NET Neutestamentliche Entwürfe zur Theologie 32

Eve-Marie Becker / Jens Herzer / Angela Standhartinger / Florian Wilk (Eds.)

Reading the New Testament in the Manifold Contexts of a Globalized World

Exegetical Perspectives

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Herausgegeben von Eve-Marie Becker, Jens Herzer,
Angela Standhartinger und Florian Wilk

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Introduction

1. "Context" as a Key Concept of Hermeneutics

The "New Testament" is a global book. The texts collected in the New Testament canon are read, studied, and interpreted both individually and in groups or larger communities ("Interpretationsgemeinschaften") across the borders of countries, nations, cultures, languages, traditions, and churches.[1] In different Christian churches and denominations, New Testament texts are the subject of personal scripture reading and meditation as well as preaching and pastoral care. In order to facilitate accurate reading, understanding, preaching, and application of New Testament texts, they are the subject of theological education at universities and colleges all over the world. Applying certain rules to interpretation enables "supra-individual understanding," which at the same time recognizes the uniqueness of the early Christian texts and their divergence from the expectations of modern readers ("Fremdheit der Texte").[2]

Throughout the history of scholarly analysis of the New Testament texts, philological, historical and hermeneutical methods have been developed and found widespread recognition, from Mediterranean and Near Eastern Christianity in antiquity to the modern European arts of exegesis. The 1960s saw the emergence of contextual hermeneutics (e.g. feminist hermeneutics, liberation theology, postcolonial studies), especially in America, and these approaches link the interpretation of New Testament texts to the task of understanding them as vehicles of cultural, social and political change. This is especially true for the "interpretive communities" (*Interpretationsgemeinschaften*) that are commonly linked to the "global south." Meanwhile, it is broadly recognized that the New Testament texts were created in specific historical situations and contexts, and those who interpret these texts do so from their own specific historical situations and contexts. Thus, "context" is a key concept for hermeneutical theorizing.[3]

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1 See H. R. Seeliger/M. Hailer/M. Kahlos/M. Sauter, "Interpretationsgemeinschaft(en)," in *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik* (2009/2013), 296–299.

2 See C. Strecker, "Fremdheit. I. Neutestamentlich," in *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik* (2009/2013), 185–186.

3 See G. F. Snyman/H. Moxnes/C. Senkel/U. Kocher/P. Klotz, "Kontext," in *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik* (2009/2013), 340–344.

As scholars of Biblical studies, we owe our awareness of the historical contingency of texts to historical-critical exegesis. The awareness of the contextual framework in which text-reception and interpretation take place is the heritage of a centuries-old hermeneutical tradition, and contextual hermeneutics have emphasized the socio-political aspects of that framework.[4] Are—in consequence—interpreters of New Testament texts solely concerned with reconstructing the historical situations in which those texts were written on the one hand and identifying the political or religious conditions in which they are read on the other? Will New Testament exegesis disintegrate into diverse and unconnected interpretive processes? Or is it possible to view the "New Testament" as a global book and establish a constant worldwide dialogue between different approaches to and settings for the interpretive task?

2. The Purpose and Outline of this Volume

This volume brings together sixteen contributions from five continents (Africa, Americas, Asia, Australia and Europe). The essays present the importance of the individual researcher's perspective in New Testament teaching and research. All of the contributors have engaged in research in the field of New Testament studies, and many of them continue to be active (in their home countries) in research and teaching within this discipline. The essays explore the global impact of New Testament scholarship and its meaning for current theological and socio-political debates. As a collection of essays, the volume aims to raise scholarly consciousness regarding the global dimensions of New Testament research.

The contributors have organized their contributions around the following guiding questions: How does "context" matter in our readings of the New Testament and its theologies? What are the assumptions that govern our exegesis? How do different contexts and social backgrounds as well as individual needs and socio-political debates help to sharpen New Testament studies in the manifold contexts of today's globalized world? More concretely, the essays were inspired by the following questions:

- Please describe your academic career up to your current position, your research focus and interests and your long-term research goals.
- How does the cultural, political, social, religious environment affect your research as a New Testament scholar?

4 See U. H. J. Körtner, "Kontextuelle Bibelhermeneutiken," in *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik* (2009/2013), 344–345.

- What other ancient (or modern) texts, sources and material matter in and for your New Testament research? Is your choice related to the specific context you work in?
- Is your exegetical work most influenced by
  - your teacher and his/her scholarly tradition or the universities from which you earned your degrees,
  - your denominational affiliations,
  - philosophical or political theories,
  - other influences?
  - What factors, ideas or people directed your ways in New Testament research and what has sharpened your specific academic profile?
- Do you think of New Testament studies more in terms of "theology" or more in terms of "religious studies" or "antiquity studies"?
- Or shortly: to what extent do you consider New Testament research in the context of the theological disciplines to be "systemically relevant"?
- What other current challenges do you see as the most pressing ones in the long term for New Testament scholarship (medicine/health: see Corona crisis; questions of structural discrimination/racism/global justice, climate change or others…)?

Thus, the contributions in this volume ultimately address three kinds of questions: *First*, in what contexts do the exegesis and the interpretation of the New Testament texts operate on different continents and in different regions? *Second*, to what extent does the study of the New Testament texts help us to understand contemporary contexts, to live in them, and to be able to influence them constructively? To what extent are the geographically determined contextuality and the global dimension of New Testament scholarship in tension with each other? *Third*, what common problems and tasks of textual interpretation become apparent in the diversity of contextual readings—in other words, how much common ground and connection does the study of the New Testament provide and allow in a global community of scholarly based textual interpretation?

3. "Contexts" in the Light of Current Global Crises

In preparing for the publication of this volume, the term "context" has taken on a new meaning. Since February 2020, the Corona pandemic has been a global phenomenon that has required regional containment measures. Russia's war against Ukraine is—in geopolitical terms—a regional conflict that has incalculable global consequences and already affects the well-being of humans all over the world. Both events describe crises that will not only influence the "contexts" in which New Testament texts are read and studied in the short term, but will affect them in the longer term. The Corona pandemic exposed the physical and social vulnerability of people living together. Russia's war against Ukraine demonstrates once again that freedom and peace are under constant threat all over the world, including in Europe. What do the current crises mean for New Testament studies and New Testament scholars?

In the context of the current Corona pandemic many governments and countries have asked what subjects are most relevant for societies and what subjects have to step down in the time of this life-threatening disease. In many cases, the public has perceived religion, and even more theology, to play a minor or even ambivalent or negative role.[5] Yet, this loss of influence and authority is not a new phenomenon, at least not in the so-called Western World. In times of crisis we have had to cope with embarrassing speechlessness. This volume intends to take up this challenge for New Testament studies, the church and theology. In reflecting on our own academic profession in a global perspective, we would like to invite readers to reflect about the current state of New Testament scholarship from their own personal and scholarly standpoint. This volume intends to provide impulse and gather suggestions for our academic field from the manifold contexts in which New Testament texts are read and interpreted in a globalized world. Can we as exegetes learn from each other's experiences of crisis? Can we generate new questions and insights on how the interpretation of New Testament texts can succeed under the conditions of crises and create socio-political potential for freedom and liberty?

4. Brief Summary of the Essays

The contributions to this volume are designed as (auto-)biographical statements and/or surveys of the current tasks and challenges of the discipline of New Testament studies. The authors reflect on the task and purpose of New Testament exegesis and theology in their particular social, cultural, and ecclesial contexts. Some authors focus on specific texts or pericopes to develop and discuss their view of the New Testament texts and the significance of these texts for academia, society, and the church. The contributions as a whole far exceeded our expectations. Beyond providing valuable reflections on the questions they had been asked to address, the authors shed light on a wide variety of contexts, dimensions and even new avenues for New Testament scholarship, employing a

5 But see various contribution from the field of Biblical Studies (Old and New Testament), Systematic Theology, Church history and Practical Theology, in *Theologische Rundschau* 86.3–4 (2021).

diversity of theoretical, historical, and material approaches. As an added bonus, the contributions often interact with each other, sometimes in surprising ways.

Without intentional planning, the first eight articles draw a line through the New Testament canon from Jesus's miracles and parables to Paul and the author of 1 Timothy. The essays that are grouped together in the second half approach the questions on a more theoretical level and also add non-canonical texts from early Christian, Jewish and so-called para-biblical literature to the discussion.

In "Appraising Exegetical Procedures in Reading the New Testament in African Context", *Faustin Leonard Mahali* reads the theological topos of incarnation from an African (specifically, Tanzanian) theological perspective. In his view the incarnation means "God revealed in Jesus indwells humanity and the whole creation to save it and renew the corrupted creation because of human destruction" (p. 23). Despite several differences between Christians in antiquity and Tanzanian Christians today—i.e. experiences of persecution, expecting Christ's second coming soon—there are important similarities that give Bible reading a firm home in African contexts. Mahali names the strong social attachment between living individuals and even the living dead and a "socio-divine worldview" (p. 25). Therefore, African Christian Theology contributes to the understanding of the New Testament by its holistic cosmic view of salvation represented in Jesus' and the apostles' healing practices in miracles. An African view of Early Christian miracles is highly relevant for today because it interprets health in not only a medical but also a more holistic sense.

In "Reading the Text Does Matter: Texts as Symbols of Personal and Social Transformation," *Ernest van Eck* explains how the South African context matters for understanding Jesus' parables. Despite the founding of the first rainbow nation in post-Apartheid times, the gap between the rich and poor is dramatically increasing. Van Eck distinguishes three periods of parable-interpretation in New Testament scholarship: A premodern allegorical-moralism resulted in "social one-sidedness; the parables only had something to say to the believer(s) and the church" (p. 42). The modern period read the parables in one way or another as a language event, and this resulted in a metaphysical one-sidedness, seeing the kingdom of God as something 'out there.' The most recent material turn in parable research reads the parables as symbols of social transformation. Van Eck demonstrates how the parables are realistic stories of peasant life in first-century Palestine, exploring "how human beings could break the spiral of violence and cycle of poverty of an oppressed society created by the power and privilege of the elite" (p. 45). Jesus addresses the inclusion of the impure, criticizes the exploitative political economy of his day and speaks against violence. In van Eck's reading, the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–26) shows that "the worlds of the urban elite and the peasantry drift[ed] so far apart that the gap between them eventually [could not] be closed" (p. 53). Instead of producing theology for the guild only, New Testament research today addresses social illnesses and in this way becomes 'systemically relevant.'

Because the Tamil context is one "where more texts 'live together'" *Gregory Thomas Basker* reads Matt 10:40–42 side by side with the Tamil literary work *Tirukkuṟaḷ* (Sacred Verses). In "Interpreting the Bible in the Tamil Context: Reading Matthew (10:40–42) in Light of Tirukkuṟaḷ (Ch.9)," Basker shows how the Tamil approach decenters the traditional Western reading of Matthew 10 as advice to Christian missionaries to proclaim individual salvation. Instead, the Tamil approach reads Matt 10:40–42 as a text on hospitality/*viruntōmpal* and an invitation to show hospitality to each other and to God. Tamil culture also broadens one's view on the meaning of the saying: "whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones" (Matt 10:42). Offering water to a guest, when he/she enters the house, is important not only in a material sense. It also becomes a sign of welcoming or of approving a bond. In his essay, Basker demonstrates how intercultural biblical hermeneutics can unify disconnected groups within the Tamil community, and thus opens fresh avenues for understanding the gospel.

In "The Absolute Assurance of Giving. A Socio-Rhetorical Approach to the Parable of the Friend at Midnight in Luke 11:5–8," *Rospita Siahaan* reads the Lukan parable with the method of sociohistorical interpretation from an Indonesian, more precisely a Batak, context. The SIR-analysis proves that the parable's climax lies in verse 8. Whoever asks a friend will get what she or he asks for. The refusal of the request in verses 6 and 7 underlines the absurdity of any doubts about this social practice. Traditional Batak culture helps to explain more of the details mentioned in the text. In a context without doorbells where everyone sleeps on a sleeping mat, a visitor would awaken the children. Thus, the concerns of a friend coming at night have a legitimate basis, but such concerns are overwrought. An unexpected visit to a friend is a common and honorable practice in the context of hospitality and friendship. Thus, Siahaan does not read the parable—as most interpreters, including van Eck, do—in the context of patronage with its culture of honor and shame but rather as an assurance of giving and receiving. The disputed term ἀναίδεια (*anaideia*) means shamelessness, yet in a positive sense. Following the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:1–4, the parable teaches the reader that humankind has every reason to approach God with confidence.

In her contribution, "A Japanese Ecofeminist Reading of John 1:14," *Yoshimi Azuma*, from the perspective of the tiny minority of Christians in Japan, discusses whether the Johannine idea of incarnation has the potential to restore the voice of marginalized human beings, animals, and plants on earth and criticizes androcentric and anthropocentric reductionism. Eco-feminism can make the New Testament more systemically relevant, especially in Japan, a country that is highly challenged by gender inequality and environmental risks, for which the disaster at Fukushima has become a synonym. While the first mention of σάρξ (*sarx*) in Joh 1:13 contrasts human “flesh” with God, the λόγος (*logos*) becomes flesh in the next verse. *Sarx* includes not only human beings but all perishable and fragile creatures of this world. Likewise, the verb σκηνόω (*skēnoō*) not only refers to the tabernacle in the wilderness but also to the mutuality and vulnerability shared by all creatures. When God becomes flesh, he/she pitches a tent/tabernacle among all creatures, not humanity alone. The mortality and vulnerability of all earthly creature is not something to be overcome. Such a reading of John 1:14 implies a new understanding of sin as exemption from the human condition of vulnerability.

In his essay, “Transformative Reading of Women, Childbirth and Death in John’s Gospel from an African and Intercultural Perspective,” *Kenneth Mtata* begins with the death of the only 15-year-old Anna Machaya from bleeding after childbirth at a church shrine in Zimbabwe. Mtata discusses how reading and interpreting sacred texts matter in such cases of child marriage and abuse. In the midst of feminist and more conservative readings he calls for self-critical and reflective readings. By using birthing metaphors to convey religious ideas, the Gospel of John refers to processes that are familiar and natural to introduce higher, spiritual ideas. Interpreting John 1:13 and 8:41 against the background of Jewish sexual ethics, Mtata demonstrates how strongly Johannine metaphors depend on the concept of mothering. Sexual pleasure and the active role of both partners are endorsed and not shamed. Moreover, John presents strong women like the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene as agents of their own emancipation as they discover who Jesus is for them. A reading of the New Testament text that is informed by scholarship and critical thinking calls churches to stand up against the widespread practice of forcing women and girls into early marriage.

In “Reading and Teaching the New Testament: A Concise Contextual Diola Interpretation of Gal 3:26–29 under Empires”, *Aliou Cissé Niang* reflects on his biographical and intellectual journey from the Diola country in Senegal via Dakar to a university in New York. Niang’s approach is inspired by Senghorian Negritude. His teaching aims to free human beings from colonial objectification. Drawing on Diola poems recorded by a French ethnographer, Niang compares the life and message of the non-Christian female Diola prophet Aline Sitoé Diatta to the apostle Paul. A historical, empire-critical reading of Galatians reveals that for Paul the στοιχεία τοῦ κόσμου (*stoicheia tou kosmou*, Gal 4:3, 8) are vanquished by Christ, and the baptismal confession (Gal 3:26–28) embodies this new reality. It activates a counter-conquest in shattering the binaries once empowered by the elemental spirits. Like the apostle, the prophet Aline Sitoé Diatta suffered from bodily impairment, had an encounter with the divine—i.e. *Ala Emit*, the creator and founding ancestor—who called her to her mission of emphasizing an egalitarian community and was arrested because a French colonial official saw a severe threat in her ministry. Yet, two questions remain: first, how far is Paul's voice echoed in the available sources of Aline Sitoé Diatta's messages? Second, do both—the apostle and the prophet—offer actionable ideas for a lasting interfaith engagement today?

In "Aussie Men, Roman Men, and Fashioning the Evangelical Man from 1 Timothy 2," *Lyn M. Kidson* begins with the observation that "women are problematic in many evangelical circles"(169). To sustain this thesis, she offers a critical reading of three popular Australian evangelical readings of 1 Timothy 2. In all three readings, masculinity is the normative state for Christians, and masculinity is dominant in the public sphere. Yet, such a vision of masculinity is weak. It depends on the obedience of women who listen to men when they speak. Moreover, it does not concur with the text, which has both genders in view. Kidson interprets the text in the light of Roman debates on masculinity. For her, Timothy fights a threat to the community from other Christians. In this context, 1 Timothy 2:8–11 describes gender ethics for males and females in gender specific ways focusing on men and women in the public sphere. 1 Timothy 2:12–15, however, gives advice to elite couples in their private communications. Here the author tries to prevent men from being persuaded by their wives to listen to the other teachers. So, 1 Timothy has a far more robust view of masculinity than present-day Australian (evangelical) commentators, and others as well.

In the second section, contributors address the concept of context and the challenges of New Testament studies for today from theoretical and biographical perspectives.

In "Reading the New Testament in Manifold Contexts of a Globalized World: Exegetical Perspectives", *Armand Puig i Tàrrech* analyzes – as one of ten million Catalan speaking people – the impact of New Testament studies in the 20th and 21th century in Roman Catholic churches, theology and global culture. While there was a growing consensus during the Second Vatican Council about the need to apply critical exegesis to the biblical texts in order to prevent the Creeds from being fossilized by the church's traditions, today there is a gradual shift away from New Testament studies to religious studies, and there is less theological interest on the part of biblical scholars. Puig i Tàrrech proposes a new focus on the reconstruction of Jesus' life and teaching in interdisciplinary and inter-confessional teams. As an example, Puig i Tàrrech proposes an intertextual relationship between the parables in Matt 22:1–14 and Matt 25:31–41. He argues that this relationship explains an apparent contradiction in Matthew 22: the bad are invited to the wedding banquet in Matt 22:10 but the one without a wedding robe is excluded in Matt 22:11–13. The wedding robe, he suggests, is a symbol for the good works that the Son of Man will call for on the Last Day according to Matt 25.

In "New Testament Interpretation in the United States: A Perspective from a Cultural Observer," *Francisco Lozada, Jr.* uses U.S. immigration history as a filter to reflect critically on the history of New Testament interpretation. Through the 'open door policy' towards the south in the 1960s and 1970s, New Testament studies became more diverse. Historical methods were decentered and new methods like socio-cultural criticism or cultural anthropology shaped readings that served the cause of liberation. From 1986 onward new laws tried to stop unauthorized immigration, and narrative and reader-response criticism appeared around the same time. With gender and postcolonial criticism, readers began to interpret the text from their own standpoint. September 2001 led to a backlash to immigration rights, and the effects of this are still felt today. In New Testament studies, the role of flesh-and-blood readers remains disputed. Lozada challenges white exegetes who attempt to hide their role in the interpretive process behind claims to impartiality and historical objectivity. He suggests that an important future task for New Testament scholars is to become cultural observers in the act of interpretation who pay attention to the state of the field.

In her essay "Racism and New Testament Scholarship in Latinx California: U.S. Debates on Racism and Biblical Scholarship," *Kay Higuera Smith* describes her personal journey as a biblical scholar. Starting from a Latina/o/x-Californiano/a/x-Roman Catholic background, she received her academic training in the tradition of twentieth century German historical-critical exegesis and currently holds a teaching position at a Pentecostal Institution dominated by white male scholars. These discursive, social, and cultural contexts make her aware of her own borderline existence. While biblical scholarship in both historical-critical and fundamentalist hermeneutical traditions claim to follow allegedly 'neutral' norms and practices, both traditions perpetuate the power play of othering and silencing scholars from outside the U.S.-American and European west. Postcolonial approaches help to overcome the logic of coloniality, yet sometimes fail to articulate the ethical implications of theoretical analyses.

Higuera Smith describes how decolonial biblical hermeneutics, converging with liberation theology for shared epistemic goals, work to develop pedagogies against the ideology of power, hegemony, and White European normativity.

In his article "Die Erfahrung, im brasilianischen Kontext zum Neuen Testament zu lehren und zu forschen," *Marcelo da Silva Carneiro* reflects on the task of teaching New Testament in both church and university contexts in Brazil. The broad range of relevant sources from antiquity, the theological needs of those who work in churches, the important legacy of Brazilian theology of liberation, and ethical decision making must be balanced. In order to enable students to make up their own mind, it is necessary to include opposing, even fundamentalist positions. As elsewhere, gender justice and homosexuality are pressing issues in the church. Yet, there are also specific Brazilian forms of racism against people of color, immigrants, and indigenous people. In addition, politicians, elected to office by evangelical fundamentalists, do not hesitate to use the Bible to legitimize their racist, homophobic, xenophobic and sexist messages. New Testament studies can respond to this situation by including decolonizing theories as analytic tools and by scrutinizing the strategies of subversion and resistance to structures of domination in the biblical texts and the message of Jesus.

In "Researching and Teaching OtherWise," *Ronald Charles* reflects on wandering between his native land of Haiti and Canada, where he was trained in New Testament studies. Charles takes the apostle Paul as his example. He understands the missionary to the nations as a Diaspora person who navigates between Diaspora spaces and theological ideals, engaging in the intricacies of Diaspora life and politics and negotiating the social realities faced by different actors. Charles, having reflected on his own stance in society as well as his position as a teacher of New Testament in liberal arts colleges in Canada and the U.S., moved away from a symbolic or heroic view of Paul. As a minoritized scholar, he seeks to de-camouflage ideological and epistemological heuristics by asking disturbing questions, listening to those from the margins and reading their texts and stories alongside the texts of mainstream scholarship. Discussing Douglas Campbell's book, "Paul: An Apostle's Journey," Charles insists that it is important to reflect on one's own ideological agendas and avoid pretensions to 'objective scholarship.' Through the choices that scholars make about texts, sources, theories and the questions that are asked or ignored, New Testament scholarship proves to be eminently political work.

In "Reflections on a Lifetime of New Testament Teaching and Research in Australasia," *William Loader* focuses on his life journey as an Australian raised with an evangelical background. As an international student, Loader travelled to Mainz in Germany to write his dissertation with Ferdinand Hahn. Back in Australia, he sought to establish and maintain academic New Testament scholarship. Loader succeeded in creating collaborative efforts between church run seminaries and universities in the early 1980s. This corresponded to the peak of the influence of German exegesis. Later, the constant decline of student numbers led to the collapse of most of the theological departments in universities. International scholarship, however, especially the international groups or Liaison committees of the SNTS (of which Loader was the secretary for many years), still gave hope. As gender-studies led to a broader and deeper understanding of New Testament studies than that of former years, scholars from outside of traditional demographics brought new perspectives and greater cultural diversity to the field. "The best practice is where preachers make connections between the tensions in the world of Jesus and the tensions in contemporary society and help people engage a spirituality in which they see their calling and the calling of the church to be 'good news for the poor'" (p. 303).

In "Reading the New Testament in Aotearoa New Zealand," *Paul Trebilco,* who got his PhD from the University of Durham, England, explains how the denominational plurality of Aotearoa New Zealand raises the questions of what theological factors might unify the church and whether there are limits to diversity in the church. These questions animated his studies on the plurality of Christian groups in Ephesus in the first and second centuries, their identities and their self-designations in relation to each other. One of Trebilco's more recent questions is: "How do Christian groups practice the radical inclusiveness of Jesus, whilst also calling for repentance, transformation and justice? How do Christian groups today maintain their on-going identity so that they are authentically and distinctively 'Christian,' while also being open to and engaged with the wider context in which we live?" (p. 313) Trebilco expresses the challenge he feels in attempting to teach and do research in the global field of New Testament studies within the inherently individualistic tradition of Western Theology while living on the land of *Māori* people, who value deeply the spiritual dimensions of corporate life.

In "Reflections on Reading and Translating the New Testament in Contemporary Russia," *Alexey B. Somov*, trained in both Eastern Orthodox Theology and non-confessional historical criticism, reflects on New Testament studies in post-Soviet Russia and Princeton. A central challenge for Biblical scholarship in Russia is that Eastern Orthodox Theology has never felt at home in modern biblical scholarship. Yet, some of the old conflicts with western critical approaches are now obsolete; in many institutions canonical approaches are now more prominent than the "demythologizing" paradigm that once held great influence.

Furthermore, Patristic exegesis becomes more relevant and stimulating when it is studied alongside historical-critical approaches. Patristic exegetes like John Chrysostom provide important keys for understanding particular Greek expressions. Orthodox Synaxaria, martyrdom reports and the Palaea literature prove to be important para-biblical texts and traditions. In Russia, with regard both to liturgy and theology, there is a need for new translations as well as for uncensored scholarly study of the Bible. Somov provides an overview of institutions and cooperative endeavors that can meet these needs.

Acknowledgements

As editors of the NET series, our intention in this volume is to document the various perspectives on exegesis and interpretation entailed and promoted by reading the New Testament as a global book. As the essays demonstrate, context matters indeed. Interpretation of New Testament texts is confronted with multiple situations of crisis and conflict, and the authors tackle the emerging challenges with a keen awareness of the hermeneutical tasks necessary for those situations. The discipline of New Testament studies is thus in a constant test, provoked to a worldwide dialogue on hermeneutics, methods, and interpretations. At the same time, the New Testament remains a tremendous resource of religious, intellectual and socio-political hope. This volume, therefore, not only reveals the rich diversity of questions that are addressed and methods that are applied to the New Testament texts, but also shows that the corpus of New Testament writings remains underutilized. The New Testament affords potential interpretations, sometimes new and sometimes rediscovered, which help us as individuals and as communities of interpreters to understand our world in times of existential crisis and beyond. We hope that this will also hold true with regard to the Covid pandemic, the many wars waged against human beings and the problems posed by climate change.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their participation in the creation of this volume, Dr. J. Andrew Cowan for checking the English of this introduction, the Lutheran World Federation and the University of Leipzig for their financial support of the project, and Francke Verlag (Tübingen) for faithful and professional cooperation—from the idea for the book to the publication of the volume. We also thank Eva Maria Viziotis and Lena Setzer (both Leipzig) for compiling the indexes.

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Eve-Marie Becker, Jens Herzer, Angela Standhartinger and Florian Wilk

1. Contextualization: Exegetical and biographical readings

Appraising Exegetical Procedures in Reading the New Testament in African Context

Faustin Leonard Mahali

Biblical Hermeneutical Model in African Context

My interest in biblical theology goes back to my bush and primary schools. I had always attended Christian education classes and loved hearing and reading biblical stories from both Old and New Testaments. I was born in a village, on the highest plateaus of Livingston Mountains of the Southern Highlands of Tanzania, short after the independence of Tanzania. People of this place respect personal responsibility, human dignity and communal life. Even though the gospel had entered this particular place around 1900, many people are following *African Religion.*[1] I had experienced fathers, mothers, grandparents, diviners and overseers from my kinspersons worshipping God and venerating ancestors. In my carreer, I have always related this context in interpreting biblical messages. This process has shaped my theological engagement and spiritual life.

At my primary and secondary education, I attended Christian education, where evangelists[2] taught me biblical stories. These biblical stories made me encounter my local context where I occasionally participated and saw my parents attend and worship God in designated shrines, especially in dense natural forests. The hearing and reading of biblical stories inculcated in me a sense of a God-fearing person. Therefore, through these stories, I learned that the God of the Bible was the Highest, but not different from our local God, who would confront the fears and threats of lives expressed in religious, social, and cultural practices.

1 The word religion is not enough to describe the belief in God practiced by this people. It has has been loaded with misinterpretation and contributed to affirming African belief in God as synonymous to ancestral worship. Ancestors are mediating worship to God, and therefore they are venerated (as mediators).

