordship is about.^[32]

Conclusion

We have done no more than make a beginning and have omitted more than we have included. The transfiguration is at least this: the sign and revelation of decisive action within salvation history. The content of the sign is at least this: the new dispensation of grace under the messianic lordship of Jesus Christ. It inaugurates a crucial phase within the story of divine action, as the disciples are instructed about a path from suffering to glory, through cross to ascension. In the context of the NT, it constitutes the fullest revelation, under earthly conditions, of the glory, and

not just the destiny, of the person of the Son of God.[33] It is pregnant with apocalyptic future. [34] At the mount of transfiguration, we are at the heart of the gospel. Michael Ramsey concluded that the transfiguration

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... stands as a gateway to the saving events of the gospel, and is a mirror in which the Christian mystery is seen in its unity. Here we perceive that the living and the dead are one in Christ, that the old covenant and the new are inseparable, that the Cross and the glory are of one, that the age to come is already here, that our human nature has a destiny of glory, that in Christ the final word is uttered and in him alone the Father is well pleased. Here the diverse elements in the theology of the New Testament meet.[35]

Joseph Hall said: 'Nearer to heaven you cannot come while ye are upon earth, that you may see him glorious upon earth, the region of his shame and abasement, who is now glorious in heaven, the throne of his majesty.'[36]

I have emphasised that far more has been omitted in my account than has been included, but it may be especially noted that I have not even mentioned the significance of the transfiguration for Jesus himself. The reason is that I believe that it is, on the whole, safest to approach the account as does 2 Peter, namely as a visual manifestation and verbal revelation for the benefit of others. [37] We can certainly make tentative suggestions and considered judgements about its significance for Jesus, but I question a statement such as that of Braithwaite: 'In studying his life it is necessary at every step to penetrate to this spiritual experience'. [38] The inner reality of the suffering and obedience of the Son, his self-consciousness, the depths and heights of his glory are hidden from us at our first approach and only maturity discloses how much or how little we may know and surmise in these matters. For now we are spectators with Peter, James and John, but not disinterested more than they were; participants in Christ with the company of saints, but not privy to the whole truth; beneficiaries of nothing less than salvation, but strangers to the comprehension of its utter cost. Yet if we understand little, it is in hope founded on a promise that we shall comprehend more when the glory of the transfigured Christ is publicly revealed in a transfigured cosmos.[39] And what we do understand is but the beginning of a life of discipleship which is the deep concern of the evangelists' account of the transfiguration. But an account of which is impossible within the constraints of the present exercise.

References

[1] [The first part of this article appeared in *Themelios* 28.1 \(2002\)](#). In its first footnote, I indicated the severe limits to my treatment. What I said there doubly holds for this part.

[2] The first edition of *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM, 1980) was followed by a second in 1989, whose 'Foreword', along with other methodological essays, appears in J. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit Volume 1: Christology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

[3] See the different approach taken and conclusions reached in, for instance, Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville: John Knox, 1999). I mention this for contrast, not as a judgement on the merits or otherwise of Matera's work.

[4] Respectively London: SPCK, 1992 and London: SPCK, 1996.

[5] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and Victory of God*, 653.

[6] Wright, *Jesus and Victory of God*.

[7] Wright, *Jesus and Victory of God*, p. xvi.

[8] Footnote 1 of the first part of this article gives swift bibliographical guidance. Of course, see throughout commentaries ad loc.

[9] On the assumption, of course, that the Church has rightly confessed Jesus Christ to be the incarnate Son of God.

[10] This is to put it generally; we must attend, of course, to the individual Gospels.

[11] 'Undoubtedly, the major tenet of the Patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration is the interpretation of the epiphany as a manifestation by Jesus to his disciples of his own divine status', J.A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1986) 110. Questions concerning the relation of the divine essence to the divine economy were regularly discussed in this connection.

[12] This can be rendered in more ways than one. I am, again, treating the Synoptic witness as a unity.

[13] See *Christ and Time* (London: SCM, 1962) and *Salvation In History* (London: SCM, 1967).

[14] Though Jurgen Moltmann could recently say that Cullmann's 'salvation-historical eschatology is probably the Christian eschatology most widely held', *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1996) 12. For some renewed discussion, see Richard Bauckham, 'Time and Eternity' in Richard Bauckham ed., *God Will Be All In All: The Eschatology of Jurgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999) 174-83.

[15] See O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1963) *passim* but including chapter 3. Our present reference to Cullmann can be justified even if Tom Wright's critical judgement on this work is accepted, in *Jesus and Victory of God*, 614.

[16] NEB renders it: 'Suddenly ...' The same word is found in Matt. 17:3.

[17] A quick way in to this is via Jeremias' article on Elijah in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II, (Eerdmans, 1964) though there has been ongoing research since then.

[18] Origen thought that this phrase lay behind Paul's similar wording in 1 Cor. 2:9. See J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983) 728. But we cannot date the Apocalypse of Elijah with confidence.

[19] It is possible to combine the demands of exegetical rigour with a conviction that biblical writings can contain intra-textual resonances that are surprisingly rich and wide. Even if there is room for demurral on some particulars, the work of Dale Allison, *The New Moses: a Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) is very suggestive on this point.

[20] Aside from reading standard commentaries on the Synoptic Gospels and 2 Peter, it is well worth following up some of the Patristic sources, if possible, mentioned in McGuckin, *The*

Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition, and A.M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Longmans, 1949). Amongst examples which are either instructive or interesting or both, I may mention Leo's 'Sermon' (51) and Chrysostom's 'Homily' (56). Among older works which repay reading are Joseph Hall, *Contemplation on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments* (London, nd.) and Archbishop R.C. Trench, *Studies in the Gospels* (London: Kegan Paul, 1896).

[21] I am thinking of Moses' prophetic signification of Jesus, not Moses as representative of law: see Deut. 18:17ff; 34:10.

[22] Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 349.

[23] Even if *analempsis* contains a reference to the death of Jesus, it is surely impossible that it contain no reference to the ascension.

[24] A.A. Trites, *The Transfiguration of Christ: a Hinge of Holy History* (Nova Scotia: Lancelot, 1994) 38.

[25] It is a fundamentally intra-Jewish matter on the assumption that the soldiers (Luke 3:14) are a Jewish, not a Roman, company.

[26] Howard Marshall apparently does not dismiss this possibility: *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster 1978) 59.

[27] I am substantially following Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) in the relevant line of interpretation of Malachi.

[28] Covenant is obviously an Isaianic theme: see, e.g., 61:8.

[29] The Septuagint reverses the order of the verses at the end of Malachi, so that we are left with the injunction to remember Moses not the threat connected with Elijah.

[30] These statements really need to be made by detailed steps; spatial constraints mean that I am taking great strides.

[31] Josh. 1-3. As an aside, it is worth noting that attention has been drawn to some sort of connection between a subsequent story in Joshua and the Transfiguration: see Richard Hess, *Joshua* (Leicester: IVP, 1996) 127.

[32] Note John 14:21: revelation happens along the path of obedience.

[33] Prior to the resurrection, that is. I am thinking of revelation in the sense of what is immediately manifested to the eye.

[34] Just how much I have omitted is indicated by the careful study by A.D.A. Moses, *Matthew's Transfiguration Story and Jewish-Christian Controversy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) - and that is just Matthew!

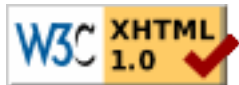
[35] Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* 144.

[36] Hall, *Contemplation on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments*, 512.

[37] See 2 Pet. 1:16-18 and the commentary by Samuel Benetrau, *Le Deuxieme Epitre de Pierre; L'Epitre de Jude* (Vaux-sur-Seine: Faculte Libre de Theologie Evangelique, 1994) ad loc.

[38] See W.C. Braithwaite, 'The Teaching of the Transfiguration', *Expository Times* 17 (1905-1906) 372-75.

[39] I mean no theological commitment here to the form of the future cosmos. The phrase, however, captures *a* characteristic emphasis of Eastern Orthodox theologians in the theology of the transfiguration.



Theology of Preaching in Martin Luther

Dennis Ngien

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Introduction

James Mackinnon, a Luther scholar, observed that there is 'no exhaustive treatise, even in German, on Luther's preaching'.¹ Theology and preaching, for Luther, are indissolubly one. In his *Large Catechism*, 1530, Luther declared: 'I am both a doctor and a preacher'² Luther elevated preaching as an indispensable means of grace, seeing it as central to the church liturgy. 'To hear mass means nothing else but to hear God's Word and thereby serve God.'³ In his *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), Luther asserted that the preaching office constitutes the sure sign of a true church: Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true Catholic church: 'a Christian holy people' must be there, even though their number is small.⁴

It is supremely through the words of the preacher that the Word of God in the Scriptures is made alive in the present. Luther says that 'one must see the word of the preacher as God's Word'.⁵ He elaborated on this in his *Operationes in Psalmos*:

The apostles wrote very little, but they spoke a lot... Notice: it says let their voices be heard, not let their books be read. The ministry of the New Testament is not engraved on dead tablets of stone; rather it sounds in a living voice... Through

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a living Word God accomplishes and fulfils his gospel.⁶

Following the same vein of thought, in his *Church Postil* of 1522, Luther insisted on calling the church a 'mouth house', not a 'pen house'.

For since the advent of Christ, the gospel, which used to be hidden in the Scriptures, has become an oral preaching. And thus it is the manner of the NT and of the gospel that it must be preached and performed by word of mouth and a living voice. Christ himself has not

¹ MacKinnon, James, *Luther and the Reformation*, 4 vols, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930), 4:318, n. 66.

² WA 30, 1, 126. The primary source for this study is the critical edition of Luther's works, the *Weimar Ausgabe*, abbreviated as WA, most of which have been translated into English, abbreviated as LW.

³ LW 51, 262, WA 36, 354.

⁴ LW 41, 150.

⁵ LW 22, 526, WA 47, 227.

⁶ WA 5, 537 as quoted in A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word. Martin Luther. Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 90.

written anything, nor has he ordered anything to be written, but rather to be preached by word of mouth.⁷

Pelikan wrote accurately of Luther: "The "Word of God" was the speech of God, and "the God who speaks" would be an appropriate way to summarise Luther's picture of God".⁸ The Word of God spoken is itself the Word of God in preaching or God's own speech to us. Thus preaching has a dual aspect: divine activity and human activity, God's Word and human speech. This article will focus on four aspects to elucidate Luther's theology of preaching:

- (I) How his doctrine of the Word of God governs his preaching;
- (II) How law and gospel are both the functions of the one and same Word, are to be preached;
- (III) Preaching Christ as sacrament and example, the appropriateness of which will be delineated;
- (IV) How the Word and the Spirit work together in unity, fulfilling the efficacy of preaching.