2 An evangelist is the one who has attended Bible School and not a theological education in a college or university.

Contextually, I understood that human beings who had broken relationships with God and creation appeased the ancestors for reconciliation. This basic understanding prepared me for a deeper understanding of the Old Testament God's covenant with Israel and the entire creation. It also made me understand the interpretation of the covenant by Old Testament prophets and its fulfilment in the salvific act of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ as narrated in the New Testament. God confronted our contexts reigned by beliefs in evil spirits and life-threatening conditions such as diseases and poverty through the power revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through this context, I envisioned interacting with the meaning and relevance of biblical stories in their contexts and my context.

After my secondary education, I joined theological education. I was always interested in biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew) in the introductions to biblical theology. At the university level, I researched *The Concept of Eternal Life in the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John*. Later, I studied *The Concept of Poverty in Luke from a Perspective of a Wanji of Tanzania* for my doctoral dissertation. In the latter study, I wanted to do biblical studies relevant to my Tanzanian context. This study was almost impossible in Germany since traditionally historical-critical exegesis was limited to biblical texts in their context. However, Augustana Hochschule, at this time, had already advanced in incorporating socio-scientific and cultural-anthropological methods in biblical studies in addition to historical-critical methods. This approach gave me a leeway to propose something that suits my context.

At the university, lectures and seminars moulded me to different discourses and methods of biblical interpretations. In addition, the Augustana Hochschule organised workshops with other international students on the church's global mission. These seminars enriched my theological thinking in intercultural hermeneutics. These intercultural encounters added more paradigms in seeing biblical texts produced by Christians in a multicultural Jewish-Greco-Roman context. I think, in the background, the *incarnation theology* had taught me to respect all cultures as a creation of God. Through this point of view, I have learnt to carefully interpret the Bible through contextual exegesis with the awareness that this could also run a risk of ethnocentrism.

The roots of incarnation theology are biblical. However, classic systematic theology deals predominantly with God becoming flesh in the historical person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.[3] Unlike the typical Christian interpretation of incarnation, the African Christian theological reflection of incarnation makes

3 R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 41.

God's indwelling (*Shekhinah*) in humans happen in the universe's context.[4] In this sense, the Christological emphasis is not the mathematical or quantitative presence of divinity and humanity in Jesus, but rather the divine is present in all aspects of life.[5] This overarching consistency in African thoughts about the divine reality of God in Christ makes it inadequate to present Jesus Christ as either the "Living-Ancestor," "Proto-Ancestor," "Brother-Ancestor," "Elder-Brother," "Perfect-Ancestor," "New-Ancestor," or as "Mediator," "Healer," "Liberator," "Chief/King," or "Life-Rescuer."[6] One title is not enough to cover the dynamic movement of God's divinity into the human Jesus Christ. In African thinking, God revealed in Jesus indwells humanity and the whole creation to save it and renew the corrupted creation because of human destruction.[7] This model critiques the narrow thinking of personifying divine character and embraces the two natures of God in Jesus as united and dynamically meant for the liberation of the whole creation. In simple terms, God, who created heaven and earth in the Old Testament, dynamically manifests His godliness and reunites with His creation in Jesus Christ. He promises to transform it into a new creation as long as humanity trusts Jesus Christ.[8]

This theological framework has been a leitmotif in my biblical epistemological inquiries in finding out the relevance of the biblical text in the local African contexts. I still put more weight on how the interpreted biblical message could affect the wellbeing of humanity. The healing miracles of Jesus are essential because the teaching of the faith accompanies them and represents a holistic cosmic view of salvation in Africa. It was just before COVID-19 I had been granted a sabbatical to work on my proposed theme on "Rereading Healing Miracles in the African Context," through a point of view of the biblical context in correlation with a point of view of especially a Tanzanian context. I am still

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4 J. S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in An African Background*, "The incarnation brings the spirit world into the physical, so that the person who becomes *in Christ* is enabled to live simultaneously in both worlds," p. 143. Mbiti draws his ideas on African concepts from his earlier thoughts, *African Religions & Philosophy*, where he argues that in African context "Man's understanding of God is strongly coloured by the universe of which man is himself a part," p. 48. See also B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 19-20.

5 Cf. A. Shorter, *African Culture: An Overview*, 46.

6 For Christological titles see W. Richebächer, *Religious Change and Christology*, 236–274. Cf. W. Kahl, *Jesus als Lebensretter*, 364.

7 V. Magezi and C. Magezi, "Christ also Ours in Africa," 9.

8 Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, "For African Christians, the whole Bible is the book of Christians, and not just the New Testament. At the same time, they see it as their book since so many things within its pages parallel the African background," p. 156.

working on this project, and I see COVID-19 and other pandemics challenging theologians to see health in a holistic sense rather than as a medical challenge only.

Reading the Bible Written in Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts in African Contexts

Since I am interpreting some aspects of healing miracles in the Early Church in Africa, it will also be necessary to sketch the two worlds. The Judeo-Hellenistic biblical context cannot be similar to the African context of the 20th century when Africans south of the Sahara began to write their history. Firstly, the Judeo-Hellenistic context of the two early centuries is almost 2000 years old, while Christianity grew in Africa at the end of the 19th and 20th centuries. Secondly, in the first two centuries, Christianity spread while experiencing persecutions from some Jewish sects and some prefects and Emperors of the Roman Empire. On the contrary, Christianity spread in Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries together with the partition and colonisation of Africa. Thirdly, while Christian marital statuses in Palestinian-Hellenistic contexts were monogamous with some exceptions of serial polygamy through divorces, many African families before Christianity had been predominantly polygamous. Fourthly, another observable difference between the Christian Palestine-Greco-Roman context and the African context is the eschatological discernment. In the biblical context, the eschatological judgement and punitive measures to wrongdoers happen after death. In the African context, correcting those who have wronged the community and creation happens to individuals and communities in the present life.[9] These differences affect heavily any contextualisation of the biblical message of the first two centuries.[10] Therefore, studying and applying biblical messages in the African context must involve careful reading of biblical texts and decolonising the influence of mission and colonialism in the local contexts to avoid anachronistic interpretations.

Furthermore, there are apparent similarities between the two contexts that make reading the Bible at home in the African context. Socially, the Palestinian-Greco-Roman social context, like an African social context, embodies an

9 J. N. K. Mugambi, *Christianity and African Culture*, 79.

10 I have extensively differentiated some life-aspects in my context in my published dissertation, F. Mahali, *The Concept of Poverty in Luke*, 34–52, 158–202. Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 7.

individual's identity.[11] In both contexts, strong social attachments between living individuals and even with the living dead are comparable. Another evident similarity between the biblical context and the African context is the socio-divine worldview. Africans, like people of the Palestinian-Greco-Roman context, believe in monotheistic God through ancestral intermediaries.[12] The hierarchical faith makes God the one and only Creator of the universe, and one reaches Him through respectable ancestors.[13] When a human being disturbs or conflicts with other human beings, and when humans destroy the environment, such as forests, land, rivers, and homes, God intervenes by plagues, calamities, and diseases.[14] Therefore, all people in the community with their given gifts of leadership, medical skills (medicine men and women), diviners, craftsmen/women, educators, midwives, and cultural (oral) literature composers and dancers serve the purpose of maintaining God's creation and in times restoring the corrupted creation.[15] I consider the healing aspect in the African context as comprehensive as possible since it deals with the holistic wellbeing of humanity and their environment. Many of the healing miracle stories in the New Testament restore the holistic wellbeing of the sick and the community surrounding them.

The reading of the Bible happened in the African context, where I grew to understand God as the Creator. However, early missionaries imposed a heinous stigma on African theological worldviews regarding their beliefs and practices and robbed people of their God-created identity.[16] The questions raised by *African Christian Theology* brought new ways of reading biblical traditions and looked for the appropriate language and tools to contextualise the biblical

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11 B. Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, 15. Cf. B. J. Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus*. Malina here says, "Kinship was the focal and overwhelmingly significant social institution, of greatest concern to the collectivistic individuals who formed societies at the time," p. 18, however, one cannot exactly say these similarities can be directly equally equated.

12 B. Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, says, "Life is a participation in God, but it is always mediated by one standing above the recipient in the hierarchy of being. This hierarchy belongs both to the invisible and to the visible world. In the invisible world, the highest place is occupied by God, the source of life," p. 19–20. Cf. A. Shorter, *African Culture: An Overview*, 45–46.

13 A. Shorter, *African Culture: An Overview*, says, "The term 'ancestor' covers many realities, not necessarily that of literal progenitor. Essentially he/she is a forebear or kinsperson who has predeceased the worshipper. There may be 'good' and 'bad' ancestors – spirits of those who died enviably or unenviably," p. 46.

14 John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 158.

15 Cf. B. Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 21–23.

16 World Missionary Conference, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions*, 24–28.

message.[17] The Bible is read from the point of view that God has revealed to the world through becoming human (incarnation) in Jesus Christ for the redemption of the whole creation, including Africa.

Historical-critical methods have dominated biblical studies in theological institutions since Enlightenment. In this positivistic era, the Bible became "the historical source of one of the many religions, and [...] the religion of Israel [became] but a sector of the general history of religions."[18] Some biblical scholars maintained "truth" through historical-critical explanations and a "theological truth" through philosophical interpretation as separate disciplines.[19] Advocates of this method still argue that the only way to discern the biblical message intended to reach a given context is through historical criticism. Then people communicate the biblical message to make it relevant in their contexts.[20]

In the third quarter of the 20th century, the historical-critical method has come under severe attack.[21] Scholars argue that people can only develop the Old and New Testament truth by reconstructing biblical narratives in their respective contexts regarding dates, places, statuses of participants, composers, and effects.[22] This view means that in the historical-critical method, people often overlook the development of biblical stories as part of a synchronic edification of texts by authors to reach their audiences in their given contexts.

Today biblical scholars consider both diachronic and synchronic analyses of biblical texts as indispensable in discerning their meaning in given biblical contexts.[23] At the synchronic level of biblical study, including effective-history and socio-cultural realities of a text becomes an integral part of textual interpretation. Historical paradigms that see texts through the focal position of cultural-anthropological worldviews have to integrate narrative and literary/rhetorical criticisms to decipher proto-receptivity and the intended meaning of a text.[24] Christian Strecker summarises three basic orientations, which he calls 'cultural-anthropological exegesis, contextual exegesis, and the reflection of the use of biblical motives in cultural performances.'[25] There is an attempt to say

17 K. Bediako, *The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 176. See also K. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 118.

18 C. Westermann, "The interpretation of the Old Testament," 42.

19 K.-W. Niebuhr und C. Böttrich (Eds.), *Johann Philipp Gabler*, 15–41.

20 E. Krantz, *The Historical Critical Method*, 55–63.

21 D. A. Knight (Forwarded), *Methods of Biblical Interpretation*, 147–207. G. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 35–41.

22 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 342. M. Foucault. *The Order of Things*, 45.

23 See only, M. Ebner & B. Heininger, *Exegese des Neuen Testaments*, 69.

24 Cf. M. Mayordomo, "Exegese zwischen Geschichte, Text und Rezeption," 36–37.

25 C. Strecker, "Kulturwissenschaften und Neues Testament," 18–19.

that "contextual exegesis," if taken as a meeting point, should, apart from a search for proximal actual events in the stories under analysis "without bias," relate those stories to the cultural-anthropological world views in the contexts in which characters produce texts.[26]

The African context as a space for reading biblical texts would also need to undergo critical analysis since the biblical context has received the Bible through Western "colonial" culture. The context requires liberating paradigms to deconstruct and decolonise some missionary teachings of the Bible to align them with the needs of the African context.[27] This process allows the interpreter (subject) to have a pragmatic evaluation of a text that speaks directly to Africans.

Therefore, contextual exegesis requires eclectic procedures that allow a diachronic and synchronic analysis of a text. The approach gives powerful motivation to relate the text to one's context. In this sense, reading the biblical text will inevitably require investigative procedures on how it resonates with Jewish-Palestinian and Greco-Roman contexts. From there, one can ask how the interpreted message could speak to our context today. In this quest, there should be both historical-critical and hermeneutical procedures to respond to the relevance of the biblical message in our micro (African) and macro (Global) contexts.

A New Testament Quest for Hermeneutic of Healing in the Early Church: Healing Stories in the Early Church

In the first place, historians and theologians have interpreted the Early Church from the classic mission perspective that perceives a conversion of Jews and Gentiles as a prerequisite into Christianity.[28] This perspective on Christianity gives a narrow view of intercultural encounters among ethnic groups of the Palestinian and Greco-Roman contexts. It also overlooks praxeological aspects of Christianity within those contexts. In the latter's case, a series of healing events in the New Testament indicates that the Early Church was concerned with increasing disciples into Christianity and their wellbeing.

26 Ibid., 19.

27 E. van Eck, *African Theology as Biblical and Contextual Theology*, 679–701. U. C. Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa*, 32. M. W. Dube, "The Scramble for Africa as the Biblical Scramble for Africa," 4.

28 Cf. U. Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, 244, 260. In a sense, these are biblical bases for mission related to mission practices of the 19th and 20th century.

The following texts serve the purpose of looking into healing practices in the Early Church as inevitably part and parcel of a missionary mandate to reclaim life from the corrupted world and to care for the wellbeing of Christians and humanity at large. The established Jerusalem Christian congregation through apostles healed people with different illnesses and resurrected the dead (Acts 3:1–10; 8:6–13; 9:34; 9:40–41; 20:9–12) as a continuation of Jesus' immanent divine intervention against the kingdom of evil for the liberation of human beings and the whole creation (Luke 11:20). The congregations also held prayers to confront the threats of [life] to receive the mighty hand of God to heal and perform miracles in the Name of Jesus (Acts 4:29–30). The followers believed the disciples of Jesus had such power so much that even when they were in touch with their shadows, they could be healed (Acts 5:15–16). Paul and his co-workers also healed people through prayers, and healing also happened because of the faith of the sick themselves (Acts 14:8–10). When Paul touched clothes and other objects, disciples reinstituted them to heal the sick (Acts 19:12). In many of these events, faith, prayer and the laying of hands by the apostles/disciples on sick people had a healing effect to the sick, to the extent of healing even physical sicknesses such as high fever caused by many other things in the body including diarrhoea (Acts 28:8).

The healing and miracle performances were typical in the early church, and they usually were accompanied by the teaching and affirmation of faith. No formula had to begin first, but the aim is the physical benefit and spiritual growth whenever there is healing. Many churches established by apostles practised healing (2 Thessalonians 3:1–3; James 5:14–15). Through prayers and anointing, Christians restored the relationship of the sick person with the Lord (God), and the Lord (God) revitalised the life of the believer and forgave sins (James 5:15). The acts of anointing and praying are holistic physical and spiritual healing acts. In this case, physical and spiritual actions through faith are crucial, and they bring healing and reclaim the life and well being of people.

Palestinian and Greco-Roman Healing Context

There is a growing consensus that to understand the healing in the New Testament, one has to strive to understand the environment of the Palestinian and Greco-Roman world or the first and second-century Mediterranean world. The cultural-anthropological and religious value systems define the state of being sick or ill and their respective remedy.[29] Pilch in his work says,

29 J. J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean*, 13.

> "… it is not always possible to separate medicine from the religious system as is routinely done … Religion can be viewed as a cultural adaptive response to a much wider range of suffering and misfortune, of which human sickness is only a small part."[30]

This means that a holistic view of healing should see healing miracles from both a medical causal-effect point of view[31] and through value systems that embody the socio-religious and cultural identities. In this respect, faith-related practices contribute significantly to people's healing and wellbeing.

Healing in the Early Church as Holistic Commission

In the case of the healing that happened in the Early Church, it was not only the physical body that was important but also the spiritual life made a decisive integral part of the whole. The trust in the relationship with God, neighbour and the whole creation brought about healing. Some exegetes identify these miracle stories as happening within the contexts of congregations for planting and caring for the church.[32] The understanding of miracle stories in this sense simplifies the power of the message of the gospel. It reduces this good news into something like a religious cult instead of a liberating message in all aspects of life. However, I think it is essential to see that Christians interpret healing miracles from the context of the incarnation of the Kingdom of God manifested in the life and deeds of Jesus Christ.[33] The trust in the incarnation of God in Christ from the biblical and African-theological perspectives, as described above, renews/heals not only the life of human beings but also the whole creation.

Faithfulness in the powerful message of Jesus Christ embodies in itself a healing miracle that may be enough to overcome the threats of life in different forms (Acts 4:29–30). The commission to proclaim good news to the nations without discrimination of a Jew or a Gentile brings hope to anyone who believes

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30 Ibid., 35.

31 R. Jackson, *Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire*, illuminates this dichotomy of biomedical and magical healing in chapters 3–5.

32 See J. Roloff, *Neues Testament*, 56. Also U. Schnelle, *Einführung in die neutestamentliche Exegese*, 109.

33 W. Stegemann, *Jesus und seine Zeit*, indicates that all categories of miracles legitimize the coming of the kingdom of God or Jesus' divinity and the same also applies to the function of natural miracles, whereby other therapeutic miracles of chronic diseases (blind, lame, deaf-mute, leper) and exorcism have their context in liberation theology from colonial oppression, 348–353. Cf. W. Kahl, *Jesus als Lebensretter*, 425–443.

in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ brings liberation from colonial evils and suppression exacerbated by the Roman Empire and its hegemonic systems. In this context, Christianity helped give hope to the hopeless and redefined the meaning of life of different groups through the communion of believers (Acts 2:39; 9:42; and 19:17–20).

In this way, I also try to understand Pilch, who says that healing (medicine) is not always separable from people's belief (divine) value systems in the New Testament context. Otherwise, we fall into the trap of anachronistic judgement and exotic experimentation of healing phenomena instead of letting them contribute and pose challenges to our own (conventionally understood as progressive) systems. At the same time, we cry for a disturbed ecosystem and climate change. The discussion of the texts above defines illness/sickness as a physical, social, political, and spiritual anomaly. All medical possibilities and spiritual means arising from trust and love in God manifested in Jesus Christ treat these ailments. Thus, the faithfulness in Jesus Christ becomes the source for us to participate in God's salvific event and assures us wellbeing on earth and eternal life in the world to come.

The narratives about healing in the Early Church embody the entire commission of Christians to preach the good news that through faith and deeds, may reclaim the lost relationship with God and his creation and bring back life in abundance threatened by individual and systematic sin. This meaning of healing and its relevance in the context of the Early Church challenges us not to reduce healing to a mere perspective of biomedicine (or human science) as emphasised in these days of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paradigm also compels us to act against any manipulation of God's power that transforms lives by some medical doctors, medicine men and women, preachers and ministers. It guides us to resist those who pretend to have more spiritual power to heal and resurrect people. In fact, from the biblical point of view, it is our faith (all of us) in God alone and his means of grace that is enough to heal us. Steadfast faithfulness of believers in the Word of God invites a renewed relationship with God and neighbour through proclaimed love that promotes healthy co-existence among human beings in a communion of believers and neighbours. It also embodies healing power that affects the physical and spiritual life of a believer.

A Response to the New Testament Hermeneutic and Practice of Healing in Africa Context

It is important to note that when Africans discern cultural-anthropological concepts of life and practices, they also bring fruitful remedies to misconceptions of African worldview due to colonial and missionary misinterpretations. Firstly, the process helps them self-examine their socially full contexts of tensions and sometimes violent conflicts. Secondly, it allows them to see that, like any ethnic group in this world, God has also created Africans in his image, and therefore they have to adore and worship him alone. Lastly, from the reconciliatory metaphors available in the African context Jesus Christ embodies the divine power (incarnation of God) to bring back the distorted life, and therefore like "respected ancestors," he presents the *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation story) for all humanity and creation.

From a contextual exegesis point of view, my reading of the Bible has never produced an African exegesis for apologetic sake. The attempt has been to see that elements I wholeheartedly believe could contribute and give more light to the reading of a document of first-century Christianity in the African context. I also do not buy the idea that the African context is similar to the New Testament context since I will be sinning by accepting that other cultures are progressive and others are not. Christians have to take each context seriously since we are all divinely consecrated by God as good creation. In this sense, no one should have a narrow and localised definition of a context. African context, like any other context, is dynamic and not static.

In the description of incarnation above, God in Jesus Christ comes to give new life to the corrupted world. In the African context, baptism in the Triune God, participation in the Eucharist and service to the communion of the Church through the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit reconcile Christians with God and with themselves and heal individuals and bring healthy relationships in the community.[34] When they submit to God through faithfulness in Jesus Christ, they receive life in abundance. It means that the healing of illnesses/sicknesses happened in the Early Church through prayer, laying of hands, anointing, baptism, Eucharist, and participation in *koinonia.* The African context sees healing as holistic since Africans do not separate medical cure from divine healing.[35] When Africans receive Holy Baptism, participate in the Holy Eucharist, pray, anoint, lay hands in the Name of Jesus, believe in the presence of God in Jesus Christ (incarnation), they also await blessings and healing from God at the same time.

There is a resurgence of much of what I presented from the Early Church in the African context. In the first place, apostles practised healing patterns (for physical and social ills) like the way Jesus healed his disciples. They also

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34 J. S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, has carefully related sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and healing ministry to salvation, 134–175.

35 Cf. H.-J. Becken, *Theologie der Heilung*, 22–28.

resurrected people who had died, bringing them back to everyday social life. The apostles also sometimes just prayed in the same manner as Jesus did, laid hands on (or touched) someone, or used oil to heal and anoint those who were ill or sick. There are also similar patterns of handling pieces of clothes or using them for healing. Some disciples even believed that contact with even a shadow of a faithful apostle could heal someone in touch with the shadow. In general, Christians trusted that faith in Jesus Christ and healing actions in his name confronted life and death threats. They believed, healing transformed the whole creation. This amalgamated healing ministry made a holistic growth of the church in membership, spiritual and diaconal care. Thus, when we see mushrooming healing ministries and churches in Africa, we should not negatively judge these trends quickly. On the contrary, we should study how these ministries and churches contextualise Christian healing in the African context.

From this point of view, I candidly agree with many African and Western theologians that Africa offers interpretative horizons that could contribute globally to the understanding of healing.[36] This position is not because the African context is similar to the context of the New Testament. Unlike the Western context, life in Africa is inseparable from spiritual world views in an authentic sense. The misconception of African spirituality by attributing African veneration of ancestors as worship of gods stigmatised the African holistic view of God in creation. In my understanding, anyone in Africa who does not care for the whole of God's creation is a witch.[37] It means the world of Africans is full of beliefs in life-giving divinities. Anything that threatens and causes havoc to life is likely to be captured as witchcraft. Africans propitiate ancestors to appease God on their behalf to reconcile and save the whole creation from every kind of evil perpetrated in the community.[38]

In the context where African governments have been powerless to follow the medical rules of social distancing and quarantines, and vaccines as an effective way of preventing the spread of COVID-19, for instance, many have been praying to God to intervene against this deadly disease. I have witnessed political and church leaders appealing to Christians and people of other faiths to pray for one another and the nation. At the same time, they have not restrained from observing some COVID-19 preventive measures such as sanitising their hands and avoiding unnecessary gatherings and contacts. So, there is an emphasis on faithfulness in God, but at the same time trust in medical measures

36 B. Bujo, *African Theology in Its Context*, 22; W. Kahl, *Jesus als Lebensretter*, 441–443.
37 M. C. Kirwen, *The Missionary and the Diviner*, 53.
38 Ibid., 54.

as prescribed by science. However, the former could outweigh the latter to avoid human responsibility, but there is still a sense of holistic thinking even when science supersedes faith.

As Christians, we need to take the Christological incarnation of God in Jesus Christ seriously as a manifestation of God's confrontation against the corrupted world as exposed by some New Testament scholars. The intentional incarnation of God to save humankind from sin not only invites us through faith to become liberated from evil and corruption but also redefines our identities from God's creation point of view.[39] The description of *koinonia* in connection with the community's healing in the Early Church needs a revitalisation of incarnation theology practised in this very early church, whereby through God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ, all humankind is assured salvation and life in abundance. In this sense, all people are invited through faith in Jesus Christ to come before God with their physical and spiritual needs, regardless of their race, gender, nationality, social status, and other contexts. God wants to save the whole world from evil and misery now and in future condemnation.

The relationship of faith and healing is therefore critical in this context. In many ways, cultural-anthropological faith-healing affects the human being since a human being is relational. It would be a mistake to discuss what is happening with healing ministries in the African context with the biomedical lens. What is happening in the healing practices cannot be described as a placebo-faith response.[40] A simple answer of terming everything in healing as psychologically conditioned reveals a misconception of healing miracles as unscientific (not medical) and exotic (primal culture). I believe, even without dissecting a human being as a biological-social and a spiritual being, God created this very being. This human being is in a relationship with God and with fellow human beings in the context of God's creation. God's power manifests itself in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, God's power embodies Christians through the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit endows them with the gifts to reconcile and serve (heal) one another and care for the creation of God. The relational discernment of the Holy Trinity is at home in the African context. Here, God is the source of everything (Creator). God comes to visit Africans (becoming flesh in Jesus Christ). And God moves in and around the whole

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39 V. Magezi and C. Magezi, "Christ also ours in Africa," 9.

40 P. F. Craffert, "Beetroot, Garlic, Lemon and Jesus in the Light against HIV/AIDS," 292–306. A different view is taken by M. Vahäkängas, "Babu wa Loliondo – Healing the Tensions between Tanzanian worlds," 3–36 (esp. 27–28).

creation as spirit-world[41] (Holy Spirit) to care, reconcile and heal the entire world.

Conclusion

As one can see, my approach to reading the Bible has been eclectic-contextual. I always have respected the historical-critical method as a means to begin dealing with the biblical text. Today historical-critical processes accept socio-anthropological and socio-cultural criticisms as part of biblical interpretation. It allows literary (rhetoric) or socio-rhetoric interpretations to complement diachronic expositions of texts limited by the authors' intentions. On the other hand, I have positively considered the African context and its people in which biblical messages find their relevance as part of a beautiful creation of God. This view has enabled me to appraise critically the way people think about God and live as neighbours. Understanding the way people in this context think about life and how they deal with threats of life encourages me to think of God's inclusive salvation revealed in the life and works of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament texts used as a model to discuss healing ministry in the Early Church illuminate us in a very consistent way that this Church built on the healing ministry of Jesus whose identity is the Christ enthroned with authority to transform the corrupted world into a righteous space for the dwelling of God and the entire creation. From a contextual point of view, these texts of healing miracles reveal genuine acts of liberation based on the overwhelmed human needs caused by the corrupt, unjust systems of the local Jewish tetrarchs and the Roman Empire. From the African perspective, God intervenes against universal/cosmic evils when propitiated through a perfect Mediator. In this context, Africans understand that God through Jesus Christ flows everywhere as a spiritual entity (Holy Spirit) and rescues humanity and creation from destruction. This model of understanding holistic healing challenges mainstream churches that mainly understand healing from the medical point of view.

The thesis about the contribution of faith in healing miracles meets challenges from the secularised (medical oriented world) and from attributing this faith

41 J. S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, says, "The spirit world forms an integral part of the whole existence …," 139. Mbiti contextualizes this by saying, "Christian fellowship operates on four planes: Communion with God, with one another on earth, with the departed saints and the heavenly company, and in Holy Things. The full scale of this multi-dimensional ocean of fellowship was inaugurated by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit," 145.

to Christ alone (*solus Christus*). However, my understanding of the revelation of God in this world through Israel (as representative of nations) and in a particular way God's incarnation in Jesus Christ (representing all humanity) makes me believe that God brings intervention to this world in the way God wills. Therefore, I think also that God heals us in a way God wills, and what we need to do, as in the words of Paul and Luther, physically and spiritually, is to believe in the power of God intending to transform this world. In the human act of faithfulness, Christians invite God to intervene against the evils of this world. Through faith, we also accept that God is omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, and therefore the life of human beings and creation is in God's hands.

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Reading the Text Does Matter

Texts as Symbols of Personal and Social Transformation

Ernest van Eck

Setting the context

The context of this essay is South Africa, and the author is a previous full-time ordained pastor of an Afrikaans reformist denomination, and currently a full-time lecturer in New Testament studies at a public university. For me, context, the ministry, and academic scholarship are inseparable. Or rather, it should be.

My context, South Africa, is known for many things. For some it is synonymous with Apartheid, including Apartheid laws such as The Group Areas Act (Act No 41 of 1950), the Bantu Education Act (Act No 47 of 1953), the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (Act No 49 of 1953), and the infamous Group Areas Act (No 36 of 1966). However, South Africa is also known for the release of Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990, its first democratic election held on 27 April 1994, and the dream of being a "rainbow nation." In more recent times, this dream has been replaced by widespread corruption, seemingly without impunity, and high levels of crime and violence. To this can be added misgovernance, poor service delivery by local councils, the shameless corruption related to personal protective equipment (PPE) during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, a general disregard for traffic rules by many motorists, unlincensed vehicles on the road, tax evasion, and a current unemployment rate of 32.6%.[1]

It also seems that economic inequality, the gap between rich and poor, is ever increasing in spite of the demise of Apartheid. In South Africa, the "richest 10% of the population own more than 85% of household wealth, while over half

1 See https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/495113/the-chances-of-employment-in-south-africa-based-on-your-level-of-education.

the population have more liabilities than assets."[2] Approximately 55.5 percent (30.3 million people) of the population is living in poverty at the national upper poverty line (R 992), while a total of 13.8 million people (25 percent) are experiencing food poverty.[3] Above all, it seems that racist attitudes and xenophobia are revisiting us time and time again.

The results of a recent survey[4] by the reputable global polling firm Ipsos,[5] mirrors the current state of affairs in South Africa. In a survey conducted in December 2020, the top five biggest worries were unemployment (59%), corruption (59%), crime and violence (58%), poverty and social inequality (29%), with COVID-19 (24%), surprisingly, only coming in fifth. In Ipsos' most recent survey done in July 2021, South Africa, of the 28 countries surveyed, is once again the country most concerned about jobs (62%), and also the most concerned about financial and political corruption (60%).[6] While working on this essay, during the second week of July 2021, South Africa experienced widespread looting, destruction, criminality and rioting on a scale not previously witnessed in democratic South Africa. In the period 8 to 14 July 2021, 89 malls and shopping centres, 45 warehouses, 22 factories, eight banks, 88 ATMs, 89 liquor outlets, 8 liquor distributors, 139 schools, and 37 trucks were looted; and again, it seems, without impunity.[7]

How does one read the text of the New Testament in a context like this? For 23 years, this question did not really bother me since I was only teaching part-time while being a full-time pastor. What I did realize during this period, however, is that what I taught in class was not really relevant to laypeople and the clergy. During this period, I also attended several local and international New Testament conferences, and my experience was that we were practising theology within a guild for the acceptance of the guild. In short, it was practising theology in an ivory tower.

When I was appointed full time in 2006, the question of the how and why of reading the New Testament was not something I could longer ignore. While looking for a topic to specialise on, reading as widely as I can, I came to realise that theology is not offering much to laypersons, the clergy, local

2 See https://time.com/6087699/south-africa-wealth-gap-unchanged-since-apartheid/.
3 See https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_ZAF.pdf.
4 See https://businesstech.co.za/news/trending/460906/covid-19-south-africans-have-other-things-to-worry-about-right-now-survey/.
5 See https://www.ipsos.com/en.
6 See https://www.ipsos.com/en/what-worries-world-july-2021.
7 https://www.netwerk24.com/Sake/Ekonomie/geplunder-gebrand-so-lyk-die-lang-lys-skade-nou-20210722.

congregations, and society. Although published several years later, Volf and Croasmun expressed poignantly what I experienced in the beginning of my full-time career as a New Testament scholar: New Testament scholars do not really consider laypeople or the clergy relevant for their work, and therefore write for the guild, an audience that is at most times part of a narrow slice of a subfield. Second, especially in my local theological environment, many theologians clutch nostalgically to past convictions and ways of life, as if the belief, practices and cultural mores of more than 500 years ago were of heavenly origin. For many, the word Reformation was the magic key that opened the doors to all theological questions and answers. Thirdly, and for me the most important, was my experience of the inability of theology to address normative questions.[8] In most cases, theology was about what one should believe, and not what one should do; it was more important, for example, to reflect on the correct interpretation of the creeds of the church than to ask or address questions that relate, for example, to social justice.

What I did not realize then, is that what I was looking for is what Volf and Croasmun many years later would describe as a theology that matters; a theology that focuses on "questions of true life in the presence of God"; (a theology that focuses) on the "truth and beauty of human existence in a world of justice, peace, and joy"; and a theology that has the "ability to address the most profound and important questions of human existence."[9] Or, as Volf and Croasmun succinctly puts it: a theology that yields "beautiful, abundant, transgressive, and reconciling *life*."[10]

With this focus, I believe, one can practise a contextual and relevant theology that can counter "taste-driven, individualized, unreflective ways of living" and help people to "articulate, embrace, and pursue a compelling vision of a flourishing life for themselves and all creation."[11]

Where to start?

My decision in 2006 to practise a theology that matters, I soon discovered, was the easy part of my journey. The difficult part was to decide what to focus on. My eventual focus, the interpretation of the parables of the historical Jesus,

8 Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*, Theology for the Life of the World (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 35–59.

9 Ibid., 1–4.

10 Ibid., 6. Emphasis in the original.

11 Ibid., 33.

a social prophet from Galilee, was shaped by two smaller decisions. First, I decided to become a member of *The Context Group: A project on the Bible in its socio-cultural context*, an international team of scholars that believe that one first has to understand the social system that produced a text before the text itself can be understood. If not, the reader can easily fall into the traps of anachronism and ethnocentrism. To avoid these fallacies, members of the Context Group developed what is now known as social-scientific criticism, that is, the social-scientific approach in reading ancient texts. The second decision that determined my eventual focus was accepting an invitation to do a comprehensive book review in the form of a review article of John Kloppenborg's book on the parable of the Tenants[12] in Mark 12:1–12 (and *par.*) and the Gospel of Thomas 65. In reading his extensive analysis of the parable, especially his presentation of the parable's *Wirkungsgeschichte*, I came to realise that parable interpretation, broadly speaking, can be demarcated into three periods.

The first period can be called the premodern period (from the time of the writing of the gospels up to and including the Reformation). In this period the parables were interpreted as allegorical moralisms. The allegorisation of the parables, from a literary point of view, started with the writing of the gospels, and continued throughout the patristic period, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation. The result of this approach was a *social one-sidedness*; the parables only had something to say to the believer(s) and the church.[13] The second period of parable interpretation can be called the modern period. In this period, inaugurated by the work of Adolf Jülicher, a plethora of methodologies were used to read the parables, focusing, for example, on the parabolic nature of the parables, the parables as similes or metaphors, the parables as language events, and many more. One specific focus was the question of understanding the term "kingdom of God," often referred to by Jesus in his parables. Was the kingdom of God referred to in the parables an eschatological (futuristic) or a present reality? The answer to this question was almost unanimous: the term "kingdom of God" was an eschatological expression, resulting in the parables being interpreted as apocalyptic symbols. This interpretation of the parables resulted in a *metaphysical one-sidedness*; the kingdom of God was seen as something "out there."

12 John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, WUNT 195 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

13 Ernest van Eck, "Interpreting the Parables of the Galilean Jesus: A Social-Scientific Approach," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): xv, https://doi.org/10.4102v65i1.308.

The third period of parable interpretation is described by Kloppenborg as a "material turn"[14] in parables research. This reading of the parables sees the parables as realistic stories, told within a very specific historical and social context, proclaiming a new way of existence that reverses the world of the hearers. This new way of existence is the kingdom of God, as a present reality. Also part of this approach is paying special attention to Mediterranean anthropology by using a social-scientific criticism, stressing the key first-century Mediterranean values, and the study of papyri from early Roman Egypt. These papyri, where applicable, provide detailed information on social realities and practices evoked by the parables of Jesus;[15] practices and realia that should be taken into consideration to avoid running the risk of serious anachronism when interpreting the parables.[16] Read through these lenses, as aptly put by Herzog, the parables are "not earthly stories with heavenly meanings, but earthly stories with heavy meanings."[17]

Reading the parables from this perspective, I realised, was to read the parables as *symbols of social transformation*, exactly what I believe we need in the South African context. This conclusion led to several questions that served as a catalyst for my parable research, the most important question being: if the parables are symbols of social transformation, do the parables not maybe advocate certain ethical/moral values that can be applied to the South African context? What if the parables, as realistic stories, have something to say to the South African realities of corruption, high levels of crime and violence, the exploitation of the poor, misgovernance, poor service delivery, the ever-increasing gap between the rich and the poor, racism, and xenophobia?

Reading the text in context

With the starting point set, I gradually developed my own method in reading the parables. In as brief as possible, my methodology, developed over a period of several years, flows from the following points of departure.

First, I am not interested in reading the parables in their literary setting in the gospels. I am not interested in the evangelist's allegorical application

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14 John S. Kloppenborg, "Ernest van Eck on the Unmerciful Servant" (PhD-seminar of the Department of Religion, University of Toronto, October 22, 2014), 1.

15 John S. Kloppenborg, *Synoptic Problems: Collected Essays*, WUNT 329 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 491–511, 556–76, 600–630.

16 Ibid., 2.

17 William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 3.

and theological understanding of the parables.[18] What I am interested in is the reading of the parables in the context of Jesus' public career some forty years or so earlier than the gospels.

This context, second, was the exploitative situation of the peasantry in first-century Palestine, as result of the ideologies of the kingdom of the *pax Romana* and the kingdom of the temple elite. This context served as emergent context for the parables of Jesus, and to avoid ethnocentric- and anachronistic readings of the parables of Jesus the interpreter must take cognizance of the dominant cultural values and norms of the first-century Mediterranean world. The modern reader of the parables of Jesus must take the social and cultural values of Jesus and his hearers, embedded in the parables, seriously (the culture of the first-century Mediterranean). Above all, the texts we have of the parables are products of a high-context society,[19] and without knowledge of the historical and cultural world of Jesus, the interpreter will not be able to make evident what *social realia* are evoked by a specific parable, that is, cultural scripts that would have been known and therefore assumed by Jesus and his hearers. Clearly, to read the parables from this perspective necessitates a cross-cultural approach (culturally sensitive reading) to get clarity on the social system presupposed in Jesus' parables. For this, one needs reading scenarios, and I believe that social-scientific criticism[20] offers what is needed.

Third, I see the parables as realistic stories. The parables of Jesus are stories about dinner parties, prodigal sons, seed being sown, laborers in a vineyard and persons accruing debt. In the parables, for example, "a vineyard or a shepherd …

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18 A comparison between the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:3–7 and Matthew 18:10–14 can serve here as an example. In the Lukan version of the parable the lost sheep is a sinner, and in Matthew it is a little one. When one reads the introductory verses to these two parables in Luke 15 and Matthew 18, it becomes clear why the two versions of the parable differ on this point.

19 "The New Testament … consists of documents written in what anthropologists call a 'high context' society where the communicators presume a broadly shared acquaintance with and knowledge of the social context of matters referred to in conversation or writing. Accordingly, it is presumed in such societies that contemporary readers will be able to 'fill in the gaps' and 'read between the lines.'" John H. Elliott, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

20 Social-scientific criticism, in short, is a way of "envisioning, investigating, and understanding the interrelation of texts and social contexts, ideas and communal behavior, social realities and their religious symbolization, belief systems and cultural systems and ideologies as a whole, and the relation of such cultural systems to the natural and social environment, economic organization, social structures, and political power." Ibid., 13.

is just a vineyard or a shepherd;"[21] the social scenarios depicted in the parables are not incidental, irrelevant, or unrelated to social reality, but "are grounded in the story-tellers social, political, and cultural milieu." Hence, the social settings of the parables are windows to their meanings.[22] And as recent studies have shown, the papyri from early Roman Egypt provide "solid ancient *comparanda* on the practices and social realities which the sayings of Jesus and the parables presuppose."[23]

I am furthermore of the conviction that the central theme of Jesus' parables is the kingdom of God, but not to be understood as an eschatological concept. For Jesus, the kingdom was the non-apocalyptic kingdom of God, implying that the parables of Jesus are not stories about God (theocentric), but stories about God's kingdom. They are stories about "the gory details of how oppression served the interests of a ruling class," exploring how human beings could break the spiral of violence and cycle of poverty of an oppressed society created by the power and privilege of the elite (including the temple authorities).[24] Flowing from this, no character in any of the parables refer to Jesus or God. The characters in the parables do not point to God, and the parables do not refer to a heavenly world.[25] The parables point to the kingdom of God; "there is something about the parable as a whole that is like the kingdom of God."[26]

Reading the parables of Jesus as an analysis of the social, political, and economic experiential world of his hearers that exposed the hidden social injustices that were the result of the way rulers of the day wielded their power and privilege brought me to my penultimate methodological presupposition. The parables of Jesus are "comparisons," comparing one world with other worlds, one kingdom with other kingdoms, that is, the kingdom of the *pax Romana* and the kingdom of the temple with the kingdom of God. The parables were atypical stories, stories that did not describe what was typical, but what was possible.[27]

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21 *Kloppenborg, Synoptic Problems: Collected Essays*, 490.
22 Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 135–36.
23 Kloppenborg, *Synoptic Problems: Collected Essays*, 2. Emphasis in the original.
24 Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 3.
25 David Galston, *Embracing the Human Jesus: A Wisdom Path for Contemporary Christianity* (Salem, MA: Polebridge Press, 2012), 64.
26 Lane C. McGaughy, "Jesus' Parables and the Fiction of the Kingdom," in *Listening to the Parables of Jesus*, ed. Edward F. Beutner, Jesus Seminar Guides 2 (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2007), 11.
27 Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: HarperOne, 1999), 40.

As such, the parables, finally, do make ethical points and can be used as a criterion for personal and social ethics in a postmodern world. In his parables Jesus imagined a different world and spoke of a different reality. And this is what is needed in the context in which I am reading the New Testament; behaviours and attitudes that embrace a morality that becomes visible in a social ethics that is based on personal choices always looking for social justice, and not for self-enrichment to the detriment of everything else, including the poor en destitute.[28]

Reading the text

Since the start of the developing of this approach to read the parables of Jesus, fourteen parables of Jesus were interpreted.[29] What results did this yield? In his parables Jesus addressed the "social illnesses" of his day: religious exclusivism (as advocated by the Jerusalem temple elite in their understanding of God in terms of holiness), and social injustice – as practiced by the Roman and Jewish elite. Jesus' parables cut against the grain of the exploitative cultural symbols of first-century Palestine, and redefined the role of patronage, criticized the pivotal role of honor and social status, condemned violence, criticized the exploitative political economy of his day, and advocated general reciprocity in place of exploitative balanced reciprocity. His kingdom was a kingdom in which everyone had enough. Contrary to the Jerusalem temple elite's "politics of holiness," Jesus advocated for "politics of compassion," a kingdom that also included the socially impure (e.g., the lame, the blind, cripples, lepers, and women).[30]

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28 It is important to stress that the ethical behavior, values, or norms inferred from the parables for application in the present should be constructed on the values or norms that arose from the historical Jesus' sociohistorical location, and not the sociohistorical contexts of the evangelists. In the gospels we no longer have the values of Jesus in focus, but the values of Jesus as interpreted, applied, or distorted by the theological or ideological interests of the evangelists. See Ernest van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet*, Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context 9 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 41.

29 These fourteen parables are the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3b–8), the Mustard Seed (Q 13:18–19), the Feast (Luke 14:16b–23), the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4–6), the Vineyard Laborers (Matt 20:1–15), the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:23–33), the Tenants (Gos. Thom. 65), the Merchant (Matt 13:45–46), the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8), the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–26), the Minas (Luke 19:12b–24, 27), the Wise Steward (Luke 16:1–8a), the parable of a Samaritan Merchant and his Friend (Luke 10:25–35), and the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10).

30 Van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 305.

Two of Jesus' parables, the parables of the Mustard Seed (Q 13:18–19) and the Feast (Luke 14:16b–23), have as topic the inclusion of the impure, criticising the social and cultic exclusion of persons. In the Mustard Seed (Q 13:18–19), the kingdom is likened to a mustard seed that reseeds itself and grows very rapidly and aggressively; it spreads like a weed. Because of its tendency to take over, the mustard plant needs persistent control. In the parable, the kingdom of God is not only like a mustard seed, but like a mustard seed planted in a garden. This makes the garden impure. If the kingdom of God is like a garden with an invasive mustard plant, then the kingdom of God is polluted and unclean. As such, the "ordered kingdom" of the temple has been replaced by a chaotic and polluted kingdom. But it has not only replaced; it has been taken over by an unclean "mixed kind" that grows wild and almost impossible to control. As such, the kingdom of God is dangerous and deadly. In time it will take over the ordered and unpolluted garden (ordered society) centred in the temple. Order is turned into chaos; the kingdom of God is taking over the kingdom of the temple. The mustard seed, however, is also taking over the kingdom of Rome. The mustard seed turns into a tree with branches strong enough for wild birds to roost and nest in. As pesky intruders of cultivated lands, the natural enemies of the sown, they feed off the land by plundering the cultivated fields. From their safe haven they take from the kingdom of Rome by plundering its base of taxation. And this means only one thing: the smaller the harvest and the "surplus of the land," the less tax went into the coffers of the kingdom of Rome. The parable thus tells of a kingdom where God is associated with uncleanness, where boundaries are porous, and where separation cannot and should not be maintained.[31]

The parable of the Feast (Luke 14:16b–23) also has the inclusion of the impure in the kingdom as topic. In the Feast a member of the wealthy elite invites other urban elites who live in the walled-off city centre to a feast. Only a few of the many invited guests made excuses, and nobody shows up. Clearly the community gossip network has come to a decision. The host's honor rating does not make it. Boundaries had been drawn, and because of gossip, the host is rejected and shamed. How does he save face? The host decides to be a different kind of patron, a patron who is not interested in honor ratings or balanced reciprocity (that is, in what he can get out of inviting people to his feast). The host sends his slave to invite people living in the wider streets and squares and in the narrow streets and alleys, and when there is still room for more guests, he sends his slave to invite those who live in the roads and

31 Ernest van Eck, "When Kingdoms Are Kingdoms No More: A Social-Scientific Reading of the Mustard Seed (Lk 13:18–19)," *Acta Theologica* 33, no. 2 (2013): 226–54, http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v33i2.13; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean,* 64–83.

country lanes – the socially impure (expendables) living outside the city walls. With these invitations, the host declares null and void the purity system that deemed some as socially and ritually (culturally) impure. All walls have been broken down, and the world is turned upside down. The kingdom is visible. The host in the Feast, by including the socially and ritually impure at his feast (the kingdom), also redefines patronage: he abandons the role status plays, as well as the ever-present competition for acquired honor in the first-century Mediterranean world. He also replaces balanced reciprocity with generalized reciprocity. In the kingdom, patrons are real patrons when they act like the host, giving to those who cannot give back, breaking down physical walls and manmade boundaries (purity and pollution codes), and treating everybody as family (practicing generalized reciprocity) without being afraid of being shamed or losing his so-called status.[32]

Applied to the South African context, these two parables clearly criticise xenophobia, the rich who exploit the poor, the political patronage system currently dominating South African politics, and the forced resettlement of people. From a positive side, it advocates looking after the poor, and the striving for a non-discriminatory, non-racist and inclusive society in which "the Other" is respected.

Another parable in which those who have are called unto to support those who do not have, is the parable of the Vineyard Laborers (Matt 20:1–15). In this parable the kingdom is compared with the actions of a vineyard owner, a negatively marked character in the first-century Mediterranean world and someone not normally associated with the kingdom. The owner most probably was one of the wealthy sub elites who owned large estates, perhaps through expropriation, or default on loans, or as gift estates from conquered lands. These lands normally were converted to viticulture dedicated to the production of export crops. This new focus on monoculture, and on viticulture in particular, had a significant and not altogether positive impact on the daily lives of the peasantry. The large estates increased pressure on smallholders, who faced an increasingly monetized form of exchange and the vagaries of labour demand. In the parable, this vineyard owner, typically a negative character, becomes an exemplary patron, acting in unexpected ways. Instead of being absent, he hires workers at six o'clock, agreeing on a daily wage of one denarius. This happens again at nine, twelve, and three o'clock, and even as late as five o'clock.

32 Ernest van Eck, "When Patrons Are Patrons: A Social-Scientific and Realistic Reading of the Parable of the Feast (Lk 14:16b–23)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 1–14, http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ hts.v69i1.1375; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 84–116.

During each hiring spree, the owner promises the recruited workers a wage that is fair. At the end of the working day, all recruited are paid the same wage. Unexpectedly, the owner is not someone who exploits the vulnerable, but a patron who offers benefits beyond the strict norms of economic exchange. He does not think only in terms of a strict balance sheet but steps into the role of a patron whose actions create enduring and effective bonds with his workers. He is a patron who is just, making sure that everyone has enough.[33]

Read as a realistic story, the parable not only call on the rich to have an eye for the poor; it also criticises the exploitation of the vulnerable and weak.

In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:23–33), Jesus again subverted the traditional practice of patronage, the role of status, balanced reciprocity, and the pivotal role of honor in the first-century Mediterranean world. A king settles his accounts, and instead of selling a servant, his family, and his belongings to cover the servant's unpayable outstanding debt, the king forgives the servant the outstanding debt. This the king, as patron, does out of mercy, but also because of his desire and love for honor (*philotimia*). The servant, however, does not reciprocate (as the king would have expected) by acknowledging in public the generosity he received. Rather, when the servant meets another servant who owes him a much smaller debt, he demands payment. And then comes the surprise in the parable. When the first servant flouts social expectations and does not reciprocate his patron's generosity, the king – totally unexpectedly – does not defend his own honor, power, and privilege. When the first servant is brought before him, he reprimands his servant as only a kingdom patron would do. When someone asks to be forgiven his debt, you show mercy without expecting a socially prescribed response. Honor does not lie in the eye of the beholder, but in the act itself. The forgiveness of debt should be offered altruistically – not in terms of balanced reciprocity, but in terms of general reciprocity. When this happens, the *basileia* of God is visible.[34] The parable the Wise Steward (Luke 16:1–8a) advocates the same: Generosity by those who have not only mitigates the oppressive circumstances of the poor, but also enables

33 Ernest van Eck and John S. Kloppenborg, "The Unexpected Patron: A Social-Scientific and Realistic Reading of the Parable of the Vineyard Laborers (Mt 20:1–15)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): 1–11; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 140–60.

34 Ernest van Eck, "Honour and Debt Release in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt 18:23–33): A Social-Scientific and Realistic Reading," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): 1–11, http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ hts.v71i1.2838; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 161–83.

the creation of a new relationship between those who have and those who have not.[35]

When will the time come that those with status act like this? Status, not because of wealth, power, political connection, or privilege, but because of mercy shown to other? This is what the parable calls for.

Jesus also criticized the exploitative political economy of his day. In the parable of the Merchant (Matt 13:45–46), the kingdom again is likened to the actions of a negatively marked (dubious) character, a person not normally associated with the kingdom of God. For the first hearers of the parable, Jesus' equating the kingdom of God with the actions of a merchant must have come as a shock. Because of the perception of limited good in advanced agrarian societies, and the conviction that production was primarily for use rather than exchange (i.e., for supporting immediate families and the village), profits made by merchants were perceived as a form of usury and as unnatural. In the New Testament world, the commerce of merchants was socially destructive and a threat to the community. In the eyes of the peasantry, merchants were evil and considered thieves. The fact that merchants had to make use of ships for their import-export trade, given that most shipowners were not Jewish, added to this negative perception of merchants. Merchants owned large parcels of land and were part of the political and economic apparatus of the Roman Empire in the first century. They assisted the movement of goods accumulated through forced extraction, cash crops, and commercial farming. Merchants thus played a major role in transforming the daily lives of peasants, which focused on subsistence and not commercial trade. For the peasantry, merchants personified the godless, symbolizing everything that was unacceptable.

But then comes the surprise in the parable. On his travels, the merchant finds a pearl of great value. The value of the pearl is so high that he must sell everything he owns to buy it. By doing this, the merchant stops being a merchant. Taking leave of the despised trade he has practiced, the merchant now becomes part of the kingdom. No more trading, no more usury, will take place. In the kingdom there is no place for usury, no place for destructive actions that threaten the community. Living in the kingdom of God means one must leave behind a life as part of the apparatus of the exploitative Roman Empire. If one is part of the kingdom, one could not support the forced extraction of goods, the growth of

35 Ernest van Eck, "Realism and Method: The Parables of Jesus," *Neot* 51, no. 2 (2017): 163–84.

cash crops, or commercial farming – all of which were detrimental to those who lived close to or below subsistence.[36]

This parable, at least indirectly, addresses social issues such as the exploitation of the worker, personal financial gain to the detriment of society and family life, and the loss of social security for many.

How was one to protest the exploitative political economy of first-century Jewish Palestine? This question Jesus addressed in the parable of the Minas (Luke 19:12b–24, 27). To enhance his power, honor, privilege, and wealth, a nobleman sets off with the hope of being proclaimed king, and before he leaves entrusts money to ten of his slaves to "do business" with, one mina each. When the nobleman returns, two slaves can show good profits and are praised and rewarded for their efforts. This was not the way to protest. By doing what the nobleman expected, these two slaves only legitimated the domination of the elite. The way to protest was to act like the third slave, the "hero" of the story. In the eyes of the third slave, the nobleman was a thief who exploited the peasantry, and the third slave did not want to participate in such exploitation. So, what does he do? First, he ties the mina in a cloth to protect the existing share for the owner: this is exactly what an honourable person should do, from a peasant's point of view. Second, when confronted by his master, the third slave does not characterize his master as a hard man to justify his fear and consequent inactivity with the mina. He rather employs the "weapons of the weak" by honouring and praising the nobleman for his status and achievements. At least this is how his remarks would have been heard by the nobleman. But what did the peasants, who most probably were part of the audience when Jesus told the parable, hear? Most probably the peasants heard the third slave both praise the nobleman but also call him out as a thief. In response, what does the nobleman do? Because he thinks the slave has honoured and praised him, the nobleman lets the third slave go. This is the way to protest, says Jesus. "Honor" those who exploit you, without taking part in their exploitation.[37]

This parable, indirectly, is a call to refrain from illegal economic activity such as the buying and selling of stolen goods, the partaking in the execution

36 Ernest van Eck, "When an Outsider Becomes an Insider: A Social-Scientific and Realistic Reading of the Merchant (Mt 13:45–46)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1–8, http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ hts.v71i3.2859; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 208–26.

37 Ernest van Eck, "Do Not Question My Honour: A Social-Scientific Reading of the Parable of the Minas (Lk 19:12b–24, 27)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no. 3 (2011): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i3.977; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean,* 276–99.

of tenders that were unlawfully procured, and being part of illegal economic activity.