The Word of God in preaching

While medieval theology developed the doctrine of sacraments, Luther was the first to construct a doctrine of the Word of God.⁹ This doctrine permeates all of his lectures, commentaries, treatises and sermons. The reformer, being held captive by and to the Word of God, preached extensively and his sermons number over two thousand. In Luther's *Table Talk* he expounded on the various constituents of the term 'Word':

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Somebody asked, 'Doctor, is the Word that Christ spoke when he was on earth the same in fact and in effect as the Word preached by a minister?' The doctor replied, 'Yes, because he said, "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16). And Paul calls the Word 'the power of God' (Rom. 1:16)'.

Then the inquirer asked, 'Doctor, isn't there a difference between the Word that became flesh (John 1:14) and the Word that is proclaimed by Christ or by a minister?'

'By all means!' he replied. 'The former is the incarnate Word, who was true God from the beginning, and the latter is the Word that's proclaimed. The former Word is in substance God; the latter Word is in its effect the power of God, but isn't God in substance, for it has a man's nature, whether it's spoken by Christ or by a minister'.¹⁰

⁷ WA 10, I, 48 as quoted in Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 91.

⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings Luther's Works, Companion Volume* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 50.

⁹ Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-book of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Charles E. Hay, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952), 2:282.

¹⁰ LW 54, 394, no. 5177; WA 4:695-96.

God continues to speak to people through the preached Word. It is through this Word that he is present with his people and continues to meet people salvifically. God assumes human form in order to speak with them 'as man speaks with man',¹¹ Preaching must thereby observe the limit which God has prescribed:

We have to argue in one way about God or the will of God as preached, revealed, offered, and worshipped, and in another way about God as he is not preached, not revealed, not offered, not worshipped. To the extent therefore, that God hides himself and wills to be unknown to us, it is no business of ours. For here the saying truly applies, 'Things above us are no business of ours'.¹²

Luther, in his *The Bondage of the Will*, criticised Erasmus for failing to see the distinction between the God preached and God hidden, between the Word of God and God himself.

God must be left to himself in his own majesty, for in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor has he willed that we should have anything to do with him. But we have something to do with him insofar as he is clothed and set forth in

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his Word, through which he offers himself to us and which is the beauty and glory with which the psalmist celebrates him as being clothed.¹³

Any speculations apart from the Word of God for Luther, is a 'theology of glory'. The true theologian is not one 'who perceives the invisible God through those things which have been made'. Rather the true theologian, whom he calls a 'theologian of the cross', discerns God's being in his deeds, in the 'visible things of God', or 'back' of God, in those things which are perceived through the suffering and cross of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁴ One must 'go to the child lying in the lap of his mother Mary and to the sacrificial victim suspended on the cross, there we shall really behold God'.¹⁵ Luther's theology of the cross is primarily concerned with God as he wills to be found. God has designated a place and person, showing where and how he can be found. Luther instructed us to listen to God's Word alone if we wish to learn who God is and what his will is towards us. Hence we are to follow the way of the baby in the cradle, at his mother's breasts, through the desert, and finally to his death on the cross.

Preaching must deal with this Word, Christ incarnate, crucified, and resurrected from the dead. With audacity, Luther identified the Word of God as the gospel. In his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*, commenting on Romans 1 he remarked: 'The Word is the Gospel of God concerning his Son who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies'.¹⁶ The true nature of the gospel as Word was the spoken form. 'The gospel is essentially proclamation, Christ coming to us through the sermons'.¹⁷

¹¹ LW 4, 61, WA 43, 179.

¹² LW 33, 138-39. See Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'* (Bern/New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 113-33. See also Gerhard O. Force. *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

¹³ Ibid. For a discussion of Luther's dictum-'Quae supra nos, nihil ad nos' which has its roots in Socrates, see Eberhard Jüngel, 'Quae supra nos, nihil ad nos', in *Entsprechungen: Gött-Wahrheit-Mensch* (München: Kaiser, 1980), 168ff.

¹⁴ LW 31, 38, WA 1, 354, 17-18 (Heidelberg Disputations, 1518).

¹⁵ LW 3, 176-77, WA 43, 72-73.

¹⁶ LW 31, 346, WA 7, 51.

¹⁷ E. Theodore Bachman, 'Introduction to volume 35', LW 35, xvii.

This explains why Luther insisted that the NT is essentially the spoken word that it is to be preached and discussed orally with a living voice.

In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther, explaining the verse 'And God said: Let there be light and there was light', spoke of the Word as the instrument which God employs to accomplish his work of creation.¹⁸ The phrase 'God said' for Luther means not only the utterance of God, but also the action and deed of God. God's Word is causative efficaciously, speaking reality into existence in his Covenants. This understanding came from his reading of Ockham and his own study of Psalms and Genesis in particular. The prophets speak and in their speaking the deed of God is accomplished. 'In the case of God to speak is to do, and the word is the deed.'¹⁹ God's Word acts and accomplishes his will. God's Word is his instrument of power which takes created forms. Luther, following Ockham, claimed that God has chosen selected elements of his created order, which are intrinsically good, to effect his saving will. God speaks in calling into existence

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the created order. In speaking through the created order God employs the words of the finite human beings to communicate with us. 'For just as a man uses the tongue as a tool with which he produces and forms words, so God uses our words, whether gospel or prophetic books, as tools with which he himself writes living words in our hearts'.²⁰ The Word of God comes to us only in the spoken form because here on earth God cannot be seen but only heard. God speaks and reveals himself 'through the external word and tongue addressed to human ears'.²¹ Although the spoken word is 'the word of human being', Luther argued, 'it has been instituted by divine authority for salvation'.²² Luther ascribed 'an almost sacramental quality' to the office of preaching so that when the Word of God is preached, no one is exempted from its benefits.²³ The Word of God remains free to be heard even if it comes from the mouth of Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod.²⁴ 'One should not consider who is speaking but what he is saying: for if it is the Word of God how would God himself not be present?'.²⁵

Unlike the Aristotelian God, Luther's God is the One who speaks with us in human language. Luther wrote, 'Hear, brother: God, the creator of heaven and earth, speaks with you through his preachers... Those words of God are not of Plato or Aristotle but God himself is speaking'.²⁶ God must be apprehended in human speech because God so graciously wills to meet us in it. Human language, Peter Meinhold writes of Luther, is 'a divine order in which human speech and the divine Spirit are brought together into a unity'.²⁷ Luther intimates:

¹⁸ See Robert Kolb, "'What Benefit Does the Soul Receive from a Handful of Water?': Luther's Preaching on Baptism, 1528-1539", *Concordia Journal* 25:4 (1999), 358, where he speaks of the Word of God as God's creative instrument.

¹⁹ LW 12, 33; WA 40, II, 231 (Ps. 2, 1532).

²⁰ LW 10, 212; WA 3, 256.

²¹ LW 10, 220, WA 3, 262.

²² LW 3, 273; WA 43, 71.

²³ George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 91.

²⁴ LW 35, 396.

²⁵ LW 3, 220, WA 43, 32.

²⁶ WA TR 4, 531, no. 4812.

²⁷ Peter Meinhold, *Luthers Sprachphilosophie* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1958), 13. 'einer göttlichen Ordnung, in der menschliche Rede and göttlichen Geist zur Einheit zusammen geschlossen sind'.

no difference is perceptible between the word of man and the Word of God when uttered by a human being; for the voice is the same, the sound and pronunciation are the same, whether you utter divine or human words.²⁸

In the prophets the term 'voice' applies without exception to the 'voice of the Lord', so that we must accept every word which is spoken as if the Lord himself were speaking, no matter by whom it is spoken, and we must believe it, yield to it, and humbly subject our reason to it.²⁹

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There abides a correspondence between God hiding in his humanity to reveal himself and God hiding in human language to communicate with us. God's descent into human language is indeed God's way of relating to us, not in a foreign language but in the day to day language of human beings. Henceforth when we hear God's Word spoken, we should obey it wholeheartedly because 'God does everything through the ministry of human beings'.³⁰

Law and Gospel: an antithetical unity

Unlike Calvinistic preaching that tends to separate the gospel from the law, Luther insisted on their antithetical unity.³¹ In a sermon preached in his home, 1532, Luther said, 'When I preach a sermon I take an antithesis'.³² In other words, he never proclaims God's great 'Yes' without at the same time proclaiming his terrifying 'No'. Here the distinction between law and gospel, Luther argued, must be made if we want to be great preachers.³³ His hermeneutical distinction between law and gospel, which corresponds to his antecedent distinction between the 'Letter' and the 'Spirit', forms two types of preaching.³⁴

The words of the apostle, 'The letter kills, the Spirit gives life', might be said in other words, thus: 'The law kills, but the grace of God gives life', or 'Grace grants help and does everything that the law demands, and yet is unable to do it by itself'.³⁵

The Word of God comes to us in two forms, as law and as gospel. God first speaks his Word of law, his alien work, which kills the sinner. Then he speaks his Word of gospel, his proper work, which recreates the sinner through the forgiveness of sins.³⁶ The law as his alien work truly condemns, but so that we might be saved as his proper work. Law and gospel both belong to the work of the revealed God. In Luther's words:

²⁸ LW 4, 140; WA 43, 236.

²⁹ LW 25, 239-40; WA 56, 253.

³⁰ LW 3, 274; WA 43, 71.

³¹ See Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, trans. B.E. Hooke (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 17-18.

³² WA 36, 181 as quoted by John Doberstein, LW 51, xx.

³³ LW 26, 10.

³⁴ Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther. An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 110ff.

³⁵ Luther, 'Concerning the Letter and the Spirit', in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 83.

³⁶ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1966), 258. See also Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ. Savior and Lord* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 200, where he compares Luthers with Calvins: 'According to him [Calvin] the law is always with the gospel rather than simply before the gospel [as in Luther]'.

for through the law all must be humbled and through the gospel all must be exalted. They are alike in divine authority, but with respect to the fruit of ministry

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they are unlike and completely opposed to each other.³⁷

God's assuring 'Yes' is hidden in his severe 'No'. This double or contradictory act is done by 'the same God who works everything in everyone' (1 Cor. 12:6). God corresponds to himself precisely in these two contradictory activities. The paradox of God's being is that God kills in order to make alive (1 Sam. 2:6). The law is not against God's promises but leads to those promises. The annihilating knowledge of God, revealed in the law is causally useful, if and when it drives us into the arms of Christ. This is made very clear in his Galatians commentary, where he wrote:

This does not mean that it was the chief purpose of God in giving the law only to cause death and damnation... For the law is a Word that shows life and drives us towards it. Therefore it was not given only for the sake of death. But this is its chief use and end: to reveal death, in order that the nature and enormity of sin might thus become apparent. It does not reveal death in a way that takes delight in it or that seeks to do nothing but kill us. No, it reveals death in order that men may be terrified and humbled and thus fear... Therefore the function of the law is only to kill, yet in such a way that God may be able to make alive. Thus the law was not given merely for the sake of death, but because man is proud and supposes that he is wise, righteous, and holy, therefore it is necessary that he be humbled by the law, in order that this beast, the presumption of righteousness, may be killed, since man cannot live unless it is killed.³⁸

Thus for Luther, as for Paul, there is a preaching which is anything but saving, which works the opposite of justifying grace. Through the preaching of the law, people are made aware of the law's power, which constantly accuses them, delivers them up to God's wrath, to eternal judgement and death. This bitter counter truth of God's alien work must be preached, otherwise we moralise our sin, placing it in the context of our enmity to God and God's enmity to us. The deepest antithesis is not between our sin and God's grace, but between God's law and God's grace. This antithesis, so offensive to moralists, requires revelation.

Luther deplored that the sermons of his day emphasised the works of the law, turning Christ's mediatorship into a judge, demanding from people a righteous living. The Bielian premise, 'doing what lies within us', was the presupposition of all medieval men. This Sasse explained:

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For all medieval men the gospel was essentially the *lex Christi*, the law of Christ that man must fulfil if he wants to be like the rich young man in Matthew 19. It is not accidental that just this story together with Matthew 10 made such a deep impression on all medieval men. This was to them real gospel, the answer to the question, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' ... Medieval men knew that only grace could save him, but he was to do something to merit God's grace. 'No one who tries to do his best will be denied grace'.³⁹

³⁷ LW 9, 178; WA 14, 676 (Lectures on Deuteronomy, 1525).

³⁸ LW 26, 335, WA 40, 1, 516-18.

³⁹ Hermann Sasse, 'Luther and the Word of God', in *Accents in Luther's Theology*, ed. Heino O. Kadai (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 61-62. See also Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*:

This type of preaching precipitated in the earlier Luther hatred of Christ. 'Christ was for me', said Luther, 'not a Mediator, but a judge'.⁴⁰ In his *Table Talk*, 1545, Luther wrote of his evangelical breakthrough:

I was long in error under the papacy... until at last I came upon the saying in Romans 1:17: 'The righteous lives by his faith'. That helped me. Then I saw of what righteousness Paul speaks, where there stood in the text *Iustitia*, righteousness. Then I became sure of my case, learnt to distinguish the righteousness of the law from the righteousness of the gospel. Before, I lacked nothing but that I made no distinction between law and gospel, held them to be all one.⁴¹

To counteract the one sidedness of medieval preaching, Luther insisted that proper preaching must constitute both law and the gospel. Luther lamented that 'for many centuries there has been a remarkable silence about this (law and gospel) in all the schools and churches'.⁴² This prolonged silence, he argued, contributed to an inadequate understanding of the doctrine of justification.⁴³ Law and gospel must never be mixed, and it is the mark of a 'real theologian' to know well how to radically distinguish between them.⁴⁴ Both are parts of the same Word of God. The 'Pope has not only confused the law with gospel, but he changed the gospel into mere laws'.⁴⁵

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When the law is presented as the gospel, the law itself is lost. The law-gospel distinction does not mean a division or separation.

Nothing is more closely joined together than fear and trust, law and gospel, sin and grace, they are so joined together that each is swallowed up by the other. Therefore there cannot be any mathematical conjunction that is similar to this.⁴⁶

A real preacher must diligently know and maintain the distinction between law and gospel, without reducing the latter into the former nor rejecting the former completely in favour of the latter. Both law and gospel are constitutive of the two functions of the same Word that confronts the sinner, accusing him as his alien work and making him alive as his proper work. Thus the ministry of the Word must proclaim both law and gospel. This Luther saw is God's will and commission, and this is precisely what Christ himself has done.⁴⁷ Henceforth Luther repudiated both legalism and antinomianism.

Both groups sin against the law: those on the right, who want to be justified through the law, and those on the left, who want to be altogether free of the law. Therefore we must

Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 63-68, for a discussion of 'nomini facienti quod in se est, deus non genegat gratiam'.

⁴⁰ WA 40, I, 326.

⁴¹ WA TR V. 210.7ff as cited in Philip S. Watson, *Let God be God* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1950), 31, n. 56.

⁴² LW 26, 115; WA 40, I, 207.

⁴³ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 251.

⁴⁴ LW 26, 115; WA 40, I, 207.

⁴⁵ LW 26, 343; WA 40, I, 527.

⁴⁶ LW 26,343; WA 40, I, 527.

⁴⁷ See WA 39, I, 428; 430, 533 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 260.

travel the royal road, so that we neither reject the law altogether or attribute more to it than we should.⁴⁸

The legalists, by their attempts to satisfy the law and to be liberated from it, have put themselves all the more under its yoke. 'That is a crab's way of making progress, like washing dirt with dirt!'⁴⁹ This explains why the preaching of the law must be followed by the preaching of the gospel.

We are not to preach only one of these words of God, but both: ... We must bring forth the voice of the law that men may be made to fear and come to a knowledge of their sins and so to repentance and a better life. But we must not stop with that, for that would only amount to wounding and not building up, smiting and not healing, killing and not making alive, leading down into hell and not bringing back again, humbling and not exalting. Therefore we must also preach the word of grace and the promise of forgiveness by which faith is taught and aroused... Accordingly man is consoled and exalted by faith in the divine promise after he has been humbled and led to a knowledge of himself by the threats and the fear of the divine law.⁵⁰

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The preaching of the law by itself, without the preaching of the gospel, works in us total despair, which in turn might lead us to the new sin of hating God. However this despair may be healed only when we hear the word of the gospel. The law is not God's final word. The negative aspects of the law—its terrors, judgements and death—are not the goal but only the means in God's hands.⁵¹ Thesis 18 of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* reads: 'It is certain that man (through the law) must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ'.⁵² The law, under the consolation of the gospel, becomes a 'disciplinarian that drives a man to Christ'. This 'is a comforting word and a true, genuine and immeasurably joyful purpose of the law'. Being assured of this, Luther said: 'I feel great comfort and consolation, when I hear that the law is a disciplinarian to lead me to Christ rather than a devil or a robber that trains me not in discipline but in despair.'⁵³ The law by itself works damnation, but with the gospel it works salvation.

The antinomians, on the other hand, taught that since the law contributes nothing to justification, the preaching of it is superfluous. It suffices to preach the gospel, which by itself could work repentance and forgiveness of sins. Although Luther agreed with them that the law is not a way of salvation, he affirmed the disciplinary purpose of the law. To abolish the law as the antinomians did is to abolish sin itself. 'But if sin is abolished, then Christ has also been done away with for there would no longer be any heed for him.'⁵⁴ Not until we place ourselves under the law, or under its terror would we be able to recognise the greatness of what Christ does for us. The law was given with a view to justification. It is necessary that the law be preached so that it might convict the sinner and drive him to Christ. The law makes him despair of himself and his own ability so that he expects nothing from himself but

⁴⁸ LW 26, 343, WA 40, I, 528.

⁴⁹ LW 27, 13; WA 40, II, 14.

⁵⁰ LW 31, 364, WA 7, 63-64.

⁵¹ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 259.

⁵² See 'Heidelberg Disputation', in Timothy Lull, ed. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 42.

⁵³ WA 39, I, 446, cf. 441 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 259-60.

⁵⁴ WA 39, I, 546; cf. 348ff as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 258.

everything from Christ. The knowledge of sin, which came through the law, is for Luther 'a great blessing', that the inner might seek healing in the gospel.⁵⁵ Since the law is God's own word, it must be preached and heard. To do otherwise, as the antinomians did, is to refuse to hear the truth of God.

Did Christ put an end to the law? To the antinomians, yes. Luther faulted them for failing to see the significance of the 'duration of the time of the law'. This, Luther understood 'literally or spiritually'.⁵⁶ 'Literally: the law lasted until Christ... At that time Christ was baptised and began to preach, when in a literal way the law... came to an end'⁵⁷ There is a time for each to fulfil its own proper function. Spiritually, the law does

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not rule the conscience after 'it has discharged its function by adequately disclosing the wrath of God and creating terror. Here one must say: "Stop, law!"'⁵⁸ Now the gospel takes over, puts an end to the accusing voice of the law and fills our hearts with joy and victory. This does not mean, as Forde recognises, the gospel puts an end to the voice of the law, rather puts an end to the negative voice of the law.⁵⁹ The role of the law as 'our custodian' comes to an end with the coming of Christ.

The theological use of the law continues to function in the life of the Christian, but as a 'schoolmaster'.⁶⁰ The Christian is never beyond law and gospel, which are 'radically distinct from each other and mutually contradictory but very closely joined in experience'.⁶¹ Paul indicates this when he says that 'we who are terrified by the law may taste the sweetness of grace, the forgiveness of sins, and deliverance from the law, sin and death, which are not acquired by works but are grasped by faith alone'.⁶² We are confined under a custodian, the law, not forever but until Christ, who is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4). When faith comes, says Luther, the 'theological prison of the law' comes to an end. 'Therefore you are being afflicted by this prison, not to do you harm but to re-create you through the Blessed Offspring. You are being killed by the law in order to be made alive through Christ'.⁶³

God's wrath remains a reality in an ongoing tension, side by side with God's love. 'A Christian is not someone who has no sin or feels no sin, he is someone to whom... God does not impute his sin' for Christ's sake.⁶⁴ He is 'a sinner in fact, but a righteous man by the sure imputation and promise of God that he will continue to deliver him from sin until he has completely cured him'.⁶⁵ Insofar as the person is a sinner, he cannot escape the terrifying voice of the law that could only be stopped by the gospel. Nestingen writes appropriately of Luther's sense of the end of the law: 'One of the benefits of Christ is that the law loses its power. The Word and faith take the hearer beyond the law, so that it can be spoken of as

⁵⁵ WA 39, I, 517 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 260.

⁵⁶ LW 26, 317; WA 40, I, 492.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gerhard O. Force, 'The Newness of the Gospel', *Dialog* 6 (Spring, 1967), 91.

⁶⁰ LW 26, 345ff, WA 40, I, 529ff.

⁶¹ LW 26, 337, WA 40, I, 520.

⁶² LW 26, 338, WA 40, I, 520-21.

⁶³ LW 26, 339; WA 40, I, 521-22.

⁶⁴ LW 26, 133; WA 40, I, 235.

⁶⁵ LW 25, 260, WA 46, 273.

ending, as "no longer" being in force'.⁶⁶ 'Insofar as Christ is raised in us', the law is 'quieted' or 'emptied' of its accusation.⁶⁷ Preaching Christ is not a discursive act, as is done in the university; rather it is the actual bestowal of Christ's benefits on the hearer. Luther says, 'Preaching Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it'.⁶⁸ The word is the power of Christ functioning

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in the act of preaching, through the preacher's mouth, to effect what has been proclaimed.