In some of his parables, Jesus specifically criticized the role patronage played in his world. In the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8), a peasant neighbour is criticized for mimicking the exploitative patronage the elite normally extended to the vulnerable to turn the poor into dependents. The neighbour, instead of practicing hospitality and generalized reciprocity in his village, because of his shamelessness (ἀναίδειαν), becomes an exploiter of the exploited. The door between him and his neighbour will open only if the neighbour at the door is willing to become his client. The awakened neighbour is willing to practice only balanced reciprocity. But this is not, according to Jesus, kingdom behavior. This is the game of Rome, the exploiter and oppressor. In the kingdom, on the contrary, one should give without expecting something in return. If one is part of the kingdom, one does not participate in a world created by the oppressive elite; when neighbours exploit neighbours, they are not part of the kingdom.[38]

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–26) is another parable in which Jesus criticized the traditional way patronage was practiced by the exploiting elite, as well as honor and status. In the parable the elite are represented by the rich man, and the poor are represented by Lazarus. Lazarus had become one of the expendables of the society that the rich man and other elite had created. Lazarus was no longer of any use to the rich man. Since he was stationed outside the rich man's gate every day, he could not really beg or take part in the daily salutation of the patron. For the rich man, coming upon Lazarus offered no occasion for almsgiving or enhancing his own honor. The rich man could gain nothing by making Lazarus a client, even in terms of negative reciprocity. Further, to show hospitium to him would have made Lazarus his equal. This, of course, would have meant a loss of honor for the rich man. To him, Lazarus was expendable in every sense of the word. Therefore, for Lazarus, the rich man's gate stayed closed. When the rich man and Lazarus die, the rich man can see how things are from the other side of the gate. Lazarus is sitting at the table of Abraham, and the rich man is now the one in need. But Abraham is not willing to help. The unthinkable happens – Abraham does not show hospitality. The gate cannot be opened. The threshold cannot be crossed. The chasm has been closed forever. When patrons, who have in abundance, do not cross the threshold past their gate, to the poor, a society is created wherein the chasm between rich (elite) and

38 Ernest van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours: A Social-Scientific Reading of the Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Lk 11:5–8)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i1.788; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 227–53.

poor (peasantry) becomes so wide it cannot be crossed. The worlds of the urban elite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be closed. Go through the gate while you can. As unthinkable as it is for Abraham not to show hospitality, so unthinkable should it be for people who can help not to show hospitality. Abraham, the exemplar of hospitality, has no reason to turn his back on the rich man. The same holds for the rich man – during his earthly life, nothing stood in the way of his helping Lazarus. It was not impossible to help Lazarus. The protection of his status and honor, however, made it impossible. And when this happens, nobody becomes part of the kingdom – neither Lazarus nor the rich man. This is what happens when patrons protect their so-called honor and status. Real patrons are children of Abraham; they look out for the poor.[39]

These two parables criticise patronage among those with political power and privilege. For many years now, South Africa has an extensive patronage system where support in elections, or support to be appointed in certain political positions, is awarded with patronage that gives access to the taxpayer's money and coffers of the state. This has led to a new elite, the growing of patronage systems, corruption without impunity, and the ever widening of the gap between rich and poor. The current patronage system in South Africa is especially seen on the level of local government (i.e., municipalities). As reciprocity for support in elections, political power enables the deployment of cadres, and in many cases, persons are appointed without the necessary skills needed to be successful and efficient in the appointed positions. This again leads to bad or no service delivery, which then leads to service protests, culminating into violence.

Two parables have as topic Jesus' stance on violence. The parable of the Tenants (Gos. Thom. 65) is a realistic narrative that depicts several aspects of viticulture in first-century Palestine, including the middling rich and their pursuit of wealth; their ubiquitous status displays; and discontent, tension, and conflict between absentee landlords and tenants. The Tenants, in Gospel of Thomas 65, challenges these normalcies by means of the clever turn of its narrative. The vineyard owner leases his vineyard to farmers, most probably in the form of a cropshare lease. When the owner, most probably after four years into the leasing agreement, sends a slave to collect his part of the crop, conflict arises. The slave is grabbed, beaten, and almost killed. The owner reacts to this challenge of his honor by sending another slave, one known to the tenants.

39 Ernest van Eck, "When Patrons Are Not Patrons: A Social-Scientific Reading of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–26)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v65i1.309; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean,* 254–75.

The fate of the second slave, however, is the same as the fate of the first. As a last resort, the owner sends his son. By sending his son, the owner appeals to the difference between his social status and that of the tenants. When the son arrives at his father's farm to collect the crop, the story takes an unexpected turn. What happens is exactly what the owner did not expect; the violence of the tenants escalates, and the son is killed. How does the owner react when his son is killed? This is the surprise in the parable: The owner does nothing! The owner of the vineyard does not exercise his right to defend his ownership of the vineyard forcefully or violently. And in doing nothing, he is the honourable person in the parable. Status and honor are not retained or gained using violence; the honourable person is the one who refrains from using violence. This is also the case with the patron-king in the Unmerciful Servant parable. This is how patrons act who live according to the kingdom of God.[40]

In the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4–6), nonviolence again is pictured as a kingdom value. Shepherds in the first-century Mediterranean world were persons with no honor. They were seen as thieves, and armed with a sling and club, were frequently associated with banditry. When one of the herd gets lost, what does the shepherd do? Because of the low wage shepherds earned, the shepherd had no other option but to go and look for the lost sheep. The shepherd, after all, was to be held accountable for livestock losses. Also, he and his family already lived below the poverty line. He therefore took the risk of leaving the other sheep behind and went looking for the lost sheep. When he found the lost sheep, he rejoiced. After his contract with the owner expired, he drove the flock back, and after accounting for all the sheep he had to tend to, he received the contracted wage, returned home, and celebrated with his family. Because of the risk he took, everybody had enough to eat, at least for a while. The gist of the parable, however, lies in something else beside the success of finding the lost sheep. There were other possible ways for the shepherd to recuperate his losses. Armed with a sling and club, and unsupervised, with freedom of movement, the shepherd could have resorted to banditry (violence). But this is not what the shepherd does. He goes and look for the one sheep that is lost. The kingdom is achieved by nonviolence. Just as the owner of a vineyard maintains his honor

40 Ernest van Eck, "The Tenants in the Vineyard (GThom. 65/Mark 12:1–12): A Realistic and Social-Scientific Reading," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 63, no. 3 (2007): 909–36; See also van Eck, "Interpreting the Parables," 84–207.

by not answering violence with violence, so the shepherd becomes a symbol of the kingdom by refraining from violence to solve his problem.[41]

These two parables, in short, directly speak against the use of violence. According to the most recent Global Peace Index, South Africa stands out in five main categories of violence: "the number of violent crimes, the number of violent protests, the number of murders, easy access to weapons, and an overall perception of criminality, ranking 10th worst in overall violence reduction, and 19th worst in terms of safety and security."[42] The kinds of violence most often committed in South Africa are violence related to drugs, robbery with aggravated circumstances, sexual offences, domestic violence, murder and attempted murder, and carjacking. Violence also occurs often during protests because of, for example, bad service delivery. The most recent violent looting of property in the second week of July 2021 serves here as a good example.

The parable of the Samaritan Merchant and his Friend (Luke 10:25–35) can also be linked to Jesus' stance on violence. Finding a man on the road who was violently attacked, a (despised) merchant from Samaria acts in a merciful and honourable way by saving a life with the help of his friend, an innkeeper. Clearly, in the kingdom, it is not who you are that matters, but how you act. The manner in which the merchant acted was not the stereotyped expected exploitation (see the parable of the Merchant above), but to save a life. As such, the parable does not teach good neighbourliness or that one specific Samaritan can, contrary to all expectations, be 'good'; at a deeper level, the parable questions the way in which its hearers in principle interact with others, especially with those who were 'socially unacceptable'. What the parable asks is to rethink what it means to be human. At stake here for Jesus is not random acts of kindness, but a rethinking of what it means to be human, that is, to cherish and protect life without any exception.[43] How different will South Africa not be if all embrace this value?

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41 Ernest van Eck, "In the Kingdom Everybody Has Enough – A Social-Scientific and Realistic Reading of the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Lk 15:4–6)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no. 3 (2011): 1–10, http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i3.1067; See also van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 117–39.

42 See https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/what-is-the-situation-in-south-africa.

43 Ernest van Eck and Robert J. van Niekerk, "The Samaritan 'Brought Him to an Inn': Revisiting Πανδοχεῖον in Luke 10:34," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 4 (2018): 1–11, https:// doi.org/ 10.4102/hts. v74i4.5195; Ernest van Eck, "A Samaritan Merchant and His Friend, and Their Friends: Practicing Life-Giving Theology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019): 1–8.

The parables of Jesus, finally, speak of a world in which everyone has enough. This we have seen in the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Merchant, and the Vineyard Laborers. This theme, however, is especially present in the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3b–8). In the parable, the sower loses three parts of his harvest; the part of the seed that falls on the road is claimed by Rome, the second part of the seed that falls on the rocky places goes to the elite, and a third part that is chocked by thorns goes to the temple elite.[44] But, in spite of what happens to the harvest (the parts that go to the Romans, local elites and temple elites), what can happen to the harvest is more important. Many seeds fall on good soil, grow, and produce a crop that yields a harvest of thirty-, sixty- and one hundredfold; this part of the harvest belongs to the peasant farmer. When this part is shared with those who barely live above subsistence, the kingdom is visible. What is left can be used to support others in need by sharing. Thus, instead of taking, giving and sharing should be what one aims for. Interpreted as such, the parable has a lot to say about those with power who illegally take, with nothing left to share or allocate to the most basic delivery of services to the poor. This then also is a possible meaning of the parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10). That what is available, oil for a lamp, must be used responsibly, otherwise the oil used to look for the lost coin can cost more as the coin itself. If used responsibly, there will be enough, even to celebrate with friend and neighbours.[45]

Reading the context (in the text)

The above interpretation of the parables of Jesus is infused by the current conditions of my political, social, and economic environment. In this context, I believe that the way in which I read the parables results in a life-giving theology, a theology that makes a difference. My interpretation of the parables criticises aspects such as xenophobia, the rich exploiting the vulnerable, weak and poor, political patronage, the forced resettlement of people, political privilege and power, lack of social security for many, corruption, illegal economic activity, and the use of violence. On the positive side, it advocates looking after the poor, the striving for a non-discriminatory, non-racist and inclusive society, the cherishing and protection of human life, and a world in which everyone has enough. It is a theology that addresses normative questions, gives practical advice to social ills, and is committed to especially the praxis of faith in church and society.

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44 See van Eck, *Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 58–61.

45 Ernest van Eck, “A Realistic Reading of the Parable of the Lost Coin in Q: Gaining or Losing Even More?,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

My work on the parables stands on the shoulders of many parable scholars, especially those who focus on the parables in their socio-cultural, -economic, -political, and religious contexts, and not their literary context in the gospels. More specifically, I am indebted to the *The Context Group* for my social-scientific approach in reading ancient texts, and John Kloppenborg from the University of Toronto and Giovanni Bazzana from Harvard Divinity School who introduced me, through their publications, to the importance of Roman-Egypt papyri in studying the New Testament.

I think of New Testament research more in terms of theology than religious studies and believe that the importance of New Testament research lies especially in the treatment or solving of social questions. With this as focus, New Testament research is "system relevant," producing genuine and relevant knowledge that does trade with what I believe are important: creation, life, society, and what it means to be human. This focus relates to what I see as the biggest challenge for New Testament studies, namely not practising theology within a guild for a guild to gain acceptance and status within the guild.

In my context, there are more pressing issues than having status and prestige as a researcher. This, I hope, is also the point of view of other New Testament scholars.

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Interpreting the Bible in the Tamil Context

Reading Matthew (10:40–42) in Light of Tirukkuṟaḷ (Ch.9)

Gregory Thomas Basker

The fact that Indian Christians have engaged significantly in intercultural biblical interpretations, shows that they never really disconnected with their indigenous (Hindu) faith, being genuinely convinced of its authenticity. In contexts of literary superiority, it is impossible to bypass the indigenous literary tradition in the interpretation of the Bible. This is also true of cultures such as China, the Muslim world, Japan, and other contexts, where there is a rich tradition of authoritative written texts and where Christianity has had limited success. In Indian biblical studies, there are numerous intercultural interpretations, focusing on the influence of Indian religious philosophies, such as the Advaita Vedanta, Saiva Siddhanta and other popular traditions in biblical interpretations. In colonial India, especially during the turn of the Century (19/20), Hindu concepts and texts were commonly used in the interpretation of the Bible. Here, interpretations often proceeded in terms of comparing biblical texts with different Hindu concepts, mainly with a view to making Christianity relevant to newly converted Indian Christians. Sanskrit words like *atman* (soul), *avatar* (incarnation) *antaryamin* (indweller), *purusha* (primordial being), *saccidananda*[1] among others were regularly employed in the exegesis of biblical texts.

Principally, Indian biblical hermeneutics emerged with the meek acceptance that revelation was not exclusive to Christianity alone. In an article of 1929, Pandipeddi Chenchiah, a pioneer in Indian biblical interpretations, writes:

1 The Sanskrit word *saccidananda* (*sat*-being; *cit*-consciousness & *ananda*-bliss) is commonly used to interpret the trinitiarian concept in India.

> Let different revelations flow into each other and man plant his feet where they meet. Each religion has a message to the others. God does not only reveal Himself to races and individuals but through races and religions to humanity.[2]

As such, Indian Christian theologians, both from the Roman Catholic as well as the Protestant circles, have often contemplated on the similarities and differences between Hinduism and Christianity and have sought ways to strike a balance between these two faith traditions. Chenchiah went to the extent of pleading for the recognition of the Vedas as the Old Testament for Indian Christians, arguing that one could read the Hindu Scriptures in the light of Christ, just as the early Jewish disciples of Jesus had done with the Hebrew Scriptures.[3] As a result, Hindu religious literature, such as the Vedas and Upanishads, were the foundational theological resources for Indian Christians for a long time.

However, these interpretations, despite breaking new ground in 'Indian Christian Theology' were criticized for being elitist and 'brahmanical' and not taking the "masses" into consideration. It was under these circumstances that newer interpretations like Dalit, postcolonial, tribal and others emerged into Indian biblical studies.[4] These studies, like their precursor, also harmonized the highly complex Indian reality and did not take specific lingual, ethnic and cultural contexts into account. Given the fact that the Indian Subcontinent is a highly complex and contested region, home to about 800 ethnicities, it is incongruous to speak of a homogenous Indian culture or an Indian identity. Until now, almost all religio – contextual interpretations have been categorized together under the umbrella, "Indian Christian Theology". Most of these works focus on general themes like spirituality[5], inter-religious dialogue[6] and Indian

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2 R. S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, *Readings in Indian Christian Theology, Vol. I* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 86–87.

3 Thomas Thangaraj, "The Bible as *Veda*: Biblical Hermeneutics in Tamil Christianity," in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 136.

4 It is however unfortunate that the contributions of Indian theologians of yesteryears such as, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, Nehemiah Goreh, Keshub Chunder Sen, A.J. Appasamy, Chenchiah, Chakkarai and others have been deliberately side-lined by those who wish to promote exclusive subaltern and liberation approaches in biblical interpretations.

5 D. S. Amalorpavadoss, *Indian Christian Spirituality* (Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1982).

6 V. C. Rajasekaran, *Reflections on Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: CLS, 1993).

Christian adaptations of Hindu philosophical and theological beliefs.[7] They do not specifically deal with a text or literary tradition. This study seeks to employ a particular literary work in the Tamil context as a distinctive hermeneutical perspective.

Contextual interpretation of the Bible has a long tradition among Tamil Christians. The first interpreters were European missionaries from the 17th to 19th centuries like Robert de Nobili, Constantine Beschi, Robert Caldwell, G.U. Pope, H.A. Popley, among others, who showed great interest in the Tamil language and culture and employed narrative principles of Tamil literature in their interpretation. Tamil Christians like Vedanayagam Sastri (1774–1867) and Krishna Pillai (1827–1900) were among the prominent native Christians who made reference to older and contemporary Tamil genres to present a distinct Tamil tradition of Christianity in South India.[8] However, in both cases, all these interpreters strictly obeyed the traditional 'western'[9] missionary mandates, and limited themselves to replacing a few Christian concepts with Hindu words.[10] In fact, religions that came to India from abroad and were localized in Tamilnadu, such as Islam and Christianity, adopted the *purana* (epic) literary style to make missionary work easier. The present study is an attempt to juxtapose the Bible and a Tamil literary work by engaging in an intercultural reading of hospitality in the Gospel of Matthew and *viruntōmpal* (hospitality)[11] in *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. If one were to designate a platform for this intercultural reading, it would be in the ethical plane, as it provides the common thrust, especially with regard to placing the Gospel of Matthew and *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in relationship with one another. In order to answer the question as to why I engage in this type of intercultural

7 R. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975); K. K. Klostermeier, *Indian Theology in Dialogue* (Madras: CLS, 1986); K. P. Aleaz, *Indian Biblical Reflections and other Essays* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2009).

8 For the works of Nobili, Caldwell, Beschi and Sastri, see H. Israel, *Religious Transactions in Colonial South India: Language, Translation and the Making of Protestant Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); for Pope, see N. K. Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905–1944* (Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1980); For Popley, see G. T. Basker, *Interpreting Biblical Texts: John and his Tamil Readers* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2016) 16–28; for Krishna Pillai, see A. J. Appasamy, *Tamil Christian Poet: the Life and Writings of H. A. Krishna Pillai* (United Society for Christian Literature: Lutterworth Press, 1966).

9 In this study, the term "west" or "western," has ideological connotation, denoting the domination of biblical exegesis, which is mainly centred in Europe and North America. It has no geographic or ethnic significance.

10 See M. Varadarajan, "Modern Tamil Literature," in *South Indian Studies, Dr. T.V. Mahalingam Commemoration Volume*, ed. H. M. Nayak and B. R. Gopal (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1990) 816–827.

11 The standard system of transliteration has been used for Tamil words.

experiment, that has previously been called as 'strange', 'puzzling', 'bizarre', 'unscientific', etc., I need to provide some details about my own personal background.

Personal Decision Towards a Tamil Biblical Hermeneutic…

As a fifth generation Tamil Christian growing up in Tamil Nadu, in South India, in a predominantly Hindu, Saiva environment[12], I was perpetually shaped by my context and learnt, very early on to juxtapose my Christian (biblical) beliefs and the Hindu way of life. In Tamilnadu, Protestant Christianity entered as early as the Eighteenth Century, and, through the years, has fused itself with Hinduism, which is the majority religious tradition here. In my context, it is common to see churches and temples lying side by side with most Tamil Christians waking up to the chanting of Hindu religious hymns from neighbouring houses or temples. Although the Bible enjoyed sacrosanct status in Tamil Christian families, we were equally exposed to Tamil devotional literature, such as, the *Tiruvācakam*, *Tēvāram* and *Tirukkuṟaḷ* or the Sanskrit *Gayatri Mantra* and *Suprabhatam* from childhood and have absorbed Hindu rites and rituals as part of our personalities.

Being conditioned by the tradition of Saivism, with many of my ancestors having served in Shiva temples, it is only natural that I have a leaning towards an intercultural reading of the Bible. When I read the Bible, I am confronted with an absolutely foreign culture. So, even my first step in reading the bible is to surpass my own culture and go beyond my religio-cultural tradition. This is a surreal experience and cannot be explained fully in terms of historical and social realities. It is to be grounded in anthropological terms. As such, this Tamil reading of the Bible is neither a philosophical reading based on the brahmanical vedic religious tradition of India, nor a sociological reading, founded on the experiences of the depressed classes of the country, viz., the Dalits and indigenous peoples. My 'Tamil (Saiva) reading' of the Bible serves to institute an 'intermediate perspective', a hybrid outlook, linking the dual boundaries of the "elite," "foreign" and "dominant" on the one hand and the "inferior," "grass-roots," and "native" on the other. It is an intercultural approach to biblical hermeneutics which focuses on the theological characteristic of the

12 Saiva religion, characterized by Shiva worship, is distinguished from the brahmanical vedic religion. The devotional hymns of the mystics of Tamil Saiva religion form the foundation of Saiva religiosity. Saivism has been designated as the religion of the ancient Dravidians and is believed to have been prevalent among the Tamilians even before the advent of the "Aryans," the colonizers of the Tamil land.

text and not just the secular or historical. In this process, it also seeks to question traditional understandings of reception history.

This, however, does not mean that I am oblivious to biblical scholarship practiced in the West. As a Tamil Christian, interested in biblical studies, I belong to a tiny minority, that constantly longs for recognition from the western world, since it is believed that 'authentic scholarship' emerges only from Europe and North America! This is perhaps the reason that most theological writings in India predominantly depend on western biblical authors. Sugirtharajah candidly states:

> Even a casual survey of Indian theological writing will reveal that not all Indian theological thinking is Indian. There are Barthians, Tillichians, Niebuhrians and existentialists in India, and most of them could find their theological home in the West.[13]

Especially, in biblical studies, Indians have largely depended on German scholarship, quoting often from the contributions of Bultmann, Kaesemann, Moltmann, Theissen among others. It is only in the last couple of decades, particularly in the context of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, that English sources from Britain and North America have been alluded to. It is interesting to note how the two radically different intellectual cultures of Britain and Germany have had their impact on biblical interpretation in India. Whereas the English were not much concerned of textual and historical reliability of the Bible, given the fact that they were a colonizing power in India, German scholars were more candid in addressing "historical and textual problems with the Bible."[14] Personally, I find the linking between religious history (*Religionsgeschichte*) and biblical exegesis (*Bibelauslegung*), a characteristic German practice, very beneficial for an intercultural exercise that I wish to engage in. Yet, it must also be mentioned that not all German scholarship would approve of an intercultural reading of the Bible! As I write this, I remember how a highly respected New Testament professor from one of the prestigious German universities read through a chapter of my doctoral dissertation, the section where I study the Tamil Saiva reception of the Bible, and remarked, "*es ist kreativ aber nicht wissenschaftlich*" (it is creative, but not scientific)!

Interestingly, such an aversion to this sort of intercultural readings, exists even within the local context. Notwithstanding the contribution of the Bible

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13 Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, *Readings in Indian Christian Theology*, 2.

14 H. Pyper, "The Battle of the Books: The Bible versus the Vedas," in *In the Name of God: The Bible in the Colonial Discourse of Empire*, ed. C. L. Crouch and J. Stökl (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 177.

to social transformation and spiritual advancement in India, the institutional church is still somewhat reluctant to unreservedly promote contextual, cultural interpretations of the Bible. By and large, church leadership in India is of the opinion that such experiments might lead to critical questioning of the traditional and foundational beliefs of the church. Since theological colleges in India are mostly governed by church leaders, biblical studies faculty is required to present the Bible as an ecclesiastical authority and not as a cultural artefact. In the church, only "bible studies" are conceded and not biblical scholarship. The church pulpit is reserved for preachers who are consistent with the church's accepted foundational beliefs. This is one of the reasons that academic distinction has suffered a breakdown not only in Indian biblical studies, but also in other parts of the world. Of late, the standard of theological education in India has deteriorated to such an extent, that it is possible to complete a 4-year Bachelor's course in Theology without learning the basics of biblical languages! Significantly, there is more emphasis on quantity and not quality. Some of us escaped this malady due to our education abroad! These and other challenges place biblical studies in India at a disadvantage.[15]

It is in this background that I engage in an intercultural interpretation of the Bible from a Tamil exegetical perspective. The Tamil context is one where more texts "live" together. Reading the Bible in light of indigenous literature is a 'reading together', a 'reading along-with', based on the conviction that no text can be read or understood singularly on its own terms, especially in an intercultural context, characterized by a variety of texts. Hence, the subjects of this study, Matthew and *Tirukkuṟaḷ* (Sacred Verse) are 'living' texts, living together, and an intercultural reading of these texts is actually a re-membering of something that is one's own. There is no crossing of boundaries. In fact, looking at the Tamil Christian context, it can be observed that both Christian and non-Christian (read Hindu) realities are historically entangled together and a comprehensive hermeneutical understanding is achieved only through intercultural reading. This is perhaps what Rasiah Sugirtharajah means when he states that "concentration on a single text may not facilitate either its

15 Interestingly, Sugirtharajah's statement written some twenty years ago, stating that we have "rightly identified ourselves with the church, and it has become our source and arena of interpretation," (R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction and some thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," *BibInt* 2,3 (1994): 251–263 (260) may not be entirely true now. If we are to be impartial and faithful interpreters of the Bible promoting academic freedom and integrity, we will be far removed from the functioning and principles of the (Indian) church!

appreciation or that of other texts."[16] Accordingly, Tamil biblical hermeneutics deals on the one hand with the historical context of the bible, and on the other, the cultural context of the reader. Contrary to 'historical' perspectives, it focuses on the interplay between religious texts. As Sugirtharajah states, "the idea is not to produce in present-day readers the same feelings that the original readers had, or to convey the same information that the first readers were privy to, but to work out a reading practice which will make use of Asian cultural perspectives to illuminate the biblical world."[17] Consequently, Indian reading of the Bible has been termed as "reading against the grain,"[18] or an "insider-outsider experience,"[19] given the reality that Christians make up just about 2.3 percentage of the total population.

In the following, I attempt an intercultural reading of Matt 10:40–42, in light of *viruntōmpal* in *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. The concept of *viruntōmpal* in the 9th chapter of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* bears striking resemblance to the notion of 'hospitality' envisaged in the Matthean text. An intercultural reading of Matt 10:40–42 reveals a confluence of impressions of hospitality and spirituality in the Ancient Near Eastern as well as in Tamil Christian cultures.[20] It is my contention that the Matthaean passage is not just about compensation, that those who welcome the eschatological messengers of Jesus in effect welcome Jesus himself and gain for themselves a reward. It is more about basic hospitality to the "other". In this background, I would specifically argue that irrespective of the socio-political milieu they were living in, the Jews (Christians) had it in their law to show hospitality to all – and not just to their own! What is focused here is not so much of a possible similarity of literary genre or underlying theology, but the understanding of hospitality (*viruntōmpal*) that is portrayed in both the texts. My reading focuses not on the messengers of Jesus, but on those who welcome (or do not welcome) them. It is important to emphasize the role of those who welcome the disciples of Jesus. Studies on the model of hospitality in Matthew

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16 R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 197.

17 R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction and some thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," 255.

18 G. Soares-Prabhu, "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28: 16–20 in the Light of a Buddhist text," in *Biblical Interpretation: A Journey of Contemporary Approaches, Vol.II*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 270.

19 Sugirtharajah, "Introduction and some thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics, 261.

20 For possible historical connections between Rome and Tamilnadu (India), see Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age*; see also R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Jesus in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). In these volumes, Sugirtharajah contends that Eastern faiths, like Hinduism and Buddhism, could have influenced First Century Christian thought.

have been few and far between. A comparative study of hospitality with *viruntōmpal* in *Tirukkuṟaḷ* characterizes the intercultural biblical interpretations in hybrid societies, such as the Tamil context. This will be our focus.

The *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is an ancient Tamil devotional poem, dated somewhere in the Third Tamil Sangam, a period normally assigned to the First Century Christian Era. As an authentication of the application of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* to this study, it must be said that it is universally applicable to all human beings and its maxims go beyond nationality and language. *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is one Tamil literature that cannot be constricted or fixed into one religion or caste category. There have been futile attempts to stamp the work as Brahminical, Advaitic, Saiva or Jain,[21] but time and again, it has been proved that *Tirukkuṟaḷ* has universal appeal. According to a legend, the poet Tiruvaḷḷuvar was born through the union of a Brahmin and a commoner and was brought up by a *Veḷḷāḷar* (Kōpālakiruṣṇakkōṉār 1921, 7 ff.).[22] The *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is believed to be the work of this poet, who cannot be categorized as belonging to any particular caste. Just like his ideas, his identity too has been portrayed as being universal. Since the idea of *viruntōmpal* (hospitality) is a common trait applicable to all contexts, it serves as a typical hermeneutical tool to interpret the Gospel of Matthew.