Preaching Christ as sacrament and example

Christ is the content of preaching. Should we preach Christ as Saviour only or as example only? Or both? For Luther, it is not either/or, but both/and, because 'Scripture presents Christ in two ways. First as a gift... Secondly... as an example for us to imitate'.⁶⁹ The sequential order must be observed: Christ as gift must necessarily precede Christ as an example. One must observe its proper time in which both forms of preaching are done. With Augustine, Luther adopted the Sacrament and example Christology. Commenting on Galatians 2:20, 'with Christ I have been crucified', Luther explained:

Saint Augustine teaches that the suffering Christ is both a sacrament and an example... a sacrament because it signifies the death of sin in us and grants it to those who believe, an example because it also behoves us to imitate him in bodily suffering and dying.⁷⁰

Furthermore he insisted that Paul's phrase 'putting on Christ' (Gal. 3:27) has double meaning.

Putting on Christ is understood in two ways: according to the law and according to the gospel. According to the law (Rom. 13:14), 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ': that is, imitate the example and virtues of Christ. 'Do and suffer what he did and suffered'. So also 1 Peter 2:21: 'Christ suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps'. In Christ we see the height of patience, gentleness and love, and an admirable moderation in all things. We ought to put on this adornment of Christ, that is, imitate these virtues.

To put on Christ according to the gospel however, is a matter not of imitation but of the rebirth and renewal that takes place in baptism. Paul is speaking about a 'putting on', not by imitation but by birth.⁷¹

Christ's sacrificial death includes both the sacrament—what Christ has done for us in the cross—and the example—what Christ has done before us. 'When we have put on Christ as the role of our righteousness and salvation, then we must put on Christ also as the garment of imitation'.⁷² The appropriate response to the sacrament of the crucified Christ is faith. In lieu of the medieval imitation of Christ Luther emphasised the

⁶⁶ James Nestingen, 'The Role of Apocalyptic in the Lutheran Reform', *Word and World* 15 (1995), 197.

⁶⁷ WA 39, I, 443 as cited in Nestingen, 'The Role of Apocalyptic in the Lutheran Reform', 200.

⁶⁸ LW 31, 346; WA 7, 51.

⁶⁹ LW 27, 34.

⁷⁰ LW 27, 238; WA 2, 501.

⁷¹ LW 26, 352-53, WA 40, 1, 539-40.

⁷² LW 27, 128.

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pre-eminence of 'abstract faith', which means 'putting on Christ and having all things in common with him'.⁷³ This faith 'conjoins the soul with Christ like a bride with her bridegroom', making the believer and Christ into 'one person'.⁷⁴ Following his break with scholasticism and throughout the course of his career Luther constantly upheld that abstract faith alone justifies our being and our deeds. All that is required of the believer is to 'cling in faith to this man, Christ—that is the sufficient and necessary condition' by which he receives in pure passivity Christ's 'alien' righteousness.⁷⁵

Luther nevertheless introduced in his discussion of the relationship between faith and works, another concept of faith—that is 'incarnate faith' which he distinguished from 'abstract faith'.

We also distinguish faith in this way, that sometimes faith is understood apart from work and sometimes with the work. For just as a craftsman speaks about his material in different ways... so the Holy Spirit speaks about faith in different ways in Scripture: sometimes, if I may speak this way, about an abstract or an absolute faith and sometimes about a concrete, composite, or incarnate faith.⁷⁶

Since 'faith is followed by works as the body is followed by its shadow', says Luther, '[it becomes] impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible to separate heat and light from fire'.⁷⁷ He writes of Paul, 'it is true that faith alone justifies, without works, but I am speaking about genuine faith, which, after it has justified, will not go to sleep but is active through love'.⁷⁸ Real faith must be active, seeking its concretization and validation in good works. The fruits bear testimony to the tree that produces them. The theological impetus to act is understood as the inherent consequence of Luther's understanding of faith itself—that is faith as incarnate faith. At times when criticised by Karlstadt and the Anabaptists for dividing the Christian life into two areas, Luther asserts faith as incarnate faith: '[I]f good works do not follow it is certain that this faith in Christ does not dwell in our hearts'.⁷⁹ The idea of incarnate faith helped Luther to meet Karlstadt's and the Anabaptists' accusation that he had divorced faith from works.

While at times Luther speaks of abstract faith—'faith without works'—at other times he even speaks of an antithetical relationship between faith and works. This is evident in his statements: 'Faith does not perform work, it believes in Christ'; 'all that is kept is faith, which justifies and makes alive'.⁸⁰ It is from this perspective that Luther repudiated

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the soteriology of the Anabaptists for suggesting that the believer 'must suffer many things... and imitate the example of Christ', arguing instead that faith 'learns about Christ and grasps

⁷³ WA 3, 504 as cited in *Dietmar Lage, Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 85.

⁷⁴ WA 7, 25 as cited in *Lage, Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics*, See also LW 26, 168; WA 40, I, 285.

⁷⁵ LW 26, 5-5; WA 40, I, 41.

⁷⁶ LW 26, 264 ; WA 40, I, 414.

⁷⁷ LW 44, 135; LW 35, 370.

⁷⁸ LW 27, 30, WA 40, II, 37.

⁷⁹ LW 34, 111.

⁸⁰ LW 26, 274, WA 40, I, 428.

him without having to bear the cross'.⁸¹ This is made clear in Luther's commentary on Galatians 5:8, where he writes, 'The Anabaptists have nothing in their entire teaching more impressive than the way they emphasise the example of Christ and the bearing of the cross', but we must distinguish 'when Christ is proclaimed as a gift and when as an example. Both forms of proclamation have their different time, if this is not observed, the proclamation of salvation becomes a curse'.⁸² Here his pastoral advice on the proper time in which preaching is done is relevant:

To those who are afraid and have already been terrified by the burden of their sins, Christ the saviour and the gift should be announced, not Christ the example and the lawgiver. But to those who are smug and stubborn the example of Christ should be set forth, lest they use the gospel as a pretext for the freedom of the flesh, and thus become smug.⁸³

The function of the imitation of Christ corresponds to the function of the law as an alien work, leading us into inner conflict, death and hell—not that we should perish, but that we might cleave to the prior and proper work of Christ's saviourhood. Good works performed in imitation of Christ will inevitably end in despair and failure. 'What in example the Lord has placed before our eyes', says Luther, 'but we cannot equal it: our light is like a burning straw against the sin'.⁸⁴ Our failure and despair remind us that we are still a saint and a sinner at the same time; they reveal 'how much we are still lacking' in our faith, and which could only be healed by embracing Christ again, but as our saviour, God's gift to us.⁸⁵ This explains why Luther admitted this:

But I will not let this Christ be presented to me as exemplar except at a time of rejoicing, when I am out of reach of temptations (when I can hardly attain a thousandth part of his example), so that I may have a mirror in which to contemplate how much I am still lacking, lest I become smug. But in the time of tribulation I will not listen to or accept Christ except as a gift.⁸⁶

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The Preaching of the Word and the Holy Spirit

How does the preached Word become a personal word? How does one become convinced of God's redemptive act on the cross? In *The Magnificat*, 1521, Luther explained, 'No one can correctly understand God or his Word unless he has received such understanding immediately from the Holy Spirit... outside of which nothing is learned but empty words and prattle'.⁸⁷ The Holy Spirit's work is not to reveal God apart from the incarnate Word. It is not his office to fill our hearts with other glory than the glory of the cross. The Spirit creates faith in Christ. Faith, a gift of the Spirit, is justifying faith—faith in the incarnate and crucified Christ, which believes against reason and all appearances.

Luther's understanding of the Spirit emerges in clear fashion in his response to the charismatic challenges to his understanding of the doctrine of salvation. The central question addressed by Luther in his inquiry about Karlstadt is 'What makes a person a Christian?' To

⁸¹ LW 26, 270; WA 40, I, 424.

⁸² LW 27, 34, WA 40, II, 42.

⁸³ LW 27, 35.

⁸⁴ WA 15, 497 as cited in Lage, *Martin Luther's Christology*, 162.

⁸⁵ LW 27, 86.

⁸⁶ LW 27, 34.

⁸⁷ LW 21, 299; WA 7, 546.

Luther, we are related to God through Jesus Christ, and are to trust him alone for salvation, not in the inner or mystical life nor in outward behaviour. So, says Luther,

My brother, cling firmly to the order of God. According to it the putting to death of the old man, wherein we following the example of Christ, as Peter says (1 Peter 2:21), does not come first, as this devil (Karlstadt) urges but come last. No one can mortify the flesh, bear the cross, and follow the example of Christ before he is a Christian and has Christ through faith in his heart as an eternal creature. You can't put the old nature to death, as these prophets do, through works, but through the hearing of the gospel. Before all other works and acts you hear the Word of God, through which the Spirit convinces the world of its sin (John 8). When we acknowledge our sin, we hear the grace of Christ. In this Word the Spirit comes and gives faith where and to whom he wills. Then you proceed to the mortification and the cross and the works of love. Whoever wants to propose to you another order, you can be sure, is of the devil. Such is the spirit of this Karlstadt.⁸⁸

The work of the Holy Spirit is to create faith by hearing the Word which in proclamation comes from outside of us. Luther's quarrel with Karlstadt, Müntzer and others is that they invert this order.

Dr Karlstadt and these spirits replace the highest with the lowest, the best with

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the least, the first with the last. Yet he would be considered the greatest spirit of all, he who has devoured the Holy Spirit feathers and all.⁸⁹

The Word and the Spirit are closely related like the voice and breath in speaking. One cannot separate the voice from the breath. Whoever refuses to hear the voice gets nothing out of the breath either'.⁹⁰ God who comes by the way of the cross deals with His in a two-fold manner: first 'outwardly', then 'inwardly'.

Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs, that is baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. Whatever their measure or order, the outward factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward. God has determined to give no one the Spirit or faith except through the outward. For he wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by him, as he says in Luke 16:29, 'Let them hear Moses and the prophets'. Accordingly Paul calls baptism a 'washing of regeneration' wherein God 'richly pours out the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5). The oral gospel is 'the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith' (Rom. 1:16).⁹¹

The order of salvation in Luther's theology begins with the Word addressing us, outside of us, through preaching of what Christ has done for us, followed by the Word being heard and believed, and thereby we are saved by calling upon God.

⁸⁸ LW 21, 299; WA 7, 546.

⁸⁹ LW 40, 83.

⁹⁰ WA 9, 632-633 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 38.

⁹¹ LW 40, 146.