Tiru in Tamil means "blessed," or "sacred," and *kuṟaḷ* means "short." A *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is a couplet which contains a complete and striking idea expressed in a refined and intricate metre. The *Tirukkuṟaḷ* comprises of 1330 couplets (*Tirukkuṟaḷs*) divided into 133 sections of 10 each, grouped under *aram* (virtue), *poruḷ* (wealth) and *iṉpam* (pleasure). *Aram* holds the key to the whole of the good life in *Tirukkuṟaḷ* pervading the entire human life, both the personal and the inter-personal aspects. Being considered as the key value in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, *aram*, encompasses the exemplary conduct of one which in turn places one in the realm of the metaphysical – that is, in a spiritual level. *Poruḷ* denotes the ways and means of a successful worldly life and *iṉpam*, points to worldly pleasures. G.U. Pope has elaborately explained the grammar of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in his translation.[23] Each couplet is arranged to contain seven words: four in the first line and three in the second. The literary skills employed include rhythm, irony, word-play, satire, idiomatic expressions and similitude.

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21 There have been continual attempts to identify the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* as a relic of a superior Indian tradition, within the fold of Hinduism. Hindu philosophies, such as Advaita Vedanta, Saiva Siddhanta or Jain, have been closely linked with the elite Brahminical institution.

22 In Tamil tradition, *Tiruvaḷḷuvar* is worshipped as the 64th Nayanmar of the Saivite tradition.

23 Pope, *Tirukkural*, xv–xvi.

G. U. Pope's translation of *viruntōmpal* as "cherishing guests" (*viruntu* – guest; *ōmpal* – cherish) falls short of conveying the meaning of the term in its entirety. *Viruntōmpal* or welcoming a guest is a spiritual obligation in the Tamil society. Irrespective of the economic value of the person, cultural status or religious affiliation, hospitality is to be shown to the guest. The chapter 9 of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, *viruntōmpal* (hospitality), presents the life of the householder as one of highest virtue. The couplet 9.1 states that the very purpose of the householder's state and laying up is to be able to accord hospitality to others. The home of the householder is open to every guest and every meal is shared with happiness. For the poet *Tiruvaḷḷuvar*, both the life of the householder (*illaṟam)* and that of the ascetic (*tuṟavaṟam*) form a continuum and is derived from the ideal of *aṉpu* (love) and *aruḷ* (benevolence). The words used for the expressions symbolizing hospitality like *mukaṉamarntu* (with smiling face, 9.4), *varuviruntu* (coming guest, 9.2), etc., are characteristic of the householder and entail co-operation, self-sacrifice, service to humanity, universal kinship and love of living beings. For *Tiruvaḷḷuvar*, household duties are in themselves heavenly, wherein the hospitable person becomes a guest in heaven (9.6). In his explanation of the word, *viruntōmpal*, Pope clearly states that it is "not entertainment of friends, but the affording of food and shelter to wayfarers, mendicants, and ascetics."[24] It is definitely a consequence of love and can be exercised only by householders living in harmony. For the Asian context, both hospitality and spirituality belong together. There cannot be one without the other. In the Tamil context, graciousness, conversation, cross-cultural relationships, all constitute hospitality. The life of the 'householder' is the highest virtue, since it is considered to be the best platform for hospitality. This position forms the basis of *viruntōmpal.*

Intercultural reading of Matt. 10:40–42 in Light of *viruntōmpal* in *Tirukkuṟaḷ* 9

Studies linking the Gospel of Matthew and the Tamil context are unknown. The closest textual study is P. Ramanathan's commentary on the Gospel of Matthew,[25] which interprets the Gospel in light of Śaiva Siddhanta, the most popular Tamil spirituality. It is generally accepted that *Tirukkuṟaḷ*'s values are strikingly similar to Christ's teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Principally non-philosophical in nature, both Matthew and *Tirukkuṟaḷ* deal with

24 Pope, *Tirukkural,* 211.

25 P. Ramanathan, *The Gospel of Jesus according to Matthew* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Truebner and co. ltd., 1898).

the norms, meaning and implications of a righteous, moral and good life. The implicit religious questions are: what are the norms of moral life? What is the meaning of a good life? What are the implications of a righteous life? In both texts, philosophy or theology is understood as synonymous with religion. There is in both the frame of reference for understanding the sociological significance of one's religious aspirations which in turn entail a reward. In both the texts, there seems to be a metaphysical foundation which provides the impulse for exercising hospitality.[26] Complying with the principle of cause and effect, the one who shows hospitality to the "little ones," in both Matthew and the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, receives a reward.

The Gospel of Matthew as a whole has been interpreted as a Gospel that decrees evangelizing and 'missionizing the nations'. According to these studies, the 'missionary motif' of the Gospel is further heightened by the use of terms like "harvest," "laborers" (Matt 9:37), "sending" (Matt10:5), "make disciples" (Matt 28:18) etc., where, the primary aim of the Gospel seems to be mission to the gentiles. Commentaries from the West predominantly focus on the 'salvific purpose' of the Gospel and the need for sending "Christian workers" to do "Christian ministry" in the farthest corners of the world.[27] Matthew 10 is seen as a classic text that concentrates on apostolic mission and the positive response of the recipients. The whole missionary enterprise of this chapter is interpreted from a disciple-centric, mission-oriented perspective and not from a hospitality standpoint.[28] Even though there are a few commentators who agree on the presence of a 'hospitable act' in this passage, they foreground the role of the disciples in the 'salvific act' and approach the text from an 'ecumenism' point of

26 Mu. Varatarācaṉ, *Tiruvaḷḷuvar allatu vāḻkkai viḷakkam* (Tiruvaḷḷuvar or the explanation of life) Seventh Edition (Chennai: n.pub., 1967), 329; See also S. Gopalan, *The Social Philosophy of Tirukkural* (New Delhi/Madras: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt Ltd., 1979), 39, footnote 31.

27 See for instance, Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Vol. 1: The Christ Book Matthew 1–12.* Revised and Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 493–500.

28 A classic example is Charette, who states that "one of these little ones" (vv. 40–42; cf. 25:31–46) points to a disciple (B. Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel* [Sheffield: Sheffield Acdemic Press/JSOT Press, 1992], 157. Commenting on 10:9–10, Gundry states: "Jesus made the prohibition [to not go to the gentiles] for the sake of a speedy mission through Galilee: the disciples were to depend entirely on hospitality in order to accomplish their mission quickly." (R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his literary and theological art* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982; repr., 1983), 186.

view.[29] For them, "hospitality" at the face of it points to "ecumenical hospitality" and is intertwined with "*missio dei*."[30] Here, "hospitality" conjures up ideas of offering hospitality to a 'stranger,' welcoming something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into one's life-world.[31] It normally implies a patronizing act, a kindness shown by the rich benevolent giver to the poor and needy receiver. It could hardly be mutual, and could never insinuate a trait.[32] So far, in Christian circles, all discussions on hospitality are centered under the umbrella of Christianity and do not venture to go beyond Christianity. Kessler's statement shows how biblical texts are usually taken as a validation for this view:

> [T]here is little room for hospitality in the New Testament when the other represents a foreign deity. The first-century Christian communities are struggling to emerge as the distinctively other (true) faith in the context of Roman imperial order and its religious pluralism. Emphasis on establishing difference and boundaries was a necessary condition for the birth of Christianity.[33]

It must be borne in mind that such an approach to hospitality is limiting. It excludes all who do not positively respond to "*missio dei*" – all, for whom, the name of Jesus means nothing more than a Jewish spiritual personality. It continues to maintain the "otherness" of the "other" – all along claiming that the 'other should be welcomed' – and never goes beyond the "us – them" binary. It speaks of overcoming "foreignness," but at the same time, makes no mention of other religions, nor shows any openness to traverse between religions. As such, the Matthaean text would portend a position, where hospitality is not as important as the reception of the Gospel. Statements like the following prove that in general the missionary interpretation is preferred over against the hospitality standpoint:

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29 For Charette the hospitable deed is not as important as the 'spiritual discernment' toward the disciple who takes the Gospel to all nations. Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 105–106, 158.

30 Classical examples of this standpoint are Kessler (D. C. Kessler, ed., *Receive one another: Hospitality in Ecumenical Perspective* [Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005], Yong (A. Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian practices and the neighbor* [Maryknoll, NY: Obis Books, 2008], 129–130, 131–132) among others.

31 T. W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of moral understanding* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 2.

32 C. D. Pohl and P. J. Buck, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Wm, B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

33 Kessler, *Receive one another: Hospitality in Ecumenical Perspective*, 11.

> Instead of staying wherever they can find hospitality, the disciples are to stay where the proclamation of the kingdom has already found a favourable reception.[34]
> Reception involves both hospitality and faith in their message.[35]

Nonetheless, it is to our advantage that scholars like Ulrich Luz have identified an element of hospitality in the Matthaean passage that goes beyond accepting the Christian message. Pointing out that the Gospel writer did not intend the discourse to apply to the time of Christ, but to a later period of persecution, Luz states that it is no longer the travelers who were addressed but those who received travelers. According to him, Matthew had consistently painted the situation of the post-Easter community back into the historical discipleship to Jesus without thereby dissolving the group of disciples in the salvation-historical past into the eschatological self-understanding of his own day. In other words, the disciples in Matthew are evidently not sent out during the lifetime of Jesus: they have only got their instructions. Hence, for Luz, the text needs to be understood sociologically and implies the significance of showing hospitality through welcoming the disciples.[36]

Having established that Matt 10, especially the second part, points to the post-Easter period, in which Jewish Christian persecution is seen, Luz states that Matt 10:40–42 is directed not exclusively to the twelve disciples, but to the whole community, to all believers. Alluding to the use of the word μαθητής, he asserts that the chapter goes beyond the historical situation.[37] So, this situation is during persecution and not during Jesus' time. So, all the more hospitality and less evangelism! Commenting on the importance of hospitality to the Matthaean community, Luz points out that the Gospel of Matthew represented a fusion of communities such as one would find in the Apocalypse.[38] On this change of focus, he writes:

> In my opinion, only one solution is possible. We must abandon Theissen's schematic distinction between itinerant radicals and settled Christians. As I see it, the primitive church did not consist of two groups of people who differed fundamentally in lifestyle and ethos, i.e. the itinerant radicals and the settled communities. Rather, there was fluid interchange between them. Community members set out on mission

34 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*. Vol. II, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 175.

35 Davis and Allison, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 226.

36 U. Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, trans. Rosemary Selle (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 146–147.

37 Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 118–119.

38 Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 7–8.

> and returned to their communities. Only this model corresponds to the fragments of historical evidence that we have. Only on this basis can we understand why "discipleship" in primitive Christianity does not merely designate the way of life of a special group of Christians but, … came to mean the Christian way of life in general. Only then can we understand why primitive Christianity did not in principle distinguish between commands applying to itinerant radicals and general commands, creating a two-tier ethic.[39]

This intercultural reading of Matt 10:40–42 from the Tamil perspective proceeds in the backdrop of the traditional, western 'missional' interpretation of the text. As such, a few broad distinctions between a mission(ary) approach and a Tamil approach can be posited. Whereas, the missional approach promotes individualism, self-centeredness, domination and authority, the Tamil context stands for acceptance, hospitality, and other-affirmation. One of the popular Tamil sayings *yātum ūre yāvarum kēḷir* (every place is my nation and all are family) highlights the idea of the universality of human nature – that we are all one under Shiva. Interpreting Matt 10:40–42 in light of *viruntōmpal* in *Tirukkuṟaḷ* 9 lays bare a Matthaean community that was radically different from what has been portrayed by western scholarship and becomes closer to the Tamil context. The following hermeneutical models that are close to the Tamil context surface when such an intercultural reading is attempted.

Guest is God

As seen already, Matt 10:1–42 may not have been addressed only to the missionaries, that is, the apostles, but could have been intended as an invitation for all to involve themselves in mutual communion with one another.[40] This text could be understood in the framework of "Apocalyptic Eschatology" where there is a compensation/reward to the one showing hospitality to the "little ones." Interesting to note is that the "welcome" or the giving of water in vv.40–42 is not about charity or generosity (as in the parable of sheep and goats, Matt 25: 31–46), but to welcome the disciple is to welcome Jesus, to welcome God! Here, the one who receives the disciple, actually communes with God, since Jesus' disciples actually substitute God. The statement Ὁ δεχόμενος ὑμᾶς ἐμὲ δέχεται (Matt 10:40: "the one who receives you, receives me" – cf. John 13:20; Ign. *Eph.* 6.1–2; Justin 1 *Apol.* 63) represents the *saliah* principle which implies that the

39 Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 153.

40 Contra Davies and Allison who assume that it is an invitation to all to involve in apostolic mission (Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 230.)

apostles are as the one who sends them. Similar formulations are also found in rabbinic literature (e.g. Mek. On Exod 14.31 and Sipre on Num 12.8). It must be noted that this was also the principle that was behind the "itinerant radicals" movement, which formed an important part of early (primitive) Christianity.[41] Hence, the text Matt 10:40–42, with its focus on perfection and doing without possessions, clearly presents a divine initiative in human relations. The guest assumes divine status, when welcomed and offered hospitality.

In this sense, the disciples are encouraged to rely on the hospitality and kindness of others as they go about accomplishing the divine task of healing and bringing the message of God's rule (Matt10:40–42). Here, it is important to note that there is no demand of conversion on the part of those who welcome the guests and even the simplest gesture of hospitality towards these "little ones" would be rewarded. Hence, in a way, those who offer hospitality to the disciples are in fact actually co-workers in the establishment of God's rule. In this context, Luz writes:

> If this really is a discourse on discipleship and not on a special form of discipleship, then the whole community is addressed as a group of potentially itinerant radicals. Those who are unable to carry the full yoke of the Lord… are to do what they can, such as receiving travelers in their homes and bearing witness to the Son of Man in their own locality.[42]

In Tamil spirituality, *viruntōmpal* implies that the householder offers hospitality to all who approach him/her; especially if the one comes in the name of God. The relationship of the Saivites with one another, especially during the Bhakti period (12–15 CE) was one based on mutual respect and love. In the Bhakti-hymns of this period, Shiva was perceived as a personal God, who took upon himself human form and manifested himself among his devotees. The *Tirukkuṟaḷ* depicts this type of spirituality in many ways. In this background, all strangers, servants or devotees of God, are treated with utmost respect. They are offered food and shelter, since they could be manifestations of God himself. It is therefore, very common to invite yogis and sanyasis and offer them food and drink. Such hospitality is shown without any expectation of reward. It is a spontaneous act, an integral part of human behavior. The householder is therefore, a representative of *aṟam* (virtue), a link between the divine and the

41 Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 8. Gerd Theissen and Eduard Schweizer believe that Matthew corroborates the idea of the itinerant radicals (10:40–42; cf. 25:31–46) who were believed to be close to the environment of Q (Sayings Source) in sociological terms. The idea of renunciation was central to the life of the itinerant radicals.

42 Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 153.

mundane, the known and the unknown, and is the archetype of a perfect social order.

Appreciating *viruntōmpal* in *Tirukkuṟaḷ* includes the poet's glorification of the householder's life. Household duties are in themselves heavenly, wherein the hospitable person becomes a guest in heaven (*Tirukkuṟaḷ* 9.6). Interestingly, the proverbial "Indian hospitality" could be one of the main reasons for the colonial rule in India, whereby the Indians welcomed even the colonizers with hospitality (since 'guest is God'), little knowing that these would later subdue them, plunder their land, and uproot their culture! It is also true that British colonialism was most successful in South India, and the British rulers experienced least resistance in Tamilnadu.

In the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*'s disposition, the 'wandering Sannyasi' is an embodiment of God. In his comment on *Tirukkuṟaḷ* 9, Varatarācaṉ points out that the goal of the householder was to bestow hospitality (*viruntōmpal*) to all who approach him/her. It is an ideal state to live life without any worries, with no care about tomorrow, just like birds and animals which live only for the moment (cf. Matt 6:26). This is the type of life that a householder is expected to provide to the one who has renounced all. According to Varatarācaṉ, such hospitality can only be witnessed in South Indian villages, where rice porridge (*kanji*) is distributed for everyone, especially those who are economically weak.[43] At the time of *Tiruvaḷḷuvar*, as was also the case in Matthew, travelers had no provision to carry food, making hospitality inevitable. Remarkably similar to the hospitality shown by householders to ascetics in Tamil culture, is the picture of Christian missionary ascetics such as Francis Bonaventur and others who portray the itinerant character of the guest. Hence, it may be surmised that here, the allusion is to a very general concept of hospitality to the other – that God is present in the other and that to serve 'the other', irrespective of the faith background s/he belongs, is to serve God (*Tirukkuṟaḷ* 9.6).

Building of Community Through Loving Praxis

In the Gospel of Matthew, the ban on 'going to the gentiles' (Matt 10:5, 6, etc.), is consistently broken and seems to suggest that that was the very purpose of the Gospel, viz., to reach out to the gentiles (Matt 8:10; 15:21–28; 28:19). There seems to be a definite connection between the eschatological outlook of the Gospel

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43 Varatarācaṉ, *Tiruvaḷḷuvar allatu vāḻkkai viḷakkam* (Tiruvaḷḷuvar or the explanation of life), 327.

and the persecuted (by Roman?) reality of the Christians. In this context, Riches writes:

Jesus's commission in Matthew 28:16–20 lifts the prohibition on 'going to the Gentiles' from Matthew 10:5. What was until now a purely inner-Jewish affair suddenly becomes something with unlimited territorial pretensions. The disciples are to embark on a universal mission to bring all nations to obey the commandments of the one on whom all authority has been conferred.[44]

From Luz's study, we understand that in Matthew's Gospel, we observe a failed mission to the Jews.[45] The sharp contrast between Matt 10:5–6 and Matt 28:19–20, shows that the Gospel writer was at the crossroads – one, suffering a failed missionary enterprise with the Jews and the other, being open to the inclusion of the Gentile Church. Hence, it is important to note, that "in Matthew we are reading about itinerant ministry *in evangelized communities* rather than about itinerant ministry in unevangelized communities."[46] So, it is not about confession to a faith tradition but more about a practicing love, hospitality – here, whether or not the household believed in Jesus was not important but what was important was that they showed open-minded hospitality.

By offering a glass of water, Matthew accentuates the welcoming of strangers into the communion of believers, and not just a reception of Jesus' disciples who bear the good news of Jesus. Thus, to be accepted within the community, a common praxis, a hospitable act, such as offering of water is necessary. For Luz, this section presents, contrary to the Church's belief, a concrete demand of the community. In other words, salvation is accompanied by "healing" and concrete binding ethics – unlike what the church proclaimed.[47] The disciple is the one who does God's will (Matt 12:46–50), for whom, the love command is the content of God's will. The disciple is thereby included into the community through bearing fruit (Matt 7:15 ff.; cf. 21:43).

The Matthaean community is seen to have radical implications, in that it demonstrates a global reach and an inclusive human community. According to Matthew, human society is not constituted by kinship or nationality, nor by a common language and culture, nor by religion, but by a relationship founded on love, mercy and mutual forbearance. The disciples are to love God (22:37),

44 J. Riches, "Matthew's Missionary Strategy in Colonial Perspective," in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. J. K. Riches and D. C. Sim (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 140.

45 Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 8. Here Luz draws our attention to the fact that there was actually no mission to the Gentiles in Q.

46 Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his literary and theological art*, 188. Emphasis mine.

47 See Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 150–151.

but also one another and their enemy, in imitation of and in response to God's indiscriminate love (22:38–39; 5:43–48; 7:12). Matthew's community was to be strengthened by the command to love. Here, we need to note how Carter alluding to Richard Burridge, categorically states that all the gospels belonged to the genre of "*bioi*" (lives), which have a 'community building' function.[48]

Further, one of the important "community building through love praxis" strategies is by "naming," such as, "disciples," "blessed," "children," "ekklesia," "brothers and sisters," "prophets," "scribes," "the wise," "little ones," "infants," etc. Carter writes: "These names secure separation from other communities, reinforce group identity, and warn this community not to be like other groups."[49] The "little ones" in 10:40–42, who are the recipients of hospitality are here called towards community building. As Carter points out, it is important to remember that, unlike Acts' numerical claims, Matthew's audience is small in number. It is a very minority community within the larger dominant society. Hence, "little ones" is very significant and in Carter's words, "underline[s] the identity of disciples as vulnerable and at risk, yet very valuable."[50]

Consequently, for Warren Carter, "to welcome" involves not only believing the message but sharing hospitality (Matt 10:11–14). It is symbolized by 'giving even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones.'[51] In the same vein, Robert Gundry points out that only a 'worthy person' "would provide room and board without charge."[52] A worthy house welcomes the disciples (by offering water). It is important to note that Mattews 10: 13b–14 mainly speaks of "welcome" and giving a receptive ear; it does not speak of acceptance of the message.[53] Since, the passage 10:26–42 is taken as having "generalized rhetoric," it is understood that all listeners can claim the promises for themselves and not just those who accept the disciples or their message. It is noteworthy that the substantival participles (translated "the one who…") are adequately general to include anyone who has exercised hospitality toward a "prophet" (προφήτην), a "righteous person" (δίκαιον), or "one of these little ones" (ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων).

In the Tamil context, conversation and community building constitute hospitality. As seen above, the life of the 'householder' is the highest virtue, as it is

48 W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (New York: T & T Clark International: A Continuum Imprint, 2000), 8.
49 Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading*, 9.
50 Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading*, 27.
51 Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading*, 245.
52 Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his literary and theological art*, 188.
53 Carter's contention that the "negative response (But if it is not worthy) denotes those who do not believe and follow", can be discarded, as it is reading too much into the text (See Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading*, 235).

considered to be the best platform for hospitality. In Tamil culture, it is important to offer water to the guest, when he/she enters the house. It has more than just material value (i.e. quenching of thirst), because the act of offering something that belongs to oneself initiates a relationship. Moreover, offering of water has symbolic significance, in that it is a sign of welcoming or of approving a bond. In Tamil folklore, water is said to have agency and that, when it becomes the point of contact between two entities, there is an ethereal phenomenon which takes place, where water "remembers" (the hospitable act that was done). Hence, the concept of *viruntōmpal* points to the importance of love that is practiced, through hospitality, which becomes the basis of community formation. In this sense, it is noteworthy that, in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, the chapter on hospitality follows immediately after the one on love.

Envisaging an Egalitarian Society

According to Luz, the main reason for the scanty treatment of Matt 10 among western biblical scholars is due to the fact that there is so much in the discourse that contradicts church reality. The ideas of itinerant preachers, without any possession, with no sandals and no money and no change of dress, have no place in the First World![54] All along, the text has been incorrectly interpreted as one that made a distinction between peoples on the basis of economic status, ethnicity or faith affirmation. It has never been seen as one presenting hospitality. When the hospitality aspect is assigned to the interpretation, then it would imply an egalitarian society that is envisaged. For a capitalistic society, such as the West, hospitality can never be mutual, since capitalism and egalitarianism operate operate in opposite directions.

Repeatedly, the importance of sharing is stressed in the whole of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. It is interesting to note that the clear mandate on sharing (33.2) is placed under the chapter "non-killing." This gives the meaning that non-sharing is a crime equal to killing! Therefore, the ground of *viruntōmpal* by the householder is hospitality to the greatest extent, of even going hungry for the sake of one's

54 Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 144–145. It is interesting to note that here Luz also points to certain 'church-oriented' (re)interpretations that suggest that the disciples could definitely possess bags, shoes or further tunics!

guests (9.2; 9.5).[55] N. Muthuraman points out that the aspect of *viruntōmpal* in *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is to be practiced not just by the wealthy, but by all.[56]

The section in Matthew 10:40–42, read on the background of Jewish-Christian hospitality bears a striking similarity to the Indian scenario. In the Jewish-Christian perspective hospitality to the alien was required. Here, it is true that the "alien" or "stranger" was not a "complete alien" or "stranger" (these were of course annihilated – like Philistines, Caananites, Hittites, etc.); but fellow Jews, those in the proximity, like the gentiles are to be welcomed. Here, the context is local in nature, where one is called to live in harmony with those one comes in contact with.

Similarly, in the Indian (Tamil) perspective, the issue could be compared to the caste structure. The caste system in the Indian society is unparalleled. Social divisions are drawn on the basis of one's caste identity, and it is on this basis that one is accepted or rejected. There is no evidence that the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* endorses the caste system, which is believed to be introduced by the brahmanical *Varnasrama Dharma*. In fact, the texts of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* totally reject any discrimination based on one's caste. Accordingly, Gopalan states, "here is no textual basis … in the Tamil classic [*Tirukkuṟaḷ*] to support the thesis that the poet Tiruvaḷḷuvar acknowledges the asrama-scheme as the basis of his philosophy of good life."[57]

Interestingly, Maṟaimalaiyaṭikaḷ, a Tamil writer and activist, in his book, *Vēḷāḷar Nākarīkam* (Culture of the *Vellalas*), points out that it was always in the nature of the Tamil *Vellalas* to bestow kindness and accord hospitality to all who came to them. This was radically opposite in the case of the Aryan Brahmins, who did not welcome anyone else, other than their own clan members. If a non-Brahmin would approach them and request a handful of rice or a glass of water, the Brahmin would drive him/her away, citing *tīṭṭu* (ritual impurity). Even if a Brahmin should offer some food to a non-Brahmin, it would always be the left-over food that would be offered outside the house. Non-Brahmins were never allowed to draw water from springs reserved for Brahmins. In case a non-Brahmin came in contact with the space of a Brahmin, such a spot would

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55 The sensitivity involved in hospitality is described by comparing the guests to the *aṉiccam* flower, which is supposed to be the softest flower, which, when it comes in contact with anything, droops. This is compared to the face of the guest, when he/she is unwelcome in a home (*Tirukkuṟaḷ* 90).

56 N. Muthuraman, *Religion of Tirukkuṟaḷ* (Madras: np., 1969), 47–48.

57 S. Gopalan, *The Social Philosophy of Tirukkural* (New Delhi/Madras: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt Ltd., 1979), 116.

be ritually cleaned.[58] On the contrary, the *Vellalas*, who are native Tamils[59], always showed hospitality to all who approach them for food. On the basis of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, "*viruntu puṟattatāt tāṉ uṇṭal cāvā, marunteṉiṉum veṇṭarpāṟ ṟaṉṟu*" (It is not good to eat before the guest, even if it were the nectar that gives eternity [9.2]), the *Vellalas* always aspired to satisfy the hunger and thirst of travelers and guests irrespective of which social background they may belong to.[60] Offering of a glass of water to the guest places both the guest and the host on an equal plane. Human beings are corporate beings, created equally to live in relation with one another, taking into account, the need of the other person. No one can live selfish isolated lives.

Conclusion

The main consequence of this reading was to realize the presence of hospitality in Matthew 10:40–42. For me, the addition of 'if one gives even a cup of water', makes it clear that the text is predominantly about hospitality and only nominally about mission. And the type of hospitality that we are talking about here is one of mutuality and not a mission-oriented act of the superior to the inferior. Consequently, the implication of the text surpasses the narrow confines of the Gospel message, such as chosen-ness, redemption or *parousia*.

Conforming to the vision of reading sacred texts in juxtaposition, this study confirms the necessity of 'culture complementing/correcting culture' in Indian reading contexts. Reading Matthew and *Tirukkuṟaḷ together* fulfils the objective of including local (con)texts in biblical exegesis. The concept of hospitality in Matthew and *Tirukkuṟaḷ* has demonstrated that there are ideological, especially philosophical and ethical convergences, between Tamil and Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. This has provided major impetus for viewing these texts together. Adopting a Tamil perspective in a heterogeneous context also serves to create a generic perspective of the Tamils, as an attempt to unify the disconnected groups within the Tamil community.

Matthew and *Tirukkuṟaḷ* do not complement each other in all respects. However, this reading demonstrates that intercultural biblical hermeneutics

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58 Maṟaimalaiyaṭikaḷ, *Vēḷāḷar Nākarīkam* (Culture of the Vellalas), 2nd ed. (Chennai: D.M. accukkūṭam, 1927), 17–19.

59 In the Saiva tradition, whenever Tamils or Dravidians are mentioned, it is mostly in relation to the Vellalars, see: M. Bergunder, "Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Anti-brahmanische und hindu-nationalistische Rekonstruktionen der frühen indischen Religionsgeschichte," in: *"Arier" und "Draviden,"* edited by M. Bergunder and R. P. Das (Halle: Verlag der Frankeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2002), 135–180, at 153.

60 Maṟaimalaiyaṭikaḷ, *Vēḷāḷar Nākarīkam*, 18–19f.

can operate under such disparate circumstances, where it attempts to find similarities and contrasts of two different but analogous traditions in order to acquire contextually relevant meanings. Such readings promise to promote newer meaning-potentials and mutual hermeneutic appreciation.

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The Absolute Assurance of Giving

A Socio-Rhetorical Approach to the Parable of the Friend at Midnight in Luke 11:5–8

Rospita Siahaan

The aim of this article is to assert that the parable of the friend at midnight exhibits the absolute guarantee of giving. Using socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI) to demonstrate this thesis, at first I will explore the inner texture which infers that the climax of the parable is the giving action of the 'asked' friend, rather than his refusal or his motive of giving. Moving to the intertexture, I explore the ancient peasant traveling, meal, and house to clarify that the hypothetical excuses of the 'asked' friend are historically acceptable.

However, the social cultural texture analysis overrides the excuses, since 'giving' is a prevalent moral and sacred duty in respect to the values of friendship, hospitality, and honor and shame. At the end, the sacred texture is investigated which affirms that the fatherhood of God guarantees a 'giving' in responding to a prayer and at the same time an assurance for humans to pray to God, the Father.

Introduction

The key to understand the parable of the friend at midnight is both the literary context and the social cultural context of the first century Mediterranean world. The literary context is Jesus' teaching on prayer where "In SRI, teaching is perceived to evoke wisdom rhetorolect, which is prominent in Luke, … prayer is a central *topos* in priestly rhetorolect…"[1] Preceded by the Lord's Prayer and followed by the parable of asking and giving in a household context, the parable

1 Vernon K. Robbins, "Sociorhetorical Interpretation (SRI) and Inductive Bible Study (IBS): Outlines of Mark, the Lord's Prayer, and the Son's Prayer in John 17," *JIBS* 1 (2/2014): 182–222, 198.

of the friend at midnight supports the assurance of God's giving in the context of prayer. The crucial point is the act of giving in verse 8, not so much on the refusal. Thus, the refusal in verse 7 is not real but a rhetorical device to drive the listeners to the point.

The parable enacts particular friendship, hospitality, and honor and shame values of the social cultural context of the first century Mediterranean world. For the sake of friendship, hospitality, and honor and shame, 'giving' is a sacred obligation, and this is the vital matter of the parable. The heart of the parable of the friend at midnight is the 'giving' action of the 'asked' friend and not so much his motive. Accordingly, although for many scholars the translation of the τὴν ἀναίδειαν αὐτοῦ and to whom the genitive αὐτοῦ is applied is central for the meaning of the parable,[2] I concur with Holmas that "it is an exaggeration to say that the interpretation of the parable hangs on the disputed phrase."[3] Indeed, it is important to know its meaning, but to hang the significance of the parable on it alone is an oversimplification.

Nguyen, a Vietnamese Catholic theologian, emphasized that

> To fully capture the significance of this earth-shattering parable, reading it closely from its Greco-Roman contexts and interpreting it from an Asian perspective will reveal that there is a double shame element at play in the parable. The dilemma is not whether the man inside will give or not give, but rather how much he must give to save face and attain honor.[4]

I totally agree with his point on the fundamental contribution of both Greco-Roman and Asian contexts in grasping the meaning of the parable. However, I disagree with his conclusion that the predicament is about "how much" to give, of which Vietnamese culture required a double amount.[5] The 'asked' friend has no dilemma at all; he gives as the 'asking' friend needs.

The social and cultural contexts of the parable are close to the Asian context in general, Indonesian context in particular, and even more specifically my Batak

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2 Such as Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke*, combined ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 125; Ernest van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours: A Social-Scientific Reading of the Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Lk 11:5–8)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67 (1/2011): 1–14, 13.

3 Geir O. Holmas, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts: The Theme of Prayer within the Context of the Legitimating and Edifying Objective of the Lukan Narrative* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 135.

4 vanThanh Nguyen, "An Asian View of Biblical Hospitality," *BR* 53 (2008): 25–39, 25.

5 Nguyen, "An Asian View," 37.

context.[6] As a Batak when I read the parable I experience my own social culture, especially those of us who live in a village and more traditional society. One of philosophical wisdom sayings in Batak related to friendship and hospitality, the crucial element of the parable of the friend at midnight, is as follows:

Parbahul-bahul na bolon	The owner of a large basket[7]
Paramak so balunon	of a mat that is never rolled up
Parsangkalan so mahiang	of a cutting board that never dries
Dohot partataring na so ra mintop	of a kitchen fire that never goes out

Tab. 1: Batak sayings in related the parable of the friend at midnight

Mindful of the values of friendship and hospitality, I, following other scholars, translate the disputed phrase τὴν ἀναίδειαν αὐτοῦ in verse 8 as his shamelessness referring to the 'asked' friend. In light of the literary and the social and cultural contexts, a conclusion can be drawn that the parable as priestly wisdom teaches the absolute assurance of God's giving which naturally serves as a call to come and ask to God.

In analyzing the parable, I employ Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI).[8] Instead of using the metaphor of texts as windows and mirrors, he portrays a text as a thick tapestry.

> When we look at a thick tapestry from different angles, we see different configurations, patterns, and images. Likewise, when we explore a text from different angles, we see multiple textures of meanings, convictions, beliefs, values, emotions, and actions.

SRI provides a method for an interpreter to change his/her angle of approach several times to see the multiple textures, namely inner texture, intertexture,

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6 Asian countries share common social settings and cultures in some ways, but in other ways there are many differences. Likewise, Indonesia, a South East Asian country, based on population census in 2010 has 1,340 tribes/ethnic groups where the Batak is the third largest. Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, "Statistik Politik 2017," https://www.bps.go.id/publication/2017/12/22/da332e4125b26eb9dd0870ce/statistik-politik-2017.html

7 Basket refers to a place of rice, both hulled and unhulled.

8 Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: rhetoric, society and ideology* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996); idem, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-rhetorical Interpretatio*n (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

social and cultural texture, and sacred texture. Furthermore, SRI gives me a greater opportunity to use my Batak lens, particularly in the intertexture and in the social and cultural texture.

I. Inner texture of Luke 11:5-8

The task of inner texture is to analyze the words in terms of their repetition and argumentation to find the rhetorical function of the text without considering the world outside the text.[9] In literary and rhetorical criticism, this is, according to Gowler, called a 'close reading.'[10] In analyzing Luke 11:5–8, verses 1–13 are taken into account as the immediate context, while Luke 9:51–19:27, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, is the broader context.

1.1. Repetitive texture

Luke 11	προσεύχομαι	πατήρ	ἄρτος	δίδωμι	ἐπιδίδωμι	φίλος	ἀνίστημι	ἐγείρω	αἰτέω
	pray	father	bread	give		friend	get up, raise, rise		ask
1	2								
2	1	1							
3			1	1					
4									
5			1			2			
6						1			
7				1			1		
8				2		1	1	1	
9				1					1
10									1
11		1			1				1

9 Robbins, *Exploring the Texture, 7; The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 27–30.

10 David B. Gowler, "Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Textures of a Text and its Reception," *JSNT* 33 (2/2010): 191–206, 191, 195.

12					1				1
13		1		2					1
				3/7	0/2		2/2	1/1	
	0/3	**0/3**	**1/2**	**3/9**		**4/4**	**3/3**		**0/5**

Tab. 2: The repetitive words in Luke 11:1–13

The repetitive texture above shows that the word which occurs most often is δίδωμι/ἐπιδίδωμι which is distributed throughout the passage nine times, while the second most frequent word is αἰτέω and is distributed only five times in the last five verses. It is evident that the unifying topics are "giving" and "asking", but the main focus is "giving." The word φίλος, the third most occurring word, is present four times and only in verses 5–8. It thus denotes friendship as the topic of the middle unit in the context of "giving."

The fourth are προσεύχομαι, πατήρ, and ἀνίστημι/ἐγείρω where each one occurs three times. The word προσεύχομαι occurs only in the first unit yet it creates the context for the whole passage, Jesus' teaching on prayer. The word πατήρ occurs at the very beginning and at the very end where in verses 2, 13 it refers to God. The fatherhood of God forms an inclusio of this prayer's teaching.[11] This inclusio gives a hint that all the topics under discussion are heading towards God, the Father. The conclusion can be drawn that in the context of praying, "giving" is the unifying topic and God, the Father, is the primary concern.

1.2. Opening middle closing (OMC) – narrative texture

The narrator records that Jesus speaks (spoke) to his disciples in the first person where each, except verse 8, indicates the beginning of a new small unit.

OMC Texture	Verses	Topic	Primary Concern
Opening	1–4	The Lord's Prayer	God is the address
Middle	5–8	Friendship and giving	"Giving" is assured
Closing	9–13	Asking and giving	"Giving" is assured

Tab. 3: The opening, middle, and closing textures of Luke 11:1–13

11 Holmas, *Prayer and Vindication*, 137.

After teaching how to pray in the opening texture, Jesus presents two parables as “example story,” which is a natural progression in wisdom rhetorolect;[12] the first one is in the social setting of friendship (11:5–8) and the second is of the household (11:11–13).[13] The middle texture is peculiar to Luke whereas the opening and the closing textures are found in Matthew though in separate contexts. The Lord’s Prayer unit is found in Matthew 6:9–13 and the ‘asking and giving’ unit in Matthew 7:7–11. Luke 11:5–8 contains a dialogue between two friends, where one is asking another. There is a third friend who arrives at midnight which is the background of the narrative.

OMC Texture	Verse(s)	Actor	Acting
Opening	5–6	The ‘asking’ friend	asks for bread
Middle	7	The ‘asked’ friend	refuses his friend’s request
Closing	8	The ‘asked’ friend	gives according to his friend’s request

Tab. 4: The opening, middle, and closing texture of Luke 11:5–8

Opening texture: The ‘asking’ friend’s request for bread

The actor in this stage is the ‘asking friend’ who goes to his friend to ask for bread because an unexpected visitor has arrived at midnight and he has no bread to offer this guest. Jesus begins the parable with a rhetorical question using τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν, which of you (recurs in 11:11[14] and four more times in 12:25[15]; 14:28; 15:4[16]; 17:7) that requires a definite answer of ‘not any of us.’[17] The rhetorical question ends in verse 7 and the parable in verse 8. The phrase τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν invites the listeners to partake in the story. The role of the listener, whether as the ‘asking’ or as the ‘asked’ friend, depends on the subject of πορεύσεται in verse 5. The grammar allows for two possibilities.

12 Robbins, “Sociorhetorical Interpretation,” 199.
13 Holmas, *Prayer and Vindication*, 134.
14 Parallels to Matt 7:9. An exact phrase occurs in Matt 12:11 which parallels to Luke 14:5 using the phrase τίνος ὑμῶν and in John 8:46. A consimilar phrase, τις ἐξ ὑμῶν, occurs in Hebrews 3:13; 4:1.
15 Parallels to Matt 6:27.
16 Parallels to Matt 18:12 but using the phrase τί ὑμῖν.
17 Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), 158; Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 120–21; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 446–47.

The subject	Translation	The role of the listeners
φίλος	Which one of you has a friend who comes to **you** at midnight and **says to you**…	The 'asked' friend
τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν (the listeners)	Which one of you has a friend, and you **go to him** at midnight and **say to him**…	The 'asking' friend

Tab. 5: The role of the listeners

Jeremias chooses the first one,[18] but many choose the second one on the basis of its setting and narrative plot.[19] Comparing this to the parable of the Lord and the slaves in Luke 17:7, which has a very similar form, suggests that φίλος is applied to the 'asked' one.[20] In both cases, the listener is the one who is doing the acting described. In Luke 17:7 it is the listener who talks to his slaves, and in this parable, it is the listener who goes to his friend. For the sake of consistency of the subject of verbs ἕξει and πορεύσεται in Luke 11:5, φίλος refers to the 'asked' friend. The theological meaning in the "how much more" pattern also suggests that the listener is more relevant as the 'asking' friend than as the 'asked' one.[21]

Middle texture: The 'asked' friend refuses the request

The actor in this stage is the 'asked' friend who, from within, refuses to give with two expressions: "do not bother me" and "I cannot get up and give you." The word κόπος (bother) recurs in the parable of the unjust judge in 18:5. Some scholars regard both instances as a means of speaking about the same topic, perseverance in prayer,[22] which is, in fact, not so in this parable. Two reasons are inserted between the two refusal sayings: "the door has already been locked" and "my children are with me in bed." These excuses clarify that the objection is not the matter of giving, but of timing. The τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν that ends in verse 7 with a negative affirmation signifies that the hypothetical rebuttal does not

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18 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 158.

19 John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary 35B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 623.

20 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 124–25.

21 Greg W. Forbes, *The God of Old: The Role of the Lukan Parables in the Purposes of Luke's Gospel*, JSNTSup 198 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 73–74.

22 Such as Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 337.

make sense. No friend would be unwilling to get up and give what his friend asks for.

Closing texture: The 'asked' friend gives his friend's request as needed

The actor in this stage remains the same, but in a different literary form. In the middle texture, the 'asked' friend talks as a first person but here as a third person. The parable seems finished with a preposterous repudiation, and it, in fact, does not. Jesus said that the 'asked' friend in the end acts reversely, he gets up and gives what his friend appeals for, and the parable truly ends.

The argumentative – narrative texture: Rhetorical strategy

The flow of the narrative is this: someone makes a request of a friend where initially the 'asked' friend responds absurdly, but in the end acts appropriately. The point is that a friend is obliged to give what his friend asks. But if that is the point, what is the function of the repudiation in the middle texture?

A parable as a rhetorical device serves the purpose of convincing the listener of what is being taught. The parable of the friend at midnight aims to convince the listeners that "giving" is assured when asking is performed in the context of friendship; therefore, the refusal is presented as a leap to the climax. The refusal in regard to ancient hospitality, as Jeremias points out, is to underline its absurdity and not to affirm it.[23] The improbable response is simply a rhetorical strategy to lead the listeners into "what to do" action despite any inconvenience.

II. Intertexture of Luke 11:5–8

Intertexture explores the historical culture and the phenomena outside the text that are embedded in the text so that interpreters get more into the situation of the parable. At least three historical cultural settings are implied in the text: traveling and meal in the opening texture and peasant house in the middle texture.

2.1. Opening texture: A midnight travel and bread (verses 5-6)

Some scholars point out that being visited by a traveling friend at midnight is not a rare event since people preferred to travel at night to avoid heat.[24] However,

23 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 158–59.

24 Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 298. David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 180. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Nottingham: Eerdmans, 2015), 337.

this contention is denied by Bailey[25] and Bovon[26] with an argument that night travel is prevalent for people who live in desert areas such as Egypt and Jordan, but not for Palestinians. Not being in a desert area, Palestinians prefer to travel at daytime. Hence, the arrival of a traveling friend in this parable is odd.

It is unexpected, however, that the 'visited' friend rushes to his friend to ask for bread without knocking. Bailey explicates rightly, "A stranger knocks in the night; a friend calls. When he calls, his voice will be recognized and the neighbor will not be frightened."[27] In my childhood (even today in a traditional village) voice calling was very important in visiting a neighbor's house in order for the neighbor to know who was coming. During the day time the door was often open so when someone went to his/her neighbor's house, s/he just came in while calling out. In the night time when the door was closed, s/he called out, and it might be or might not be with knocking. It is worth noting that all villagers knew each other because of their strong social ties and also because of the small number of residents.

The 'asking' friend requests bread even though it is not the main dish, but it is needed as a meal utensil due to the custom of the common sharing of food from one dish. The sharing of food will not be defiled as everyone takes from the common dishes with a broken piece of bread.[28] The parable is set in a double unexpected situation, a sudden visit and a bread shortage.

2.2. Middle texture: Ancient peasant house (verse 7)

The first excuse of the 'asked' friend is the closed door. The ancient peasant house used a wooden or iron bar hung in a ring on each side to bolt the door. The second excuse is the sleeping children. Ancient peasant families often slept on a shared mat in a large room, which was possibly the only room with very limited light. Getting up from among sleeping children and drawing the barred door in darkness undoubtedly causes a noise and this is the hindrance.[29] Bailey disputed this notion with argumentation that the barred door is light enough to make no sound and that children fall asleep easily even if disturbed. The two reasons raised by the 'asked friend' are frail excuses.[30]

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25 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 121; Followed by van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours," 7.

26 Francois Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 102.

27 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 128.

28 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant,* 123; Nguyen, "An Asian View of Biblical Hospitality," 28–29.

29 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 157–58; Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary*, 102; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 447.

30 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 124.

As a Batak person I lived in a house with a wooden bolted door until I was fifteen. Sleeping on a shared mat with family or relatives in a living room is a lived experience for me, even though not on a daily basis, but only when family gathered or when relatives were staying overnight.[31] With such a house in mind, I affirm that the excuses of the 'asked friend' are very logical and decent in terms of the disruption caused. After all, their conversation was already annoying the sleeping children, for to be heard from inside to outside and vice versa, their voices were obviously not soft.

III. Social and cultural texture of Luke 11:5–8

How could someone be so daring as to go to his friend's house at midnight only to ask for bread, especially since the bread is not for his own family, but for his friend who just arrived? Reading the parable with our current social and cultural context would probably render blame to the 'asking' friend and give support for the refusal by the 'asked' friend. Such a reading would be ethnocentric and anachronistic, and to avoid it, the social cultural value of the first century Mediterranean world which is embedded in the text must be explored.

The word φίλος occurs 29 times in the NT where 15 are in Luke (plus 3 in Acts). Five occasions (7:6, 34; 12:4; 15:6, 9; 21:16) are parallel with other gospels, but without the word φίλος. In Luke 11:5–8 φίλος occurs four times where three of them refer to a personal friend (verses 5, 8) which carries the sense of friendship, and one that refers to a guest which carries the sense of hospitality (verse 6). Therefore, the parable of the friend at midnight is built in the context of hospitality and friendship where honor and shame are the pivotal values.[32] The parable describes a conflict between physical need and cultural social duty, where the latter prevails over the former.[33] Before further investigation of the social and cultural texture, the three ancient social conventions will be presented briefly.

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31 Coincidentally, when I am writing this article, I found evidence in social media that this custom remains practiced by Batak people mainly in a traditional family/village/town. https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1233043120410870&id=100011155809825: On 31st Oct 2020 at 7.10 PM (West Indonesian Time) a fellow female pastor uploaded a picture on her wall face book where she and her family slept on a mat in the living room when she visited her parents.

32 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 158–59; Bernard B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 87–90; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*; Bovon, Luke 2: A Commentary, 101.

33 Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary,* 102.

3.1. Friendship

Friendship, along with hospitality, is a universal value throughout the ages, but every age and context has its own way of practice. In antiquity, especially in Roman and Greek tradition, there are many kinds of friendship, but personal friendship, done in pairs, is the most important one. The word φίλος in the Septuagint is the translation of several Hebrew words where רע (30 times) and אהב (27 times) occurred the most. רע is most often translated as πλησίον, neighbor; thus, the word 'neighbor' encompasses 'friend' in Judaism and Hellenism. Stählin, followed by Scott, claims that friendship is prominent in Hellenism, but not in the Bible especially in the Old Testament.[34]

It is true that the usage of words φίλος and φιλία is not prominent in the NT, but it does not indicate that friendship is not prominent. Friendship *topos* is significant and very much emphasized particularly by Paul, Luke, and John to build and maintain relationship between them and the congregations they addressed and in the midst of the congregation itself. Luke alludes to the tradition of friendship, but he extends it beyond reciprocity practice.[35]

Personal friendship is built voluntarily upon trust and congeniality that requires commitment and self-sacrifice. One of Aristotle's proverbs that is often quoted to portray the deepest meaning of friendship is: "Friends have one soul between them." Having one soul, friendship requires sacrifice until death. This value is implanted in Jesus' saying in John 15:15, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."[36] It is found only in John because the Johannine corpus was greatly influenced by Hellenism.[37] A person does what is best for his/her friend and in certain circumstances, sacrifice is demanded.

3.2. Hospitality

Hospitality comes from the Greek words φιλανθρωπία (φιλανθρώπως), ξενία, and φιλοξενία. The word φιλανθρώπως originally refers to friendly relation of gods to humans, and later on extended to philosophical ethics where humans, in general, and rulers, in particular, are required to imitate gods in friendly

34 Gustav Stählin, "φιλέω, φίλημα, φίλος, φιλία," *TDNT* 9:154; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 90.

35 Alan C. Mitchell, "'Greet the Friends by Name': New Testament Evidence for the Greco-Roman Topos on Friendship," in *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, SBLRBS 34, ed. John T. Fitzgerald (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 225–62.

36 Stählin, *TDNT* 9:151–59; Sam K. Williams, "Friendship," in *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), 352; van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours," 5; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 90.

37 Wolfgang Feneberg, "φίλος," *EDNT* 3:428.

relations. However, the word group occurs only three times in the NT (Acts 27:3; 28:2; Tit 3:4).[38]

More common in the NT are ξενία (and ξένος, 16 times) and φιλοξενία (and φιλόξενος, 5 times) which comes from the stem word of ξεν- meaning foreign, alien, and also guest. In a historical cultural sequence, strangers were initially considered as threats, thus, needed to be fought and eliminated. As civilization emerged and developed over time it consequently changed the notion and the treatment to strangers. Strangers were no longer enemies, but fellows who were treated well. This was the same in Judaism. Initially strangers were regarded as enemies for bringing along their cults, but after the exile the resident foreigners were welcomed and accepted to be full members of the community.

Mercy was to be shown to aliens to win them. Hospitality is prominent in the Gospels; the ministry of Jesus depends on it and so do his teachings and parables. ἀγάπη as the greatest command conveys φιλοξενία (Rom 13:9, 13; Heb 13:1–2).[39]

The *xenophobia* (fear of strangers) of primitive people turns into *xenophilia* (love of strangers) and, hence, hospitality becomes the symbol of civilized culture. Hospitality which is usually offered to friends is broadened out to strangers.[40] Bruce Malina explicates that "[in] the ancient Near East, hospitality was the process of 'receiving' outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests. Hospitality thus differed from entertaining family and friends."[41] The strangers who became guests were part of the household during their stay.[42] They are treated as family/kin.

Hospitality is not merely a practice and custom; it is "one of the pillars of morality upon which the universe stands. When guests or hosts violate their obligations to each other, the whole world shakes and retribution follows," as Koenig, who categorized hospitality as 'partnership with strangers,' describes.[43] It is a sacred obligation that must be observed by all. A guest of someone is

38 Ulrich Luck, "φιλανθρωπία, φιλανθρώπως," *TDNT* 9:107–11.

39 Gustav Stählin, "ξένος, ξενία, φιλοξενία, φιλόξενος," *TDNT* 5:1–23.

40 Stählin, *TDNT* 5:1–4; Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 18.

41 Bruce J. Malina, "Hospitality," in *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), 440.

42 David A. DeSilva, "Cultural Relationships in the World of the New Testament," in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London/New York: Routledge, 2007), 68.

43 John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001) 2, 8.

a guest of the whole community; consequently, responsibility to entertain a visitor is not only of the household, but of the community.[44]

In welcoming strangers, the host provides for physical, social, and spiritual needs. Physical needs include food, clothing, foot washing, shelter, but the most prominent is table fellowship. Social need is a feeling of being welcomed. Spiritual needs would include healing and being received into a larger community. These all are carried out as a moral category where both host and guest are obliged to be prepared and willing to welcome, to enter another's world, and, the most notable is to be vulnerable.[45]

Hospitality contributed significantly to the development of the early church. The early congregations relied on hospitable members to open their homes as meeting places (Acts 5:42; 12:12; Rom 16:3–5; Col 4:15). The itinerant missionaries also relied on the hospitality of the congregation in regard to accommodation, shelter, and financial support (Matt 10:11–13; Acts 16:15, 40; 2 Tim 1:16; 3 John 5–8).[46] For the sake of the mission, Luke emphasizes that residential communities must carry out hospitality to itinerant missionaries.[47] More than that, Luke depicts God as a hospitable God throughout his gospel.[48]

3.3. Honor and shame

Is it beneficial? Is it right or wrong? These might be the most important questions for people in this present day when doing or deciding something, but not for the Mediterranean people in the first century. For them the first question would be "is it honorable or shameful?" Honor and shame were very basic values for them. Malina asserts, "Honor is the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) plus that person's value in the eyes of his or her social group."[49] As deSilva denotes, "honor is a dynamic and relational concept."[50] Who determines that someone is an honorable person is not only him/herself, but also his/her social group. Someone is truly honorable when there are both self and communal acknowledgements. Honor and shame do not belong only

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44 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 123.
45 Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 13–15.
46 DeSilva, "Cultural Relationships," 68.
47 Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 85–120.
48 Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).
49 Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insight from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed., rev. and exp. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 30.
50 David A. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 25.

to a person, but also to a group, which is called by Malina 'a collective honor.'[51] Generally speaking, for (Middle) Eastern people, "some areas of life are governed by law, but much of life is controlled by the 'shame' (negative) that is avoided because of the individual's inner 'sense of shame' (positive)."[52]

3.4. Friendship, hospitality, honor and shame in Luke 11:5–8

Friendship: Going to a friend's house at midnight without appointment (verse 5, 6)

In the present age going to a friend's house without appointment or at least a prior notice, and, moreover, in the middle of night is impolite. It is the other way round in ancient and traditional society. Someone could go to his/her friend's house without any appointment, and this is both what the 'unexpected' friend and the 'asking' friend in the parable do. Friendship demands sacrifice; therefore, the visited friend sacrifices his bed time to welcome his unexpected guest.

Hospitality: I have no food to offer him (verse 6)

One prominent custom of hospitality is to serve a guest with food. Therefore, when the 'visited' friend has no food, for the sake of hospitality he has to feed his guest. He has no other choice but to go to his friend's house though it is midnight. What the 'visited' friend does by going to his friend is both a moral and a sacred obligation.

Friendship, hospitality, honor: Do not bother me … I cannot get up and give you anything (verse 7)

Jeremias points out that, "it is only if we understand v.7 as describing not a refusal of the request, but rather the utter impossibility of such a refusal, that the parable truly depicts the custom of oriental hospitality, and its real point becomes clear."[53] The excuses are factually true, but culturally cannot be justified. The repudiation is socially unacceptable for the sake of friendship, of hospitality and of the honor of the whole village since the guest of a friend is his friend and of the village, too.

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51 Malina, *The New Testament World*, 43.
52 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 132.
53 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 158–59.

Honor and shame: διά γε τὴν ἀναίδειαν αὐτοῦ ἐγερθεὶς δώσει/because of his shamelessness he will get up and give him (verse 8)

The social moral obligation is demanded of the 'asked' friend. Because the refusal in verse 7 is not real, verse 8 serves as an assertion of the act of giving. However, there is a conundrum in the meaning of ἀναίδεια and to whom the genitive pronoun αὐτοῦ refers. It is a consensus that the word ἀναίδεια literally means shamelessness, a negative sense based on the external evidences (Jewish and Greco-Roman literatures).[54] Such negative meaning seems not fit in the parable; hence, it has caught the vast attention of interpreters resulting in an unending debate. By and large the disputation can be categorized into three groups where the first two are traditional interpretations and the third one is new and quite radical.

First, boldness which refers to the 'asking' friend

He gives neither because of friendship nor because of hospitality, but because of the boldness of the 'asking' friend.[55] His boldness (audacity) is not on what he asks for but rather on the time, in the middle of night.[56] In this sense, ἀναίδεια has a positive sense.