This order is constituted by the 'whole root and origin of salvation' which 'lies in God who sends'.⁹² Luther elaborates:

For these four points are so interrelated that the one follows upon the other, and the last is the cause and antecedent of all the others, that is, it is impossible for them to hear unless they are preached to; and from this, that it is impossible for them to believe if they do not hear, and then it is impossible for them to call upon God if they do not believe, and finally it is impossible for them to be saved if they do not call upon God.⁹³

While preaching is indispensable to the engendering of faith, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to give faith in the heart. Here we see that Luther's view differs from

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Augustine's. Jansen notes:

Augustine emphasised the following: the Spirit, who is none other than God himself, is given to us as grace, awakens in us love for God. Here Luther took over the basic structure of this Augustinian thought but filled it differently. Faith as the effect of the Holy Spirit appears in Luther instead of love.⁹⁴

The work of the Holy Spirit is related to the Word and the community of the Word, as Luther expressly says:

The creation is past and redemption is accomplished, but the Holy Spirit carries his work unceasingly until the last day. For this purpose he has appointed a community on earth, through which he speaks and does all his work. For he has not yet gathered together all his Christian people, nor has he completed the granting of forgiveness. Therefore we believe in him who daily brings us into this community through the Word, and imparts, increases, and strengthens faith through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins.⁹⁵

The same idea also appears in his gospel sermon preached on a Pentecost Sunday in 1522:

It is a faithful saying that Christ has accomplished everything, has removed sin and overcome every enemy, so that through him we are lords over all things. But the treasure lies yet in one pile; it is not yet distributed nor invested. Consequently, if we are to possess it, the Holy Spirit must come and teach our hearts to believe and say: I, too, am one of those who are to have this treasure.⁹⁶

The work of the Holy Spirit thus is to communicate to us the gospel that, in Christ's cross and resurrection, the divine blessing has conquered the divine curse. 'The work [redemption] is

⁹² LW 25, 413; cf. LW 40, 81; 128ff.

⁹³ Ibid. Cf. LW 24, 172, WA 45, 618.94 Reiner Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976), 123. Cf. Bertrand de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, trans. Edmund J. Fortman (Mass: St. Bede's Publications, 1982), 202 'The Spirit of prayer (cf. Rom. 8:26) draws us to Christ in faith, the Spirit of grace places us in the reality of Christ as his instruments in the works of love'.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 124.

⁹⁵ See 'The Large Catechism', in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 419.

⁹⁶ See 'Gospel Sermon, Pentecost Sunday', in *Luther's Church Postil. Pentecost or Missionary Sermons*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1907), vol. 12, 279, no: 16. Cited also in Arnold E. Carlson, 'Luther and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit', *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (May, 1959), 136-37.

finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death and resurrection, etc'.

But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed,

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God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. Therefore to sanctify is nothing else than to bring us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, which we could not obtain by ourselves.⁹⁷

The Holy Spirit is 'the mediator of the real presence of Christ in faith'.⁹⁸ Thus to spurn knowing the Father in the Son loses all knowledge of God. It is by the Holy Spirit that we are led to see God in the flesh, in whom the Father is mirrored.⁹⁹ The God who came to us in Christ is the same God who comes as the Holy Spirit. More fully:

Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God is and what he thinks and does, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. In these three articles God has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover... we could never come to recognise the Father's favour and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is the mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we know nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁰

The Holy Spirit is a 'real and divine sphere of revelation in which the risen Christ alone is present, (not as) an idea (but as) a redemptive reality'.¹⁰¹

By this Holy Spirit, as a living, eternal, divine gift and endowment, all believers are adorned with faith and other spiritual gifts, raised from the dead, freed from sin, and made joyful and confident, free and secure in their conscience.¹⁰²

The Spirit confers in our hearts the assurance that God wills to be our Father, forgive our sin, and bequeath eternal life on us.

We should, therefore, not believe the gospel because the church has approved it,

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⁹⁷ See 'The Large Catechism', 415. See also Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1., trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 72-73.

⁹⁸ Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), 52.

⁹⁹ WA 30, I, 192 as cited in William Clebsch, 'Luther's Conception of God', *Anglican Theological Review* 37 (1955), 39: 'Von Christo aber kundten wir auch nichts wissen, wo es nicht durch den Heiligen gerst offenbaret were'.

¹⁰⁰ 'The Large Catechism', 419, cf. LW 33, 286.

¹⁰¹ Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, 203. See also Eilert Herms, *Luthers Auslegung des Dritten Artikels* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 53.

¹⁰² LW 37, 365.

but rather because we feel that it is the Word of God... Everyone may be certain of the gospel when he has the testimony of the Holy Spirit in his own person that this is the gospel.¹⁰³

The Spirit comes to us, says Luther, in order to 'inculcate the sufferings of Christ for the benefit of our salvation'.¹⁰⁴

It is easy enough for someone to preach the word to me, but only God can put it into my heart. He must speak it in my heart, or nothing at all will come of it. If God remains silent, the final effect is as though nothing had been said.¹⁰⁵

The activity of the Holy Spirit is intrinsically bound to the Word that is spoken. Except the Holy Spirit draws, no one would come. But how does God draw us? This Luther explains:

When God draws us, he is not like a hangman, who drags a thief up the ladder to the gallows, but he allures and coaxes us in a friendly fashion, as a kind man attracts people by his amiability and cordiality, and everyone willingly goes to him. Thus God, too, gently draws people to himself, so that they abide with him willingly and happily.¹⁰⁶

Why do some repent earlier while others much later? Here Luther gives credence to the freedom of the Holy Spirit so that the control is taken out of the preacher's hand. The Holy Spirit works freely through the word in the manner appropriate to the specific context. In some cases, the word, which has been preached many years ago, may remain in the heart without effect; then God's Spirit comes, and 'effectively calls to mind and enkindles in our hearts', gives new power to the formerly preached word, making it finally effective.¹⁰⁷ It is God who works all in all. The 'whomever' and the 'whenever', Luther argues, is the Spirit's prerogative, which we could do nothing except to submit to his working. In his words:

God wills that we should teach the law. When we have done this he himself shall see who will be converted by it. He will certainly turn anyone whom he wishes to repentance whenever God wills... The gospel is for all but not all believe. The

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law is for all but not everyone feels the power and significance of the law. I thus repent whenever God strikes me with the law and with gospel. We are not able to say anything about the time and the hour. God himself knows when he wills to convert me.¹⁰⁸

Why does preaching not meet with the same level of effectiveness? Why does the Holy spirit work efficaciously in some and not in others? Why do some respond favourably, while others reject the gospel? His answer is this: [T]his has not been revealed to us but rather is to be left to the judgement of God'. Our task, he says, is to remain faithful to preaching and hearing, and 'leave the matter in God's hands; he will move whatever hearts he wills'.¹⁰⁹ Contrary to the enthusiasts who emphasise human preparation to receive the Holy Spirit, Luther affirmed

¹⁰³ WA 30, II, 687ff as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 38.

¹⁰⁴ LW 37, 365.

¹⁰⁵ WA 10, III, 260, WA 17, II, 174 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 39.

¹⁰⁶ LW 23, 86, WA 33, 130-31.

¹⁰⁷ LW 14, 62, WA 31, I, 100.

¹⁰⁸ WA 39, I, 370, cf. *ibid.*, 404 and 406 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

that God's word enters my heart without any preparation or help on my part.¹¹⁰ There is only one 'true preparation'—to hear or read or preach the word. The efficacy of preaching does not lie in human power or techniques, but rather in God's power.¹¹¹

Conclusion

The uniqueness of Luther's theology of preaching lies in that preaching is not mere human speech about God, rather it is God's own speech to human beings. Preaching is indeed the minister's activity; it is also God's activity. When we hear the sermon, we do not hear the pastor. The voice is his, but the words he uses are really spoken by God. God meets human beings through the agency of human voice. Preaching is God's Word speaking to us, not a rehashing of the old stories. Wingren's words elucidates most succinctly Luther's view:

[P]reaching, in so far as it is Biblical preaching, is God's own speech to man, is very difficult to maintain in practice. Instead it is very easy to slip into the idea that preaching is only speech about God. Such a slip once made, gradually alters the picture of God, so that he becomes the far-off deistic God who is remote from the preached word and is only spoken about as we speak about someone who is absent.¹¹²

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Luther's God is not an impassive deity of the Greeks, but an ever-present deity who hides in human speech, who is active in preaching through human voice. Accordingly, the faithful hearers will respond: 'Pay attention, we are hearing God's speech'.

Right preachers should diligently and faithfully teach only the Word of God and must seek only his honour and praise. Likewise the hearers should also say: I do not believe in my pastor, but he tells me of another Lord, whose name is Christ: him he shows to me, I will listen to him, in so far as he leads me to the true Teacher and Master, God's Son.¹¹³

Preachers must assume the 'right to speak', though not the 'power to accomplish'.¹¹⁴ It is God's good pleasure to shine his Word in the heart with law and gospel, but not without the external, spoken Word. What an office, a name and an honour of preachers to be 'God's co-workers' to achieve his purpose!¹¹⁵

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<http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/>

¹¹⁰ WA 12, 497 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 41.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word. A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 19.

¹¹³ LW 51, 388; WA 51, 191.

¹¹⁴ LW 51, 76, WA 10, 111, 15.

¹¹⁵ WA 17, II, 179 as cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 40.

The Church and the City

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It was predicted by Rafael Salas that by the end of the 20th century the world would experience radical and overwhelming change with the majority of people living in urban centre, primarily in the cities of Asia, Africa and Latin America.¹ Harvey Cox goes further when he says, 'Future historians will record the twentieth century as that century in which the whole world became one immense city'.²

Urban growth is more than a sociological reality, it is the fulfilment of God's intentions since the beginning of time. 'The cultural mandate given to Adam and Eve in the garden to fill, rule, and subdue the earth (Gen. 1:28) was nothing more than a mandate to build the city'.³ The missiological side of this coin is that the nations are coming to our cities to become new citizens and not just temporary residents. Immigrant churches from Asia, Africa and Latin America will continue to grow at an increasingly rapid rate.

The missionary movement is exploding in these nations as they send out missionaries. Recently, in an article in the *Christian Mission Journal*, it was noted that 'Spanish-speaking missionaries [are] reaching Latin immigrants in London and Paris ... [and are] taking the gospel to Muslims in Spain ... It's European missions the South American way!'⁴ These churches are ignited by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of Christ throughout the world. This mission action will continue to enter our North American cities, and it will be an ongoing factor as the new missionary era takes place. We must take note that the dominant role of western missions is slowly disappearing since the modern mission movement. We will need to consider the following challenges

¹ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 17.

² Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 273.

³ Harvie M. Conn, 'Genesis as Urban Prologue', in *Discipling the City: A Comprehensive Approach to Urban Ministry*, 2nd ed., ed. Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 15.