With a slight difference, underlining honor and shame as the heart of the parable, Liefeld argues that the ἀναίδεια means shamelessness.

> The entire story has to do with honor and shame. It starts out with the host acting honorably to provide for the midnight guest, continues with the host then acting in a shameful manner toward the man in bed, and concludes with the latter dealing with that shame in an honorable way.[57]

The shamelessness of the 'asking' friend enforces the 'asked' friend to give, otherwise, the 'asked' friend and eventually the whole village would be shameless as well.

This reading neglects the social value of the first century Mediterranean world. Asking something for friendship and hospitality's sake, albeit at midnight, is obviously not a shame. The 'asking' friend has sacrificed his bed time for his unexpected guest, now it is the turn of the 'asked' friend to also do so.

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54 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 125–26; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 88; van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours," 8–9.

55 Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus*, 181; Holmas, *Prayer and Vindication*, 135; Edwards, *The Gospel According* to Luke, 337.

56 Forbes, *The God of Old*, 78–79; Holmas, *Prayer and Vindication*, 135.

57 Walter L. Liefeld, "Parables on Prayer," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 251.

Furthermore, "It is never a burden but rather an honor and a privilege to be asked by a friend," as Nguyen correctly declares,[58] which many Asians hold till today. In this situation the 'asking' and the 'asked' friends are honored because the former is visited and the latter is asked for.

Second, shamelessness which refers to the 'asked' friend

Underlining that the focus of the parable is not on the 'asking' friend but on the assurance of giving, Jeremias asserts that referring ἀναίδεια to the 'asking' friend is absurd; the phrase διά γε τὴν ἀναίδειαν αὐτοῦ means 'because of his importunity' (or could be 'because of his shamelessness') and is applied to the 'asked' one. He must give, otherwise he loses his face before the villagers by tomorrow morning.[59]

Bailey asserts that the αὐτοῦ should be applied to the 'asked' friend because he is the actor in verse 8. He too asserts that the word ἀναίδεια renders to avoidance of shame, conveying positive quality. Criticizing Jeremias for changing the negative quality to positive one without explanation, Bailey provides the explanation. It occurs at the translation of the Aramaic to the Greek. The etymology of ἀναίδεια is αἰδώς which means both sense of shame (positive) and shame (negative). When an alpha private is added, in Greek it negates the first one, and the meaning becomes "without a sense of shame." However, in Aramaic it could change the second one, resulting in a positive sense; shame with negation means avoidance of shame. As a comparison Bailey gives an English word, "blame." When negation is added to the word "blame," it becomes "blameless" (positive).[60] Byrne, following Bailey's interpretation, emphasizes the contribution of honor and shame value (and parental love), which he calls human feeling, in constructing the meaning of the parable.[61]

Unconvinced with the mistranslation suggested by Bailey, Nolland suggested a cryptic idea due to the shamelessness of the 'asked' friend that is "*which would be brought to light if he refused the request for help*."[62] To disapprove the impossibility of shamelessness in the parable, Scott points out that the expression "you who are evil" in verse 13 is as negative as shamelessness in verse 8. Both serve to establish the theological significance of the "how much more" argumentation. Accordingly, translating ἀναίδεια with shamelessness is

58 Nguyen, "An Asian View of Biblical Hospitality," 25.

59 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 158–59.

60 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 132–33; Followed by Nguyen, "An Asian View of Biblical Hospitality," 36: He accepts both translations shamelessness and avoidance of shame.

61 Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 120–21.

62 Nolland, *Luke 9:21 – 18:34, 626*. Italic is mine.

relevant in the parable. "He has done out of shamelessness what he ought to have done out of honor."[63]

Accepting the two translations, shamelessness and avoidance of shame, Nguyen enhances the argumentation from his Vietnamese culture.

> The dilemma, however, is not whether he will give or not give, but rather how much he must give" since "when a friend/neighbor asks for a favor in Asian cultures and particularly the Vietnamese culture, s/he would minimize the request by half.[64]

Asked for three loaves of bread, he has to give at least six loaves. His shamelessness is his refusal because of his limited good. The 'asked' friend does not have more than what asked, therefore, he gives or not, both render shame to him. This is what Nguyen called double shame. This understanding is disputed by Eck on the grounds that avoidance of shame has the same meaning with "obtaining honor" which conveys a positive quality. Such use of ἀναίδεια is found nowhere in Greco-Roman and Jewish literatures.[65]

Third, shamelessness which refers to the 'asked' friend as fully negative sense

Oakman defines the stand of the patronage system in the parable; the act of giving in verse 8 is to make the 'asking' friend indebted to the 'asked' one.[66] Following him, Eck, using social-science interpretation which focuses on the limited good and patron-client relationship, takes verse 7 as a real refusal and shamelessness in a negative sense. The 'asked' friend is willing to help, not for friendship's sake but for balanced reciprocity (benefit from the transaction or barter). The 'asked' friend acts as a patron and then the 'asking' friend becomes client. He does this shameful action publicly and intentionally so that in the future when other neighbors come for a help, they know his rule: helping in order to be a patron.[67]

Arguing that it is Luke who sets the parable in the context of prayer, Eck emphasizes that the parable comprises not a vertical relationship of God and human, but a horizontal one, human to human. The character refers to the Kingdom of God, not to God. Jesus teaches that a neighbor must enact

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63 Scott, "Hear Then the Parable," 89, 91.

64 Nguyen, "An Asian View of Biblical Hospitality," 37.

65 Van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours," 8.

66 Douglas E. Oakman, "Money in the Moral Universe of the New Testament," in *The Social Setting of Jesus and The Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 344.

67 Van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours," 11.

generalized reciprocity (giving without expectation for return) to make the Kingdom of God visible to the world. The 'asked' friend fails to do so; he acts out of balanced reciprocity which is practiced in a world created by aristocratic society, the Roman and religious elite.

> In short, the parable 'makes it painfully clear what is needed for peasant and village is to act with integrity', integrity that visualized a different world within a world of oppression and exploitation. When neighbors exploit neighbors, they are not part of the kingdom. This was not the way to act.[68]

3.5. My Batak perspective

A social-science approach gives a significant contribution, yet, it cannot be applied to a text blindly because it could result in "uncontrolled and overly speculative projections … explain too much in terms of social factors (the New Testament documents are first and foremost religious/theological documents)."[69] The reading of Eck offers a speculative projection. He refutes prayer as the original setting of the parable and suggests the Kingdom of God instead. He, unfortunately, does not provide any evidence or indication in the parable that refers to the Kingdom of God. Even if his argument is adhered to, the explanation of the shamelessness of the 'asked' friend as an enforcement of patronage system is too forced.

As a hapax legomenon in the NT, the precise meaning of ἀναίδεια is not easy to decide. Therefore, the linguistic external evidences should not be the only consideration, but also the literary, cultural and social context of the parable. The literary context proves that the repudiation in verse 7 is merely a rhetorical device to underscore the absolute act of giving. That the friendship, hospitality, and honor and shame value is the social context of the parable is a consensus. These two considerations drive me to concur with the second group translating ἀναίδεια as shamelessness in terms of avoidance of shame. Whether ἀναίδεια conveys negative or positive nuance is not very crucial since the heart of the parable is not the motive of the giving but the assurance of giving.

I had a similar experience as an unexpected guest at midnight. On 3rd January 2012 my family was traveling from my mother-in-law's house back to our home, which is a four-hour drive. Unfortunately, after about an hour trip, around 12.15 a.m., the car broke down at a sharp turn with no street lights. On the left-hand side were bushes and on the right-hand side was a very small house that looked

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68 Van Eck, "When Neighbours Are Not Neighbours," 12.

69 Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNCT (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), 38.

like a shed. For about an hour while Donny (my husband) was trying his best to repair our car, I made phone-calls to some friends nearby to ask for help. All of them picked up my phone but all were on New Year's vacation out town. We felt very close to death because of all the vehicles that were passing us at high speed. Many of the drivers said bad words to Donny because our car was stopped at a very dangerous place. My 3-year-old daughter slept on my lap, my 6.5-year-old daughter and my 77-year-old mother were shaking with fear. This condition, in addition to darkness and the cold night wind, caused us to remain in the car even though every single second the car was at risk getting hit. Since Donny could not fix the car and no friend could come for a help, I, while holding my baby, ventured to cross the road to the hut while Donny stayed with my shivering family in the car. I had not knocked yet, a man came out from the house and welcomed me nicely. Fortunately, he and his son-in-law knew how to fix our car.

At the house lived a big family with some toddlers who were sleeping on a mat, although they had some bedrooms. The whole family was awake because of us. The mother and her married daughter gave us hot tea to warm our body; they also offered us a meal, which we refused to accept because it would cause an overburden to the host (though they showed none at all). Asking their toddlers to move to their bedrooms, they let my mom and my sleepy older daughter sleep on their mat using their pillows and blankets. Within one and a half hour the car was fixed, my family had a place to rest and their shaking has already gone. We did not know them, but they truly offered us hospitality as they treated us as kin. This is just one example of many hospitable actions in Batak culture in the present age. It is acknowledged that this practice has been declining due to the rise of individualism and the increased crime, but has not disappeared yet.

IV. Sacred texture of Luke 11:5–8

There is a significant challenge when this parable is isolated from its context, that is, no sacred texture. Conscientious interpreters, however, need to integrate the theological insights of verses 5–8 with the larger literary setting, verses 1–13, the teaching on prayer. Prayer is one of Luke's theological characteristics. Luke alone records that Jesus prayed at his baptism (3:21) and went to a deserted place to pray (5:16). The most distinctive feature of Luke is the parables on prayer:

the unjust judge and the widow (18:1–8), and the Pharisee and tax collector (18:9–14), in addition to the parable under examination.[70]

Due to prayer, the guarantee of "giving" in the context of friendship in verses 5–8 is elaborated in verses 9–13 in the context of household. "How much more God, the Father" in verse 13 functions as the theological application of the household parable[71] and by implication of the parable of the friend at midnight as well. Both, using the rhetorical phrase "which of you," end with an escalating theological message: when humans undoubtedly give what their friends/children ask, how much more God, the Father, does. God must give with absolute assurance.

The parable of the friend at midnight as a priestly wisdom rhetorolect, comprises, borrowing Bovon's term, a doctrinal thrust and an ethical thrust,[72] namely the approachable God and assurance for humans to pray. God's absolute assurance of giving signifies that God is approachable on the basis of God's fatherhood which Luke composes as an inclusio of 11:1–13. Luke previously records that in his prayer Jesus has addressed God as Father five times (10:21–22).[73] The fatherhood of God is the embodiment of one of God's main characteristics in Luke's parables, namely caring and loving.[74]

As a consequence, humankind has no reason not to approach God. Luke purposely sets the prayer teaching in a rhetorical move of 'how much more' from the lesser to the greater.[75] As someone asks a friend and a child his/her father with confidence, so should believers even more ask the loving and caring God. The fatherhood of God is the ground, on one hand, for the guarantee of God's giving and, on the other hand, for human confidence to approach God in prayer.

Conclusion

Inner texture analysis reveals that the context of the parable of the friend at midnight is prayer where God, the Father, is the primary subject and 'giving' is the main focus. It also reveals that the refusal in verse 7 is not a real one, but is

70 Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 241–42.
71 Holmas, *Prayer and Vindication*, 136.
72 Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary*, 103.
73 Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 438; Liefeld, "Parables on Prayer," 252.
74 There are two other main characters of God to be mentioned: the merciful and gracious God, and God the Sovereign Judge. Forbes, *The God of Old*, 244, 252.
75 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 179; Robbins, "Sociorhetorical Interpretation," 200.

a rhetorical device so as to leap to the crux of the issue that is the assurance of giving for the sake of friendship.

Although the excuses of the 'asked' friend are historically plausible due to house and sleeping conditions of first century Mediterranean people, as the intertexture unfolds, yet they are not due to the social convention of ancient oriental people. Social and cultural texture analysis, corroborated with my Batak perspective, discloses that the 'visiting' friend makes an unexpected visit as a practice of friendship which brings honor to the 'visited (asked)' friend, the 'asking' friend makes an unexpected request as a practice of friendship and hospitality, and the 'asked' friend gives what is needed for the sake of friendship, hospitality and honor and shame. The parable functioning as priestly wisdom rhetorolect, as sacred texture asserts, teaches the fatherhood of God; hence God is approachable and accordingly encourages believers to pray in confidence. Luke 11:5–8 contains an absolute assurance of giving in the context of prayer.

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A Japanese Ecofeminist Reading of John 1:14

Yoshimi Azuma

As a Christian woman, I consider myself as a minority in Japan. According to the survey in 2017, Christians in Japan number approximately 0.97 million, making up only 0.82 percent of the whole population.[1] In Japan, Christianity was prohibited from 1587 until 1873, which still has lasting impacts on society in various ways. To some extent, Christianity is still considered as a foreign religion violating Japanese traditions. Such bias against Christianity still exists, especially in the countryside where Buddhist and Shinto traditions are strong.

I was brought up by evangelical Christian parents in Japan. When I was nine, my family moved from Tokyo to Mie, a countryside with strong Buddhist and Shinto traditions. My family constituted the only Christians in the local community. We did not participate in children's activities in Sunday mornings, which caused controversy in the local community. Japan is a relatively homogeneous society with much social pressure to conform. As a child, I realized that living as a Christian in Japan meant living as a minority, sometimes even facing social conflicts. Although I was able to fit in the school and local community, I kept having a minority identity.

When I was 18, I moved back to Tokyo to study at International Christian University (ICU), Liberal Arts College founded by American missionaries after the World War II. At ICU, Christians were about 10 percent of students, a much higher rate than in Japanese society. At ICU, I was able to meet other Christians on campus for the first time in my life. However, I found out that most of the faculty members at ICU were liberal Protestants and that the evangelicals were in a minority. It was difficult for me to find out that as an evangelical Christian, I was a minority even among Japanese Christians.

At ICU, I changed my major from international studies to religion. As a Christian, I had a deep desire to know Christianity better. Knowing Christianity

1 Japan Missions Research. "JMR Report 2017," https://www.tci.ac.jp/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/JMR_report_2017.pdf.

better was to know myself better. I was strongly attracted to the academic study of Christianity, especially historical-critical studies of the New Testament and Hebrew Bible as well as systematic theology. It was inspiring and encouraging for me to learn that Christianity was more diverse and deeper than what I had been taught. I wrote my thesis "The Wisdom of God in Paul: an Exegesis of 1 Cor 1:18–2:16," under Prof. Takeshi Nagata, a Pauline scholar who had his Ph.D. at Princeton Theological Seminary. Studying under him, I started thinking about the possibility of studying in the USA.

To do my master's study, I studied under Prof. Takashi Onuki, a renowned scholar in early Christianity and Gnosticism, at the University of Tokyo, a national university. Prof. Onuki taught New Testament studies at the department of area studies, specifically in the Mediterranean world. At the University of Tokyo, New Testament studies was considered as a historical and philological discipline. While I pursued my academic study of Christianity, as a woman I did not feel comfortable at the University of Tokyo. At undergraduate level, female students are less than 20 percent of the whole students, and at graduate school, only about 23 percent are women. Being one of a few women on campus, I felt a sense of a minority, which I had never felt at ICU. Also, I felt a growing gap between an evangelical church I attended and academia. At the University of Tokyo, I studied the New Testament as a historical discipline without much theological interest, while at the evangelical church I attended, the academic study of the New Testament was considered as somewhat dangerously violating Christian faith. I wanted to see how the academic study of the New Testament can enrich and inspire the faith community and vice versa. I wanted to study the New Testament in an environment where academic research can be combined with theological interests and practice.

Thus, I entered a Ph.D. program at Emory University as a Fulbright scholar in 2005. At Emory University, I studied at Graduate Division of Religion while working as a TA at Candler School of Theology, a seminary associated with the United Methodist church. I attended an Episcopalian church in Atlanta where a seminarian from Candler School served. It was encouraging and inspiring to see how the academic study of the New Testament can enrich the preaching at the church. Additionally, attending the Episcopalian church not only deepened my spirituality but also inspired my study of the New Testament. I was able to combine the academic study of the New Testament with the practice of faith in church.

At Emory, I developed my interest in the narrative critical and theological approach to the New Testament. Moreover, I deepened my interest in the Hebrew Bible and the Qumran literature. I wrote my dissertation "Reading

John 11:1–12:11 through the Lens of the Resurrection in 1 Enoch," under Prof. Gail O'Day. My approach was a narrative critical and comparative approach. Although I did not take an explicitly feminist approach, I read the New Testament from women's perspectives.

In 2012, I started teaching at the School of Theology at Kwansei Gakuin University in Nishinomiya, Japan, a private university originally founded by Methodist missionaries in 1889. The School of Theology is a seminary approved by the United Church of Christ, a mainline Protestant church in Japan. At college, I teach both Christian and non-Christian students; while at graduate school, I teach mostly Master of Divinity students who plan to become pastors. Thus, I teach the New Testament in terms of both religious study and theological study.

An especially enriching opportunity for me to teach New Testament studies at Kwansei Gakuin has been a chapel hour held every weekday. Once or twice every semester, I need to give a short sermon based on a biblical passage at the chapel. Since non-Christian and Christian students attend the chapel, I try to make my sermons understandable to everyone. This has been an excellent opportunity for me to interpret the Bible within contemporary and theological contexts.

In 2019, with my colleagues, I started a research group project in ecofeminist biblical interpretation at Kwansei-Gakuin University Research Center for Christianity and Culture (RCC). Ecofeminist biblical interpretation is a development from ecofeminism (ecological-feminism). A term *ecofeminisme* was coined by a French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her *Le féminisme ou la mort*.[2] According to d'Eaubonne, ecofeminism is women's potential to bring about an ecological revolution. It is a third wave of feminism, "a convergence of ecology and feminism into a new social theory and political movement."[3] A Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara defines ecofeminism as a "philosophy, theology, and wisdom," a reaction against the destruction of the natural world and the oppression of women.[4] Ecofeminist theology attempts to rethink Christian tradition in a way that acknowledges the interconnectedness of the human beings to the ecosystem. In this understanding, the Mystery is immanent and

2 Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le féminisme ou la mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974).

3 Heather Eaton, "Ecofeminist Contributions to an Ecojustice Hermeneutics," in *Readings From the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 55. For this definition, Eaton cites: Noel Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 24; Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 39.

4 Ivone Gebara, "Ecofeminism," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russel and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 76.

not reduced to a masculine entity. Ecofeminism attempts an emancipation of not only women but also all marginalized beings, including animals.

Ecofeminist biblical interpretation is an approach to the Bible arising out of ecofeminism. Ecofeminist biblical interpretation criticizes the androcentric and anthropocentric interpretation and attempts to restore the voice of marginalized human beings, animals, plants and the Earth in the Bible. Ecofeminist biblical interpretation combines Biblical studies with other disciplines, including feminism, ecological studies, and environmental studies. Ecological and ecofeminist interpretation of biblical passages have been already published, including the Earth Bible series.[5] However, ecofeminist readings of more biblical passages still need to be done.

Ecofeminist biblical interpretation can make New Testament studies more "system relevant," especially in Japan, because it can respond to some of the most serious challenges Japan faces, namely, gender inequality and environmental problems. Gender inequality has been one of the biggest challenges in Japan, a strongly patriarchal country. Japan ranked 120st out of 156 countries in Global Gender Gap Report in 2020.[6] The gender gap is especially large in politics, economics, and academia. In 2018, it was revealed that several medial schools had been systematically tampering with the scores of female students in order to reduce the number of female entering students. Such gender inequality was accepted as a necessary evil because medical schools needed more male students to work at their hospitals after graduation. Women also face discrimination upon graduation. It is much more difficult for women to get a full-time job than men. This is largely because of the widely accepted gender role division according to which men are expected to work long time, while women are to stay home to raise children. Such a gender role division is still a part of the Japanese society and is widely accepted especially by conservative Christians. Patriarchalism of Judaism and Christianity in the Bible has been easily combined with patriarchalism of Japanese society. Unfortunately, some biblical passages have been used to strengthen patriarchalism in Japanese society.

Another challenge of Japan is environmental one. Since Japan is located in the area where several continental and oceanic plates meet, earthquakes and

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5 According to Eaton ("Ecofeminist Contributions to an Ecojustice Hermeneutics," 57), the samples of ecofeminist biblical interpretations include: Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalyptic to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism, and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 222–44; Anne Clifford, "When Being Human Becomes Truly Earthly," in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann O'Hara Graff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 173–89.

6 World Economic Forum. "Global Gender Gap Report 2021," http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf.

tsunamis occur frequently. The consequences from Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear disasters in 2011 are still large. In 2020, 37000 people are still evacuated from Fukushima because of the earthquake and the nuclear disaster. The 371 square kilometer land in Fukushima still remains to be the evacuation designated zones.[7] The problem of the contaminated water in Fukushima has caused much tension with surrounding countries. While the contamination of water and land in Fukushima exists, people in Fukushima suffer from prejudice and discrimination because of fear of radiation. Although the radiation level of many areas in Fukushima is safe and agricultural products in Fukushima have passed strict radiation tests, fear and prejudice still exist. While the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquakes remains, the risk of typhoons and heavy rain increased due to the climate change. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, Japan is ranked the fourth country after Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the Bahamas that was most affected by the extreme weather in 2019.[8]

Thus, gender inequality and environmental risks are some of the most serious challenges of Japan. Ecofeminist biblical interpretation can help to address these issues and thus can make New Testament studies more "system relevant" in Japan. In our research project of ecofeminist biblical interpretation, we attempt to put New Testament studies in more active conversation with systematic theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie Macfague and Ivone Gebara. Our research team attempts to bring New Testament studies into fuller conversation with ecofeminist theology, thus trying to address theological questions as well as social questions. Some of the questions include: How can New Testament studies support ecofeminist theology that enables us to live a life that is more responsible for the Earth? What passages in the New Testament can support and enrich ecofeminist theology?

An ecofeminist interpretation: An interpretation of John 1:14

The Johannine prologue, which speaks of the creation of all things by *Logos* (1:3–4) and incarnation (1:14), has been considered a significant but controversial

7 Fukushima Prefectural Government. "Transition of evacuation designated zones," *Fukushima Prefecture*, https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal-english/en03-08.html#:~:text=Currently%2C%20the%20evacuation%20designeted%20zones,Return%20zones)%20have%20been%20lifted.

8 Eckstein, David, Künzel, Vera and Schäfer, Laura. "Global Climate Risk Index 2021," https://germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_2.pdf.

passage in ecological and ecofeminist biblical interpretation. Norman Habel finds problematic dimensions in the prologue, namely dualism that devalues the Earth and the physical universe. According to Habel, the way in which the creation process is described in John 1 implies the existence of a pre-creation spiritual world and the post-creation material world, which is absent from the creation account in Genesis.[9] However, such a division of a pre-creation spiritual world and the post-creation material world is not attested in John 1. Habel does not consider seriously the implications of the creation of everything by the *Logos* in 1:3–4 and the incarnation expressed in 1:14, especially in relation to 1:13. Concerning the incarnation, Habel raises the following questions: "does 'flesh' here mean more than human flesh? Is Word connecting here with more than humans or only with humans? Is Earth again relegated to the margin?"[10] In this essay, I will argue that the incarnation concerns not only human beings but also all living creatures. Flesh is not limited to humans, but all beings, all creatures. By the incarnation, the *Logos* is connecting not only with humans, but also with all living creatures, including the Earth. The interpretation of the prologue, focusing on John 1:14, will show how ecofeminist biblical interpretation can make New Testament studies more "system relevant."

1:10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 1:11 He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him. 1:12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 1:13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 1:14 And the *Logos* became flesh and tabernacled among us and we saw his glory, glory of the only Son from Father, full of grace and truth.

The first reference to flesh in the prologue is made in 1:13, which makes an implicite contrast between human birth and birth from God. Human birth is expressed in three phrases: "of blood(s)", "of the will of the flesh," "of the will of a man." While the third phrase specifically refers to human aspect of the birth, the first two phrases "of blood(s)" and "of the will of the flesh" are not limited to human birth, but can refer to animal birth. Thus, "blood" and "flesh" accentuate the physical and natural aspects of birth. Together with the last phrase "of the human will," human birth is defined negatively in 1:13, contrasted with the divine birth. To become "children of God" is not a physical and human birth, but a divine birth.

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9 Norman Habel, "An Ecojustice Challenge: Is Earth Valued in John 1?" in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, ed. Norman Habel (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 77–78.

10 Habel, "An Ecojustice Challenge: Is Earth Valued in John 1?", 81.

This negative use of flesh is followed immediately by the reference to the incarnation: "And the *Logos* became flesh." The *Logos* became physical, natural and perishable flesh. Interpreters have debated if the *Logos* really "became" flesh, or just lived in the earthly sphere. Ernst Käsemann emphasizes creatureliness of "flesh."[11] He sees the nuance of creatureliness in flesh and says that the paradox of 1:14a is "in the fact that the Creator enters the world of createdness and in so doing exposes himself to the judgment of the creature." However, Käsemann interprets "the *Logos* became flesh" as the *Logos*' change of the location and not of his nature. He says, "'The presence of God' on earth is the real goal of the becoming flesh."[12] Arguing against Käsemann, interpreters attempted to show that the *Logos* really "became" flesh. In this controversy, the emphasis was placed on the change of the *Logos*' nature. In this discussion, the meaning of "flesh" was interpreted primarily as humanity.[13]

However, "flesh" is not synonymous with humanity, since the frailty and creatureliness of "flesh" is not limited to humanity but is shared by other living creatures. Many interpreters stress the frailty, mortality and transitoriness of flesh in the Hebrew Bible.[14] Jörg Frey rightly says that σάρξ is "the perishable par excellence" and emphasizes that it is precisely this perishable aspect of flesh that promoted John to choose σάρξ instead of ἄνθρωπος.[15] He also points out that

11 Ernst Käsemann ("The Prologue to John's Gospel," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W. J. Montague [London: SCM Press, 1969], 158) cites Barret's definition of flesh as "*sarx* in John .... stands for humanity over against God" and says what is meant is "creatureliness in the whole range of its possibilities. The paradox…in 1.14a consists in the fact that the creator enters the world of createdness and in so doing exposes himself to the judgment of the creature."

12 Käsemann, "The Prologue to John's Gospel," 158.

13 For example, Marianne Meye Thompson's discussion in *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988) centers around the humanity of Jesus. Although she admits that the Gospel of John does not repudiate Jesus' "solidarity with the world and its inhabitants" (121), her discussion of flesh focuses on the humanity of Jesus.

14 Rudolf Schnackenburg (*The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. Cecily Hastings [Virginia, VA: Seabury Press, 1980], 1:267) says *sarx* "expresses that which is earth-bound…, transient and perishable." Rudolf Bultmann (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. Noel Hoare and Kenneth Riches, trans. George R. Beasley-Murray [Oxford: Blackwell, 1971], 62) similarly argues that *sarx* in the Gospel of John signifies "transitoriness, helplessness and vanity" of the world in relation to salvation. John McHugh (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1–4*, ICC, ed. Graham Stanton [London: T&T Clark, 2009], 53) says, "Flesh is the most vulnerable, the most corruptible, the most easily destructible, part of the human being."

15 Jörg Frey, "The Incarnation of the Logos and the Dwelling of God in Jesus Christ," in *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 281.

"the Old Testament connotation of the frailty and perishability, indeed mortality, appears to be in view (cf. Gen 6:3; Isa 40:6–7; Jer 17:5; Sir 14:17–18)."[16] Most of the examples in the Old Testament usage of "flesh" refer to the whole living creature (Gen 6:13, Job 34:14–15), as is shown by the peculiar expression "all flesh" (Isa 40:6–7; Sir 14:17–18). The choice of the word σάρξ suggests that the impact of the incarnation is not limited to humanity, but extends to all living creatures. By becoming "flesh," the *Logos* shows mutuality not only with human beings, but also with all corruptible, vulnerable, mortal living creatures.