⁴ Ann Witkower, 'Latinos Bring New Flair to European Missions', *Christian Mission, A Journal of Foreign Missions* (Summer 2001), 6.

which will require several shifts in our thinking: (1) the church as mission; (2) the pastor as shepherd and church planter; (3) the new relationship between sending and receiving churches; (4) old and new models for missionary enterprise.

The Church as mission

In this century there must be a greater engagement between the church and the city. In the early 20th century the church and the city were distant in their concerns and mission. Dr Harvie Conn, one of the pioneers of urban mission and ministry, noted, 'Churches appear to be in the city but not really of it. City and not church occupies the periphery'.⁵

Why must the church be engaged in mission? First there is a theological reason – the church is the community of the kingdom of God.

The Church can never possess the King so as to monopolise the Kingdom. The Church is communities resulting from the preaching of the Kingdom. They serve the Kingdom as symbols which show imperfectly what the Kingdom is like. The Church is to bring to visibility for the world fellowship with Christ as King and obedience to him. The Church is to be 'God's colony in man's world, God's experimental garden on earth'. She is a sign of the world to come and at the same time a guarantee of its coming.⁶

The church is the people of God in society. It is also the agent of the kingdom. God will use the church as king, prophet, and priest to bring societal transformation. The prophetic role⁷ will give witness to the truth and declare our faith in public. We will admonish each other towards a resurrected lifestyle. We are priests (Matt. 27:51) and therefore pray and intercede for our community. We have access to our great mediator, Jesus (Heb. 4:14–16). We are admonished and equipped to provide mercy (Heb. 13:16) to a wounded world. We are kingly and will rule (Eph. 2:6); the world will recognise our authority over evil and this world as instruments of justice. We rule as those overcoming the world already, but not yet.

The present rule of Christ is the basic theme of the church and the kingdom. The church brings the people of God together in worship as they acknowledge Christ's reign as King. The church is God's colony. The church is the body of Christ, that community in which Christ dwells, turned in action toward the world (1 Cor. 12:12–27).⁸ We also

⁵ Harvie M. Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church: A Historical Overview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 11.

⁶ Ralph W. Christensen 'Church Renewal and the Kingdom of God,' unpublished paper, n.d., 1.

⁷ Joel 2:28–29; Num. 11

⁸ Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 143.

recognise that Jesus Christ is the head of the kingdom, and this will bring great growth to the church in the city as it did in the early stages of the NT church (Eph. 1:10, 22–23). The Lord is the evangelist who announces his coming, and is the herald of the gospel that is the word of the kingdom. As a result the church grows and reproduces (Matt. 13:3, 23). The great missionary is Jesus, who is sent by the Father. Jesus is the great shepherd (John 10:11–30) who gathers the people of God from every corner of the earth and promises to deliver them from the evil one. Jesus ministered the gospel of the kingdom, his rule over all of life, and was moved with compassion as he saw people who were like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). 'Shepherding is the mission of the church – crossing frontiers in the form of a servant.'⁹ Edmund Clowney states,

Jesus came to gather, and to call gatherers, disciples who would gather with him, seeking the poor and helpless from city streets and country roads ... Mission is not an optional activity for Christ's disciples. If they are not gatherers, they are scatterers. Some suppose that a church may feature worship and nurture, leaving gathering as a minor role Mission is reduced to a few offerings, the visit of several exhausted missionaries on fund-raising junkets, and the labours of an ignored mission committee. Such a church is actively involved in scattering, for the congregation that ignores mission will atrophy and soon find itself shattered by internal dissension.¹⁰

We follow the example of Christ who was sent and in obedience came (John 1:1–14), so we are sent into the world. 'Mission expresses the purpose for which Christ came into the world.'¹¹

The second reason the church must be engaged in mission is that people from every corner of the world are entering the cities. Urbanisation and urbanism is the way of life and the new wave for missions. This has been in process for the last century, but the church has been slow in responding to this challenge. 'A book by James D. Hunter in 1983 notes that "evangelicals are grossly under represented in the large cities". Only 8.6 percent surveyed by Hunter were in cities of one million or more.'¹² Dr Conn realised that he was in a battle to convince the larger North American evangelical community about this urban wave, that God is interested in the cities of his world, and that Pauline theology was profoundly nurtured in urban mission. Pauline missiology was centred in the great urban centres of the Greco-Roman world.

In Acts the Pauline missionaries almost unfailingly go first to the Jewish synagogue and find opportunities to speak and debate at the regular Sabbath services. When they

⁹ David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1980), 248.

¹⁰ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 159–60.

¹¹ Clowney, *The Church*, 161.

¹² Harvie M. Conn, *A Clarified Vision for Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 17.

meet resistance there, or even if they do not,¹³ they sometimes take up residence in the households of individuals: of Lydia in Philippi (16:15), of Jason in Thessalonica (17:5-9), of Priscilla and Aquilla in Corinth (18:2-4).¹⁴

Conn asks, 'How can we recruit personnel for reaching our urban generations when the rural and suburban areas have nurtured their visions of the church?'¹⁵ The church must take on this challenge with vigour and confidence in the power of the reigning Lord. When reading the NT, you cannot help but be struck by the fact that most of it was quite purposefully written within a missionary context, and that context was mostly urban.

The NT made it impossible to note any distinguishing differences between church and mission. There were no denominational or extra-church structures other than the synagogue that issued strategies for mission. Certainly no para-church mission organisations were to be found. Dr Conn noted that 'after the first century, [there were] not even separate apostles or evangelists for the unreached'.¹⁶

The apostolic nature of the church has been diminishing, as can be seen as we trace a number of shifts in the church's relationship to mission. First, the apostolate in the Roman Catholic Church went from sending out missionaries to apostolic succession. Then the shift in the Reformation went from mission and the sending of called men and women to orthodoxy and the maintaining of truth. Here again the sending into mission is lost. Second, the teaching on the Holy Spirit in the Roman Catholic Church made a dramatic change from the empowerment of the church for prayer and mission to ecclesiastical incorporation. This had also affected the Reformers as they focused on the Holy Spirit taking on the major role of the interpreter of Scripture. The Pentecostal and Charismatic churches moved towards the empowerment of the believer through the charismata. Once again we see a shift that divorces the Holy Spirit from the spirit of mission.

A third shift along the lines of mission and the church has to do with the church's role as a sending community. In the 19th century the calling was primarily a calling of individuals who were motivated by God to participate in 'foreign' missions. It was an individualistic calling. In other words individuals rather than the church were awakened to the call of the mission frontier. The individual was called and sent, which led to a mission focus on saving individual souls. The individual became the agent of the kingdom and of the Spirit, which then limited church planting strategy. It may be noted that it was the individual that also became the agent of mission. 'This results in a low view of the church.'¹⁷ This changed in the middle of the 20th century, and the church

¹³ Acts 16:13-15; 18:2

¹⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 26.

¹⁵ Conn, *Clarified Vision*, 17.

¹⁶ Harvie M. Conn, unpublished notes, 1981, 3.

¹⁷ Conn, unpublished notes, 2.

became much more aware of the ecclesiastical responsibilities in matters of church planting.

The establishment of missionary societies by Protestants was due in part, but not totally, to the inactivity of missions emanating from the local church. One reason for the shift in mission responsibility from the local congregation to mission agencies and denominational structures was that the theology of the church became church-centred and not necessarily centred on Christ and his kingdom. This was not a kingdom response but rather a truncated locus. On the whole the church in Europe was very slow in getting involved in mission work. Another barrier was the overwhelming responsibility of maintaining the church with the upkeep of mission activity. There was a maintenance approach that became stagnant rather than one which was centred on mission and allowed the church to become more dynamic. There was therefore a shift from church to mission agencies.

On a practical level we might agree with this move. The church was too involved with its members so a survival ideology was formed. The churches could not handle the challenge that they perceived as being too cumbersome. They found that it was too inefficient to carry on the mission mandate; therefore, there was a divorce in the church that tossed missions to a more efficient and pragmatic structure which was focused on 'one thing'. The move from mission to maintenance became a primary core value in the local church. There was a shift from the NT understanding of the church as a body prepared and enabled to serve and become involved in the crossing of the city frontiers to the self-enhancement and solidification of the church.

It is important to realise that this divorce did not happen among immigrant and language churches in North America. The Spanish-speaking churches continued to exercise the sending mandate, on a faith basis, and mission from the United States was launched primarily into Latin America and the Caribbean. Other language churches from Africa and Latin America continued this cross-ocean mission of planting churches in their own homelands. This webbing of connecting the North American mission enterprise with the two-thirds world mission is a spontaneous movement that is now taking place in a more organised and intentional manner. We have much to learn about mission from the Spanish-speaking church in North America.

Towards the middle and latter part of the 20th century the Holy Spirit was at work in the United States, igniting a vision in local churches that initiated an urban mission agenda. This would break the isolationist aspect of the church or what might be called a ghetto mentality – caretaker rather than husbandman. It would also shatter the manifestation of the church in mission as one that is out to conquer the world and incorporate others into its own domain. In this movement local churches, some independent, but many that belonged to a larger body of churches such as denominational churches, the sending of Christians from local congregations revived the apostolic nature of the church. Some viewed these churches as innovative, creative and risk takers. However others, especially those administering denominational agencies, did

not see these churches in a favourable light but rather as being disloyal and possibly subversive. Yet these churches were moved by mission history founded in the first century as well as the modern mission movement. They were for the most part following the NT teaching, and the application of the biblical principles enabled and empowered the church to pursue this mission challenge. It seemed irregular to see churches reproducing churches, yet they were considered as refreshing new models of ministry.

In this ever-changing world, the agency of the kingdom and catalyst for societal transformation is the church. The church must embrace its commitments to the Great Commission in a demonstrative way. The local church must be equipped to handle the numerous missiological challenges that are presented in this increasingly global society. Ray Bakke often speaks about the 52 nations living in London. East London is basically becoming Asian; South London Afro-Caribbean, housing West Indians, Jamaicans, and Ugandans; and the Arab community is filtering into West London. This global phenomenon is forming in the cities of the world. We are finding the world in our own neighbourhoods. This pluralism of religion and culture is now localised in our urban communities, and the mission field has skipped across the ocean into our neighbourhoods and local church communities. Look again and note the hand of the missionary God. If we are to approach our mission responsibility effectively and biblically, the sending nature of the church must be restored.

Mission cannot be allocated to others just because they may have the means or the resources. This is not a pragmatic issue but one that is centred on the concerns of the Lord of the harvest and the church's faithfulness to the Great Commission to gather the nations:

The Christian answer in face of the urban complexity of life is not a return to the simple lifestyle of rural communities of the 'good old days'. God is at work in the world's urban situation and calls for a lifestyle accountable for his kingdom coming and which he will complete in his time.¹⁸

Churches will have to strategise for a mission movement in their city. It will have to take place in their context and move from that point of reference to other mission frontiers. Churches will become much more the sending platforms for mission activity than ever before. They will plan with multiple models rather than one form. They will go further than the zone of expectation dictates. In other words, they will be biblically faithful to the gospel and sensitive to the context in which they plant their churches. In the same way leadership will be trained through different vehicles. Multiple models of theological training are essential for the task. Discipleship will take a high priority and will be much more thorough than we have seen in years past. The church is the redeemed redeeming the world for Christ.

¹⁸ Christensen, 'Church Renewal,' 12.

The Pastor as shepherd and church planter

In order to accomplish the enormous task of mission, churches must review the preparation and selection of pastors and other leaders. The renewal of local churches is essential for this task and it will take place when kingdom principles are applied, radically restructuring the existing models of leadership into a lifestyle modelled after the servant minister/ministry in the midst of a dynamic and at times impersonal urban context. In North America churches have become more regional and less local, and location has not been taken as seriously as it should for the mission enterprise. Churches look for locations with suitable facilities that are reasonable and accessible to transportation and provide sufficient parking space, but they show little concern for the immediate mission context. Certainly there is a need for churches that might be regional, especially in city centre communities, but this has become all too common. Often this is done because churches focus on the wrong group of people. Most churches are primarily concerned for the people within the church and the people most like 'us'. In part they ignore what is in reality their mission context, which could represent a different ethnic, racial, and socio-economic group. This means that we have directed our attention to a church model absent from a mission context. We have not seriously strategised with the community in mind and have become too pragmatic, getting the pews filled at any cost and the leadership already prepared and finances already allocated through transfer. In this pragmatic move the mission of the church is short-circuited.

Churches need to strategise with the local community in mind. The tension is healthy – it may be difficult in the short run but will be healthier in the long term. We have segregated our lives to the context of sameness and comfort while living in a global community that may be distinctly different and in need of the gospel. The bottom line is that there is no clearly defined mission context for most churches. This process is too often left in the hands of the pastor who may have a rural, suburban nostalgic vision of the church and therefore lacks a missiological dynamic and vision. The pastor and leaders may be in the city but not of it.

The role of the pastor is being challenged from being one that is primarily focused on maintaining the basic needs of the congregation – preaching, teaching, counselling, administering and ruling – to one that has an increased responsibility for those of the surrounding community who are more and more culturally distant. This does not mean that pastors will be the ones who are actively doing all the ministry or starting the new churches, but they will be the strategists, visionaries and initiators for this calling. We now need to equip our pastors with missiological tools so that the Scriptures are biblically interpreted and communicated to our new neighbours in the process of contextualisation. Charles Kraft refers to his theological training in his book, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*:

[An] important insight that came to me was that my understandings concerning God and his works, including how I understood the Bible, needed to be culturally adapted if they were to speak to the people God had called me to. It came as a bit of a shock that most of what I had learned in Christian college and seminary, in the forms in which I learned it, was inappropriate or irrelevant to the Nigerians I worked with.¹⁹

William Dyrness also expresses concerns about ongoing training. 'After three years of ministry in North America and this new experience in Asia, I began to suspect that the study of theology in the West was several steps removed from people's lives.'²⁰

Pastors need skills in interpreting the city and the mission context so that they and their congregations are able to form effective philosophies of ministries. Getting acquainted with mission history will alert pastors to mission strategies. They need to re-read Scriptures to see that mission and church growth principles are really biblical principles properly applied. This ability to be fluid and missiological will give local churches standing power in a transitioning society.

Pastors are placed in the context of mission whether they know it or not. If not the churches will decline and continue to move further from their context because of the imminent and rapid change of communities. Where will we run unless we take on the missionary heart of Christ and handle the challenges of transitional communities? These transitions are primarily ethnic, racial, generational and socio-economic. Ray Bakke states,

My urban pastor colleagues could best find meaning in their otherwise buffeting and discouraging circumstances if they understood the true significance of their roles. They needed to concentrate on their local congregations or neighbourhoods, but they also needed to widen their visual lenses in order to see that the *whole world* was coming to their cities. For the first time in nearly 2000 years of Christian history, we could speak realistically of the global mission of local churches.²¹

¹⁹ Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), xiii-xiv.

²⁰ William A. Dyrness, *How Does America Hear the Gospel?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 5.

²¹ Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Urban World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 9. For detailed discussion of the specific social scientific tools needed by our 21st century pastors and leaders, see Susan Baker, 'The Social Sciences: Tools for Urban Ministry', in Manuel Ortiz and Susan Baker, *The Urban Face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 60-82.

Here we should emphasise that the understanding that we are to work from the Scriptures as the authority for all of life in a mission context is the call for contextualisation. In this age when a continued flow of biblical distortion is entering our churches, it is in the Word of God that we find the transforming power for our communities. Not only is Christ being ignored as the only means and way of salvation (John 16:1-2), but attached to this is the subversion of the authority of Scripture. Syncretism and liberalism are not founded in the mission enterprise, as is often thought, they are founded in the unbiblical view of Christ and his Word, where evangelism and mission are distorted and omitted.

McGavran once told us that syncretism was not found where evangelism and the saving power of Jesus was proclaimed. There must be a *steady watch and care for our communities*. Pastors, both as gatherers and watchers, must know their communities. This will entail reading the community formally through census and demographic work and also informally through constantly walking through the community. Visitation is a lost art that must be revived in the city. Technology will not and should not replace the need for face-to-face relationships. It is extremely important that pastors *learn to interpret community* in a way similar to how they interpret and exegete Scripture. In a community where there is a growing population of East Asians, the pastor must know what that transition will mean. Will it mean decline for the church or will it be a mission challenge that will bring growth and renewal to the church? How we approach people in our context of service will determine the outcome. God desires growth.

How do we apply the Word in light of this sociological phenomenon? How do we communicate the gospel to a people of a different culture and worldview? How do we as the church of Christ become the church as agent of the king in this new milieu? The dialogue between the social sciences and theology is rarely reviewed in our learning institutions, but it has to take on greater importance.

Pastors will have a more urgent and profound responsibility in missions. They cannot be divorced from their function of gathering the flock from within the mission context of the church:

The city, which is the ultimate extension of earthly man and which is therefore capable of evil and good, is both the scene and goal of the Christian pilgrimage. It is therefore the arena of the Christian mission and consequently the context and strategic base of influence for the planting and development of Christian churches throughout the earth.²²

Pastors, along with servant leaders in the local church, must be trained to model the gospel of the kingdom. Pastors will have to be equipped to understand and apply the holistic vision of the gospel.

²² Francis M. DuBose, *How Churches Grow in an Urban World* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 110.

The New Relationship between sending and receiving churches

In this essay we will be using terms that may cause some difficulty but the intent is to point out that some nomenclature that is used at present should be abandoned or at least examined. One such set of terms is certainly the *older* and *younger* church categories. These terms have a history, and at times this has been a negative history. These categories continue to be used today but seem to have a slightly different edge to them. The terms younger and older church are difficult to define, and this will be brought to light in this section. We have also used such terms as *mother* and *daughter* churches. The mother church is a church that sends while the daughter church is the new start of the church that is being 'born,' but these are not biblically defensible categories. Another term we use is 'mission' church, which is one that is not quite ready to be a 'full' and 'complete' church. Often denominations do not consider a new start to be a full church until there is more of a self-supporting and self-governing dimension and a number of families are counted. Therefore, a mission church is not considered to be a church and is looked upon as having less in substance and quality than a church.

As the sending church in the West becomes more and more dominated by the mission enterprise of the two-thirds world church – those in Africa, Latin America and Asia – the language of younger/older church is being utilised. Ironically, these younger churches are being started in what is considered as the new nations. The older churches are mainly western and eastern orthodox churches. How do we define this order? Is it geography that determines this distinction? Is it based on the historical time line, the chronology of the church? Can we determine the distinctions on the basis of dependency? Which of the churches are more dependent on the others? Dependency is a regretful basis for definition or drawing conclusions. It may be best for us not to define this global movement as older/younger churches.

My concern has to do with inherent paternalistic attitudes that continue to promote dependency and, therefore, a superior/inferior clash. If we are to take modern mission history seriously, we will note that the early development of missions with the sending church coming from the West was to be in several phases. The first of these is that the western sending church was in complete control over the receiving church. The sending church had ultimate power and authority over the mission. There was very little conflict or personal tension, at least in any visible manner, because one was dominant and the other subservient. This was a colonial pattern that was oppressive and problematic. The new Christians were considered the people being evangelised or the object of the mission group. The leaders, teachers and experts were those being sent from the dominant mission or sending church. This continued until the early and middle part of the 20th century when a second phase took place.

This second historical period was also frustrating for the national churches because there was still a carry-over in which the sending church was dominant and in control, yet there was some consideration for indigenous leadership. National leaders were not

ignored but rather tolerated. They were part of the process of mission, but there existed a lingering disrespect for their value in the ongoing mission of the church. Indigenous Christians felt impotent in making a meaningful contribution. This also led to a sense of an employer/employee relationship. The mission acted as employer and the national Christians were employees.

We are currently in the third phase and the 'younger' or emerging churches are now clearly in charge and are carrying the major responsibility of the national church. In this process the development of the national churches had some correlation with the political climate of the time – independence or limited civil unrest. This formula produced a greater opportunity for autonomy for the national church. Allan Anderson states,

Africa has witnessed a century of rapid social change with its accompanying industrialisation and urbanisation, as well as a transition from a pre-colonial period through a traumatic colonial era to an equally traumatic post-colonial order. These factors have affected the formation of new religious movements all over the world, and those in Africa are no exception.²³

It will also lead to organisational tension and conflict between the sending and receiving church. In 1971 John Gatu from Africa called for a moratorium. At times this conflict has caused difficulty and sluggishness to the missionary enterprise. We may still be practising a phase of mission that is inappropriate. It will limit complementary service in this missiological shift from the dominant sending/ receiving to one of partnership. If we consider the more recent literature in mission journals, mission textbooks and class lectures, we recognise that most of this material is still authored and published by those from the West.

As we begin the 21st century, how shall the process unfold? What should be the response to the new sending churches? Will there be a mutual sharing of resources? Will dominant/inferior attitudes or employer/employee relationships be corrected by the church, pastors and mission societies? It is difficult to speculate and to plan intelligently as to how we will respond to each other, but we must read history and realise that there is much for us to learn from our previous mistakes. David Barrett speaks of the 'reaction to mission' principle.²⁴

Barrett thinks that the main cause for the rise of the (*African Initiated Churches*) AIC movement is socio-political, for he sees AICs as one manifestation of many African protest and resistance movements that arose in the colonial period. He

²³ Allan Anderson, 'A "Failure to Love"? Western Missions and the Emergence of African Initiated Churches in the Twentieth Century', *Missiology* 29.3, (July 2001): 276.

²⁴ David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 97, 154, 184, as cited in Anderson, 'Failure to Love', 276.

says that the 'common root cause' for the whole AIC movement is a reaction to European missions, which exhibited a 'failure in love' in their attitudes to African people.²⁵

Will those in the West see the sending church from the two-thirds world as intruders, insensitive to the existing mission enterprise from the West? Will control or embracing the opportunity for 'our' mission to grow and expand be a priority? It is our view that we will have to rely on a profound spirituality that embraces the mission of God sacrificially and promotes the family of God, unity and reciprocity as high values. It is a call to humility in Christ. There will be a need for a spirituality that understands the sending God's compassion as we carry out the missionary mandate to reach all nations in partnership with all nations. There must be a reciprocal model of missionary work that breaks the many years of colonialism and has been limited to one that has become one of service, but no sharing of the partnership from the churches. The churches must find dependency in each other,²⁶ a *koinonia* that is significant and presupposes not independence but interdependence (1 Cor. 12:26-27). No longer can one be the donor and the other the recipient.

Another concern will be the status of new missionary work coming from other countries and reaching people of their language and culture in the West. How will they be treated by their denominations and church fellowship? A recent ethnographic work done by Delia Nüesch-Olver indicated that as Latino missionaries reach their particular subgroups in the North, they are stigmatised by their degree of adaptation or assimilation. Many of the denominational leaders who take these leaders to the United States do not realise that Latinos will have to do cross-cultural work even among their own groups and that they are unprepared and have few if any support systems. The difficulty among the incoming leaders is discussed in Nüesch-Olver's article called 'Immigrant Clergy in the Promised Land'.²⁷ Pastors speak of losing their ministerial status. She notes, "'A Hispanic like me'", said Pastor Hablante, "will never be elected in this country to the positions of church leadership I had before coming here".²⁸ There is much conflict and loss as the new immigrant missionaries come to the west.

The western church cannot be the answer to resources and theological training to the non-western church. We need each other and must find ways to mutually share our gifts and talents for the advancement of God's kingdom. The gifts and resources are different and should not be compared one to the other. There must be a change of heart and mind so that we can see each other differently and accept one another. We must

²⁵ Anderson, 'Failure to Love', 276.

²⁶ 1 Cor. 12 – I have need of you.

²⁷ Delia Nüesch-Olver, 'Immigrant Clergy in the Promised Land', *Missiology* 29.2, (April 2001): 185-200.

²⁸ Nüesch-Olver, 'Immigrant Clergy', 187-88.

overcome categories such as mother/daughter, adopted, donor/recipient and have/have-not.

We must also make mission structural changes. Mission agencies must have personnel from the minority, national and international churches involved in their decision making process. Long term relationships should be built leading to mature relationships. It is important to note in this reciprocal model that we are not offering similar gifts but rather gifts that are necessary and important to each other in the context of evangelising the world together. There must be more complementary offerings and learning from each other.

Twenty-five years ago, the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism stated that the global Christian mission is a responsibility of the global Christian church and not just a western missionary responsibility.²⁹ The call at the conference, as well as for us in the 21st century, was for the worldwide Christian church to participate in worldwide mission. We need new partnerships in mission, a global-urban partnership in the spirit of humility. Conn and Ortiz note,

The new wave is distinctive in its location and its accelerated velocity. The wave is breaking on the shores of Africa, Asia and Latin America. And urban metropolises like Mexico City, Seoul and Kinshasa are compressing into a few decades growth that took North American cities over a century to achieve.³⁰

The future of mission is dependent on humility, mutuality of service, resources, and love for one another as the church globally engages missions in the 21st century under the lordship of Christ.

Old and new models for missionary enterprise

In my opinion the new models will not arise out of this mission era but rather will come from a reforming of old models, models that are biblical but contextually sensitive. For one thing, it is important to realise that single models – the one-type, one-context model – will not accomplish the urban mission call for the 21st century. We must consider multiple type models as the standard. We must think in multiple forms of church planting, leadership development, community development, leadership selection, stewardship, evangelism approaches, worship, preaching, Sunday School, small groups, and economic development for church plants in the city.

We must keep in mind that the city is dynamic, like culture, and is in constant flux. The urban dynamic needs to help in forming strategies for the city yet we need to keep

²⁹ John Stott, (ed.), *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974–1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 28.

³⁰ Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 65.

our biblical ecclesiology as the authority and principle for all contexts. In the city there is a diversity of both people and needs. Change and cities go together. The Western city is a phenomenon which can only be described in terms of process. The city is a set of interacting systems – political, economic, technological, and sociological – which is constantly changing. This gives us a hint as to why we need multiple church models for ministry in the city.

The basic foundation and structures are found in the NT. First, the church in the NT was a new community. The members of this new community transcended all earthly barriers – language, culture, socio-economic status, nationality, vocation and occupation. It was a community whose members were concerned for others rather than for themselves. The community was salt, light, body, new creation.

This image of the church challenges the cities that are filled with such diversity. This biblical image of the church should translate very well into our modern society. How that translation takes place might require different forms. It will certainly require a church that is incarnational in its lifestyle. Its members are part of the community in a meaningful way. It is probably multi-ethnic and multi-socio-economic and may be multi-lingual. It will take on issues of injustice – such as racism, sexism and oppression – as part of its core values. The new community model is prophetic in that it speaks against evil and social injustice.

The second image of the church is that of priest. Peter tells us that the whole of the church is a priesthood.³¹ There may be multiple gifts in the body with each individual displaying various unique gifts, but the church – both as individuals and corporately – has the office of priest. It will have mercy and compassion ministries as its major thrust. It will display a lifestyle of prayer, sacrificial giving, incarnational living, and simplicity. The life of the church is one of libation.³² Small groups will be an image of the church in miniature.

The church is also a pilgrim (Heb. 13:13). It paves the way, living on the border line between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. This church is innovative and missiological, giving away its best and seeing the community transformed. It is first local, but it aspires to reach out beyond its boundaries. The regional aspect is missiological in that it wishes to plant new churches in locations where members reside. Small groups are also driven by a mission directive. The church is not to be defined in terms of itself but in terms of God and the world. It has to cross boundaries into the world.

The church and the city end with a glamorous picture painted by John (Rev. 21:1-6). It is a 'Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband' (Rev. 21:2). The city is people; the city is dressed as a bride; the city is being transformed; the city is not going up but coming down. It is where the nations will be healed because the Lord is making everything new

³¹ 1 Peter 2:9

³² Rom. 12:1; Phil. 2:17; 4:18; 2 Tim. 4:6

(Rev. 21:5). It is already happening, but not yet. God is transforming the city already and will complete it at the coming of the Lord.

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The Last Word

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Since the events of September 11th, 2001 I have refused to purchase anything connected to that date. My boycott reflects a resistance to profiteering from tragedy, not a lack of patriotism for my country. You name it, you can buy it. Bumper stickers, T-shirts, jewellery, framed pictures of the former New York skyline, mementoes of every sort. The advertisement with many of these will include something like 'a portion of the profit from the sale of this item will go to disaster relief' (a victim's family fund, the education of the firefighters' children) and similar charitable concerns connected to the terrorist attack. 'Nine-eleven', written 9-11, is the shorthand used to designate the events of that day.

Buying patriotic mementoes seems to me to hearken to a desire for talismanic protection from a heightened sense of vulnerability for the common person. When national leaders are assassinated, that's one thing – that's *them*. But, when a person like you and me simply goes to work and is only doing their job, that could be *me*. Shielding from anonymous hatred, random violence and sudden death is some of the hope behind the consumerism based on 9-11. In its essence the talismanic shield is the attempt to establish a reason, an identity. Citizens in the United States who don't know all the words to the national anthem and cheat on their income taxes that are necessary to support the country are wearing red, white and blue to mitigate emotional chaos. We may have been initiated into a violent vulnerability that is the daily reality of many countries around the world, but Americans will still insist on it being *us* and not *them*.

My boycott stems essentially from the Gospel of Jesus that insists that the Kingdom of God exists for the sake of those others: the downtrodden, the poor, the lowly, the widows, the orphans, the lost, the sick, the most vulnerable. As a Christian, I need to get into the *global* mess of 9-11, not try to shield myself from it. When the armies of the world were arrayed against Judah in the days of King Jehoshaphat, he confessed, 'We are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you' (2 Chron. 20:12, RSV). That is the reality of all of life. I may not expect the secular state to express such honesty or to hold this evaluation of its resources. I was however hopeful that I would see such honesty and humility in the church.

The recognition of powerlessness is supposed to drive us to the Cross, not the chequebook. Stark reminders of life's fragility and personal vulnerability should endear

us to people who have experienced the same. The recognition that 'we are them' should remind 'us' of who we really are as Christians – celebrants of foolishness and powerlessness, truly the only realists in the world. Much as I love my country and am horrified by the events of last year, my response needs to declare that my citizenship is not of this world. The cross of Jesus asks me to identify with the pain of the world, not attempt to shield myself from it.

The public and private patterns of Jesus' life are interesting in this reflection. The cross was a very public event. His suffering and the identification of sin's worst strikes were not hidden from the eyes of the world. The brokenness and sorrow, the helplessness and vulnerability of the Saviour were in full view. It was the resurrection that was unobserved, hidden, tucked away and celebrated by the community of faith in the private places of the upper room and the early morning seaside breakfast. The triumph, the overcoming victory, the conquest of death was confined to the eyes of faith. Today however, the church tends to imitate the world in publicising its victories and hiding its brokenness.

With hardly an exception the church in the United States responded to the 9-11 tragedy in a similarly backward way. Like the secularists we have made very public displays of triumphalist patriotism and have found a multi-million dollar way to commodify suffering. The church has not huddled in the privacy of the secret closet to talk to our heavenly Father who hears us and knows what we really need. Instead of leaning into the sorrow and loss and powerlessness in order to lift the cross, upon which all evil is dealt a final blow, the church has lifted the flag of another citizenship and added our voice to the triumph of another kingdom.

In *Screwtape Letters*, the affectionate uncle, the demon Screwtape, wrote the following to his demonic nephew Wormwood to help him in his attempt to blunt a Christian's faith,

Once you have made the world an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing.¹

C.S. Lewis insisted that this was true for both Britons and Germans in his day, and every time I pass by something for sale attached to 9-11, I am confessing that Lewis was right about the kingdoms of this world (no matter their flag), that settle for so much less than the Kingdom of our God. Jehoshaphat's confession and clinging to the 'foolishness and weakness' of the Cross won't sell much in today's world or the world's church. They do however define reality. And they do remind me of who I am and where I ultimately belong.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942).