This interpretation is supported by the use of "all flesh" in John 17:2a in the farewell discourse: "Just as you gave to him authority over *all flesh*, so that everything which you have given him, he might give them eternal life." "All flesh" in 17:2a can include all living creatures, as in the Hebrew Bible.[17] Also, as Dorothy Lee points out, the use of the neuter form "everything which" (17:2, 24; 6:37, 39) can also include all living creatures beyond human beings.[18] In the prologue, it is declared that "everything (neutral) came into being through him and without him, not one thing (neutral) came into being." (1:3) The use of the neutral form emphasizes that what was created by the *Logos* was not limited to humans. One can see the correspondence between the prologue and the farewell discourse. Lee says,

> The Son's dominion over 'all flesh' in creation is set alongside the assertion that the Word/Son became flesh. The two seeming contradictions coalesce: the one who formed flesh is himself formed by flesh; the Creator of *all living creatures* becomes a living creature; flesh stands alongside flesh. The dominion exercised "from above" now arises "from below," out of the earth, bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh (Gen 2:23). The fashioner of all things is himself fashioned. Divine glory radiates now *not from heaven alone but from within the very core of earth*. … We cannot read the phrase 'all flesh' on the lips of the departing Redeemer without awareness that it is the same creatureliness that the eternal, glorified Son shares: at one with all living beings.[19]

As Lee rightly emphasizes, "flesh" highlights "creatureliness" that is not limited to human beings but is shared by all living creatures. The incarnation accentu-

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16 Frey, "The Incarnation of the Logos and the dwelling of God in Jesus Christ," 281.

17 Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 43. Jürgen Moltmann ("God in the World—the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008], 375) also sees a reference to all creatures in this passage.

18 Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 44.

19 Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 45. Emphasis added.

ates that the *Logos* became a living creature and shared its creatureliness, *i.e.* the creator became the created being.

Considering this wide scope of flesh in 1:14a, it may be possible to see the wide implications of the incarnation in 1:14b "and tabernacled among us." In the verb "tabernacle" (σκηνόω), it may be possible to see the implications that the *Logos* lived a temporary and vulnerable life of a creature. As Craig Koester points out, the verb form "to tabernacle/dwell" (σκηνόω) shows the word play.[20] The noun σκηνή was used for the Israelite tabernacle, where God spoke with Moses (Exod 33:9) and showed his glory (Exod 40:34). Thus, while the verb form connotes the idea of glory, the cognate words σκῆνος and σκήνωμα, used for the tabernacle of the human body (σκῆνος Wis 9:15; 2 Cor 5:1, 4; 4 Bar 6:6–7; σκήνωμα 2 Pet 1:13–15), are connected with the concept of "flesh." These cognate words σκῆνος and σκήνωμα emphasize the perishability and temporariness of human body. Thus, such a word play accentuates that the *Logos*' tabernacling took the form of the perishable and temporary human body.

Also, the verb form (σκηνόω) and its noun form tabernacle (σκηνή) contain the implication of the vulnerability and temporariness. The verb σκηνόω is used rarely, only five occurrences in LXX (Gen 13:12; Judg 5:17 [in B x2]: 8:11; 3 Kgdms 8:12). In LXX, all occurrences of the verb σκηνόω refer to human living in tent, except for 3 Kgdms 8:12 which speaks of Lord's living in cloud. These usages accentuate the temporariness of the tent living, while the compound verb κατασκηνόω, used more than 60 times in LXX, emphasizes the idea of a long and permanent residence. While John MacHugh argues that the sense of the tent living, even metaphorically, is not the sense of John 1:14, I see no reason why it should be excluded in John 1:14. In NT, all the other occurrences of the verb σκηνόω are concentrated in the book of Revelation (7:15;12:12;13:6; 21:3), two of which (7:15; 21:3) refer to God's presence in the eschatological future.[21] Revelation 21:3 is especially important: "See, the tabernacle (σκηνή) of God is among the people (μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων). He will dwell with them (σκηνώσει μετ' αὐτῶν); they will be his people, and God himself will be with them" (21:3). Here, God's presence among the humans is expressed using the imagery of the tabernacle, not the temple, on the new earth.

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20 Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament*, CBQMS 22 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989), 102.

21 7:15 is in relation to the temple. God will pitch a tent over those who serve God in the temple.

The tabernacle—the tent—is fragile, temporary and portable, and has the possible implication of mortality, as in the cognate words.[22] Gerald West argues that although the association with the glory in the tabernacle has led readers in the direction of power, the verb σκηνόω shows the image of temporariness and vulnerability of tent living, of nomads or of refugee camps on the margins.[23] Also, Margaret Daly-Denton says:

> the tent-pitching imagery makes the point that the Word is actually sharing in the common experience of all life on Earth: that death is inevitable… Maybe, then, the verb *eskēnōsen* emphasizes the condition of the Word made flesh as an earthling, camping in a temporary and insubstantial dwelling and sharing the ultimate fate of every living creature.[24]

The aspect of mortality and vulnerability is not limited to human beings, but is shared by all other creatures. From the fact that the verb is used in close proximity with the word *sarx*, Mary L. Coloe argues that the emphasis is on the mortality of flesh and that the death of Jesus is already intimated in the prologue.[25] Whether or not Jesus' crucifixion is in view in this verse, the *Logos*' becoming flesh and living among us shows that the *Logos*, by pitching a tent among us, shared the vulnerability and temporality of mortal creatures.

If we take seriously the temporary and vulnerable aspects of the tabernacle as a dwelling, it can be a positive symbol for many today, especially marginalized people and earth creatures. After the natural disasters, many people are forced to live in tents and even in 2021, people are still forced to live in temporary housings after the East Great Earthquake in Japan. The *Logos* "tabernacled among us" can have the implications that the *Logos* lived in a temporary and vulnerable way,

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22 Interpreters disagree whether the choice of the verb σκηνόω, instead of the compound verb shows the transitoriness. McHugh argues that "it is hard to think it was because he wished to stress that Jesus' life on earth was so transitory" (55). On the other hand, Clements thinks that the verb form shows impermanence. God was not permanently bound to one place. Ronald E. Clements, *God and Temple: The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 117.

23 Gerald West, "Year B: The Word Series; First Sunday in Creation: Earth Sunday," in *Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*, ed. Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads, and H. Paul Santmire (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 138.

24 Margaret Daly-Denton, *John: An Earth Bible Commentary: Supposing Him to be the Gardener* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 36. Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School*, trans. Linda Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 222, sees in this verb the reference to the mortal human body as in the cognate words.

25 Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 25.

thus showing mutuality with all the marginalized people who are forced into a tent living.

Furthermore, if we take seriously the implications of "flesh" and "pitching a tent/tabernacle," then "among us" can include all living creatures and possibly the earth itself. McHugh says, "among us" refers first to those who personally saw Jesus (1 John 1:1), secondly to that particular generation, Jewish or Gentile; thirdly by extension to "all who hear the Gospel story to the end of time; and to all the human race."[26] We can further extend the scope beyond the human race to all flesh, all living creatures. As Daly-Denton says:

> biblical understanding of *sarx* may well urge us, in an eco-hermeneutical reading, to read the 'us' among whom the Word pitched his tent as the whole Earth community and not just human beings. 'Flesh' is a far broader reality than 'humanity' and, as we are learning from the geneticists and biologists, we are not a solo species; we are related to all other 'flesh' with whom we share the same remote origin in the dust of exploding stars.[27]

Such understanding of the incarnation fits the declaration in the prologue that everything, including all other creatures, happened through the *Logos* (1:3).

We may extend the implication of the incarnation further to the earth itself. In the Gospel of John, the *kosmos* is the object of God's saving will. "For God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (3:16). Also, the world is the object of the life giving of the bread of God: "For the bread of God is that who comes down from heaven and gives life to the *world*." (6:33); "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the *world*." (6:51) God gives life not only to human believers, but also to the *kosmos*, the earth itself including all living creatures, the land and water. The incarnation also shows the implications of the *Logos*' mutuality with the earth. When we consider seriously the implications of the verb "to pitch a tent," we can see the earthly implications. The *Logos* pitched the tent among the vulnerable creatures on the earth, thus showing mutuality with the land and the earth. Thus, it is true that, as Käsemann insists, by the incarnation, the *Logos* lived in the earthly sphere. More precisely, the *Logos* became a human, a vulnerable earth creature, and lived a temporary and vulnerable earthly life among us, among all vulnerable earth creatures.

This understanding of the incarnation opens a new perspective on salvation in Christian theology. The *Logos*' becoming flesh and living a temporary

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26 McHugh, *John 1–4*, 56.
27 Daly-Denton, *John*, 35.

and vulnerable life among us shows that mortality and vulnerability of earth creatures are not something to overcome. According to Gebara, the primal sin is not "a disobedience that caused us to fall into a mortality to which we were not originally subjected." Rather, it "lies in the effort to escape from mortality, finitude, and vulnerability."[28] Gebara points out that while the desire to escape from mortality may have been a part of human nature, it took organized forms with the rise of powerful males who attempted to monopolize power over other humans, land, and animals. For Gebara, such an attempt to dominate others represents an attempt to rise superior to death itself. "For them the ultimate power over others was to rise superior to death itself, to organize their power to assure themselves of an invulnerability to that finitude that is the common lot of earth creatures."[29] With Gebara, Ruether argues that in this process of domination to flee from vulnerability, women became particular targets because "they represented man's finitude origins and the realities of earth-bound pain and limits. To rule over and to flee from women, the body, and the earth was to seek to conquer and flee from one's own denied finitude."[30] Gebara and Ruether argue that Christian theology needs a new understanding of sin and salvation and should give up the concept of the future paradise where tragedy and death are overcome. Instead, the newly understood paradise should be "a community of mutual life-giving where we can hold one another in the celebrative as well as the tragic moments of our common life as earth creatures."[31] The interpretation of the incarnation as God's showing of mutuality with the perishable beings could provide a basis for this new understanding of salvation in ecofeminist theology.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to show an ecofeminist interpretation of the Johannine prologue, especially John 1:14. John 1:14 can be interpreted to mean that the *Logos* became a temporary and vulnerable living creature and led a temporary and vulnerable life among earth creatures. The implication of the incarnation is that the *Logos* showed mutuality not only with human beings, but

28 Ivone Gebara, *Teología Ritmo de Mujer* (Madrid: San Pablo, 1995), 146–56 cited in Rosemary Ruether, "Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 105.

29 Ruether, "Ecofeminism," 105.

30 Ruether, "Ecofeminism," 105.

31 Ruether, "Ecofeminism," 106.

also with all the perishable and fragile living creatures, and possibly the earth itself. Such an understanding of the incarnation supports the new understanding of sin and salvation in Christian theology. In this new understanding, sin is an escape from vulnerability itself. Thus, salvation is not understood as an overcoming of death, but rather as accepting vulnerability and death and building a mutual community of life-giving.

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Transformative Reading of Women, Childbirth and Death in John’s Gospel from an African and Intercultural Perspective

Kenneth Mtata

Introduction

On 16 July 2021, a 15-year-old Anna Machaya “died from excessive bleeding, hours after she gave birth at a shrine of the Johane Marange apostolic sect near Mutare,” in Zimbabwe.[1] This story has made headlines because of campaigns by ecumenical groups and civil society organizations, but according to the report of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, “is just a tip of an iceberg. Many girls have lost their lives under circumstances identical to Anna’s fate. Others survived but their future, their dreams, their rights, their liberty and freedom were stolen in a similar fashion.”[2] In a deeply religious context like Zimbabwe and Africa at large, one cannot think about lasting solutions to such a crisis without re-reading the sacred religious texts that shape harmful ideas and practices of faith communities.[3]

This paper focuses on the “birthing” texts,[4] the pericopes of the wedding at Cana,[5] that of Jesus’ meeting the Samaritan woman[6] and the pericope on Jesus’ mother at the cross[7] in light of the experiences of women in Africa in

1 Zim Live News, “Anna Machaya’s Parents Spared Jail for Misleading Detectives over her age: Court Hands out Suspended 9-month Jail Sentence,” *ZimLive.com*, https://www.zimlive.com/2022/01/14/anna-machayas-parents-spared-jail-for-misleading-detectives-over-her-age/.

2 Zimbabwe Gender Comission, “Statement On The International Day Of The Girl Child-11 October,” *zgc.co.zw*, 2021 https://zgc.co.zw/statement-on-the-international-day-of-the-girl-child-11-october-2021/.

3 The author is fully aware of the fact that some of these African Indigenous Churches do not use the bible as such, although the stories of the bible are orally drawn upon.

4 John 1:13; 3:3ff; 8:41; 9:2, 19f, 32, 34; 16:21; 18:37.

5 John 2:1–12.

6 John 4.

7 John 20.

general but in Zimbabwe in particular. Although much benefit has already been attained from feminist readings of the Bible both in the academy and also in the church, where “many women and not a few men seek ways of liberating the word to speak the gospel in the midst of oppressive situations of our time,”[8] such readings have not yet translated themselves into practices that are a life-giving and transformative, especially in those contexts where Christianity is growing the fastest, in Africa. One of the important methodological contributions of the feminist approach is its challenge as a field of academic biblical studies which tends to be ‘neutral’ on social injustice, preferring rather to look at objective exegesis of the biblical text. They have shown that the commitment to the “historical fact”, which is the commitment of some methods may miss that these facts are “always “narrative laden” and that “the interpreter is not able to step outside the hermeneutical circle.”[9] In this light, this paper does not claim “value neutrality”, but commits to “public consciousness”, declares willingness to discussing my “values, interests, commitments, presuppositions and social political location.”[10]

But how is this achieved without going to the text to tell it to the reader what they want to hear? It happens when the reader is self-critical and reflective on what they are doing. Particularly, this is enhanced by entering into serious conversation with those who do not share one’s background and orientation—that is, by being intercultural. Ideological commitment should not mean insularity.[11]

One can observe struggles of being rigorous in engaging scriptures on the one hand and checking on what agenda you are pursuing. Even the most experienced of scholars will struggle with self-awareness. A cursory look at the studies on women in John, in this light, will show that sometimes the struggles outside

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8 Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 11.

9 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Y. Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 48, as cited in: Patrick J. E. Chatelion Counet, *John, a Postmodern Gospel: Introduction to Deconstructive Exegesis Applied to the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 144.

10 Schüssler Fiorenza, “Remembering the Past,” 53.

11 Here I follow Peter Scott who himself follows José Míguez Bonino in that “I do not distinguish between ideology in a negative sense (as hiding reality) and ideology in a positive sense (as a mobilizing force) nor do I distinguish between an unconscious and a conscious ideology.” José Míguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 51–52, as cited in: Peter Scott, *Theology, Ideology and Liberation: Towards a Liberative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 24, footnote 8.

of readers can be brought to bear on the text without being transparent that that it is what is happening. This is true whether one is using diachronic or synchronic approaches. For example, in his investigation on *Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel*,[12] Raymond Brown does now clearly state that in looking at the "Johannine community" outside the text and how this community is reflected in the text, he is actually struggling with the contemporary Roman Catholic Church's theology and practice of ministry which does not include women in ministry. A closer reading of other Catholic theologians such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,[13] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor,[14] Francis J. Moloney,[15] Sandra Schneiders,[16] and Margaret Beirne[17] shows that some scholars are explicit about the debates outside the text and how they seek to hear afresh what the text says within the contemporary context in society and the church.

As mentioned above, this paper lays bare its "presuppositions and social political location": it seeks to see if there is anything redemptive in the text on women, childbirth and death in the gospel of John. The intention is to appropriate this redemptive dimension of these texts to facilitate engagement and transformation of situations of oppression of women that leads them to death physically, spiritually and psychologically.

This paper seeks to go beyond the tendency to juxtaposition women and men in John which is common in some characterization. In this approach, which I consider too simplistic, effort is put to compare female and male characters in John, in the hope of showing how women in the gospel fared better than men. So for example, some studies came to the unsupportable conclusion that male authority was contested in the Johannine community and early church.[18] This circular argument begins by assuming the existence of an imaginary "Johannine community" where female leadership of Mary Magdalene was in competition with male leadership of Peter.[19] This is obviously an anachronistic reading

12 Raymond Brown, "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," *TS* 36 (1975): 688–99.

13 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origin* (New York: Crossroads, 1983).

14 Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "A Feminist Re-Reads the New Testament," *DL* 34 (1984): 398–404.

15 Francis J. Moloney, *Mary: Woman and Mother* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009).

16 Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

17 Margaret Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

18 Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene: The First Apostle; the Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

19 Colleen Conway, "Gender Matters in John," in *Feminist Companion to the early Christian Writings*, vol. 5, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (New York: Sheffield, 2003), 79–103, 81.

of contemporary gender justice struggles that could be addressed without overstretching the text. While there could be benefit in comparing the response of the Samaritan woman with that of Nicodemus to the message of Jesus, a purely binary relationship will not be beneficial. Suggesting that there could be a "Petrine tradition" familiar to the author is also not helpful if such a tradition cannot be established outside the text.[20]

Women in ordinary life in the first century

Women's experiences have always been shaped by the social, economic, and political power at their disposal. This is why it is difficult to generalize women's experiences even in John's gospel especially if we do not know their location in life. There are general experiences of women that we however know to have transcended the class. These can help us to be close to understanding the reality of the women we are reading in the text. What is clear is that women carried some unique responsibilities "foreign to men" such as giving birth, "midwifery, nursing, healing, and comforting mourners", etc.[21] We can look at some of these as they are referred to in John.

Mother and woman

How John calls women is helpful for our purpose. An overview reading will show the following categories such as "woman" (γυνή), "mother" (μήτηρ), "bride" (νύμφη), "sister" (ἀδελφή) and, to a lesser extent, "daughter" (θυγάτηρ). Due to limited space for detailed analysis of each category, I concentrate on the uses of "woman" and "mother." The notion of "mother" (μήτηρ), which occurs eleven times in John, exclusively refers to the mother of Jesus (2:1, 3, 5, 12; 6:42; 19:25) and only once it is used in the metaphor of childbirth as is presented to Nicodemus by Jesus. Nicodemus is asking whether one could enter his or her mother's womb to be born for the second time (3:4).

In our judgement, "mother" (μήτηρ) in John represents affection, care and closeness of relationship. Jesus and his mother relate in the familial context of weddings (2:1) and at home in Capernaum (2:12).[22] At the wedding, his

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20 Conway, "Gender," 81.

21 Éthan Levine, *Marital relations in Ancient Judaism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 145. See also Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

22 Regarding Capernaum as a possible home of Jesus I follow Peter Richardson who set Cana and Capernaum 'alongside each other as literary rivals for Jesus' home base.' He

mother observes and shares with Jesus that they no longer have wine (2:3). Jesus responds, with neither a harsh nor disrespectful retort,[23] in which he does not use "mother" (μήτηρ) but uses the vocative, "woman" (γύναι), in reference to his mother (2:4). Immediately the narrative reverts to the use of "'mother" (μήτηρ) where Jesus' mother tells the servants to do everything Jesus says to them (2:5). The last time "mother" (μήτηρ) is used is in the reference to Jesus' mother standing at the cross together with Jesus' aunt and Mary Magdalene (19:25). In this illuminating episode at the cross (19:26), Jesus sees his mother (μήτηρ) and the disciple he loved and then he calls his mother, "woman!" Here γυνή is used for the second time in reference to Jesus' mother. But she does not end as γυνή but as the "mother" (μήτηρ) of the beloved disciple: "Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' (ἡ μήτηρ σου) And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (19:27).

From this brief overview, we see that "mother" (μήτηρ) is used in close relationship and the prototype of such close relationship is that of Jesus and his mother which is passed on to the beloved disciple.

Having looked at "mother" in its exclusive reference to Jesus' mother, it is important that we also look at the use of "woman" (γυνή). "Woman" (γυνή) occurs twenty-two times and exclusively refers to other characters[24] apart from the two instances when it is used in the vocative case (2:4 and 19:26) in reference to the mother of Jesus as has been pointed above. We can observe that while μήτηρ has been used in Jesus' affectionate, maternal, and familial relationship, it is not the case with "woman" (γυνή). The two times Jesus uses it in reference to his mother, Jesus is setting demarcations of relationship. According to Barrett, the words, τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοι (literally: what for you and for me?) (2:4) are spoken by demons when they refute the timing of the coming of Jesus.[25] When the same words are used by Jesus in reference to his mother, whom he addresses here as "woman'" (γύναι), the reference represents distance, but also transition, especially when he uses the same designation for his mother as he hands his custodianship of her to the beloved disciple.

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thinks that the competing presence of Cana and Capernaum could reflect the existence of 'small Johannine communities in Judea, Galilee, Samaria and Peraea in the early period, rivalling for example, Petrine communities, especially in Capernaum.' See Peter Richardson, "What has Cana to do with Capernaum?" *NTS* 48 (2002): 314–31, 316, 324.

23 At least this is the position of many Johannine scholars. See for example Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1978), 191.

24 John 4:7, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27f, 39, 42. (I did not consider John 8:3f, 9f in this discussion.) John 16:21; 20:13, 15.

25 Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 191.

Further, if we exclude its usage in John 8, "woman" (γυνή) and its vocative reference to Jesus' mother, this designation is mainly used in John 4, in reference to the woman of Samaria and in John 20:13–15 in reference to the metaphorical woman in childbirth sorrow. Furthermore, these share some common elements. In her conversation with Jesus, the woman of Samaria is presented in many ways as the "other" or different. She is initially portrayed as aloof as she stands alone before a man at the well. She has no idea who this man is. She is in need of that living water that will stop her from coming to the well over and over again. She has no husband. Even the one she currently has is not hers. She is indeed alone.

But this is transitory characterization. She soon discovers that Jesus is a prophet. From there on she no longer speaks in the singular but collective: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain…" (4:20). She is no longer isolated, but one who belongs. Indeed, Jesus also stops addressing her as an individual. She and those to whom she belongs will no longer worship (in plural, προσκυνήσετε) (4:21) on the mountain, but in spirit and truth. As soon as she discovers with whom she is conversing, she rushes to the city to mobilize her own people (4:28). She is no longer alone because the people come after her to meet Jesus (4:30). Even though the city people claim they believe not because of the words of the woman (τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναικὸς) (4:39, 42), maybe for cultural reasons,[26] they come at her invitation. The narrative presents the designation of this typical "woman" (γυνή) as that which goes through transformation as the narrative progresses.

The other "woman" (γυνή) pericope before the last one at the resurrection narrative is the metaphorical woman whose pain at birth is contrasted with the joy of holding the baby as discussed above (16:21). She goes through a process of change characterized by extreme pain. Before she becomes the mother of the new-born baby, she is simply a "woman" (γυνή) going through labor pains just as Jesus' mother is "woman" before she is the "mother" of the beloved disciple. This transition is also demonstrated by yet another "woman" (γυνή) of John 20:13–15. From verse 11 to 12, the narrator knows that the woman who is weeping has a name, and her name is Mary Magdalene. But the resurrected

26 The value of the testimony of women in various Jewish cases is contested. But Josephus says that in "Jewish law, women are disqualified as witnesses (*Ant.* 4.219)" (Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 163; see *Ant.* 4.219: γυναικῶν δὲ μὴ ἔστω μαρτυρία διὰ κουφότητα καὶ θράσος τοῦ γένους αὐτῶν· μαρτυρείτωσαν δὲ μηδὲ δοῦλοι διὰ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀγένειαν, οὓς ἢ διὰ κέρδος εἰκὸς ἢ διὰ φόβον μὴ τἀληθῆ μαρτυρῆσαι). But there are also other examples where the testimony of women was given the same value as that of men. See Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 165–66.

Jesus calls her "woman" (γυνή) (20:13) as "she did not know that it was Jesus" (20:14). She is comparable to the woman of Samaria in John 4 in that initially she does not know who she is talking to. But this is a transitory state; soon she will know. At the moment she is "woman" (γυνή). Like the other five vocative addresses, in this case it is also used to define the turning point of the narrative in which the addressee is going through her transformation: "Woman, why are you weeping?" (20:15). Only when her ignorance reaches its climax in not recognizing Jesus who is speaking to her as she responds, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away" (20:15), is her designation changed. Here Jesus addresses her with her name: Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbuni!" (which means teacher) (20:16). Where "woman" (γυνή) is used, the narrative accelerates towards a climax of transformation. In this sense, "mother" and "woman" are comparable gender categories that provide insights into how the fourth gospel's gender construction is characterized by such transformation.

What we can see from the usage of mother and woman are categories of affection and transition to higher insight or revelation. They are viewed as mothers by others, but go through a process of enlightenment and empowerment themselves.

Childbirth

Ilan points out that the injunction to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28) held a central place in the social, political and spiritual contexts of the Second Temple period.[27] In this regard, childbirth was both an "event" and also a "metaphor" or carrier of potent ideas.[28] The Gospel of John uses this metaphor of birthing to transport a number of theological ideas. In its first reference to giving birth, the Gospel begins by positing the possibility of miraculous birth of those who would believe, unlike Jesus' miraculous birth as in Matthew and Luke. These are born (ἐγεννήθησαν) of God, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh and not of the will of a man (θελήματος ἀνδρὸς) (1:13).[29] In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, this process is called being "born again" or "from above" (γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν), without which one cannot see the kingdom of God (3:3). Nicodemus' challenge is whether one can return to one's mother's belly (κοιλίαν τῆς μητρὸς)

27 Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 105.

28 Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1–18* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

29 This "community formulation" is used in 2:23 and 3:18, but also in 1 John 3:23 and 5:13 (Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1–6*, trans. Robert W. Funk [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984], 118).

and be born for the second time (3:4). This birth of water and spirit, responds Jesus, is imperative if one is to participate in the kingdom because that which is "born from the flesh is flesh and what is born from the Spirit is spirit" (3:6) and it is possible to be part of those born from the spirit (ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος) (3:8). According to John, there is a difference between being born of God or the spirit and being born of blood, human desire, and the will of a man. Nevertheless, in being born of human will, there are two possibilities, namely being born of known parentage or being born out of adultery. The Johannine Jesus' opponents vehemently reject any suggestion that they could be of any parentage other the one which they claim, that of Abraham. They protest that they are not "born of fornication" (ἐκ πορνείας οὐ γεγεννήμεθα), but have one legitimate father who is God (8:41). The act of childbirth brings with it sorrow associated with the physical pain, but also the chances of death for the mother and the child, as in the case of Anna Machaya in Zimbabwe: "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come…" (16:21). Yet, this pain is overcome by the joy of receiving the child. In this, Jesus refers to the sorrow his followers will endure after his departure and the joy they will feel when they see him again in the future. The sorrow of childbirth came not only from the usual pain associated with childbirth, but because in the absence of proper cesarean section, many women died in childbirth. We look at these expressions in some detail.

"…Not of bloods…"

Johannine scholarship generally accepts that the gospel reflects the use of both Jewish and Hellenistic ideas, although there is no agreement on the extent of such influence. If, for example, one takes the plural reference to blood (αἱμάτων)[30] in 1:13, both the Greek and Jewish biological constructions can be illuminating. For example, the Aristotelian "hematogenic doctrine" assumed that "male semen is coagulated blood, and the woman feeds the embryo with her menstrual blood."[31] Hence "born of bloods" would have been understood to mean one born by a woman. In the same vein, Jewish biological constructions saw the mother's blood as basic to conception. Wisdom of Solomon 7:2 present[32] says,

30 On the principle of *Lectio difficilior probabilior* (the most difficult reading is the more probable reading), this reading is likely to be the original one.

31 Masten Stol and F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* (Groningen: STYX Publications, 2000), 14.

32 The oldest version of the Wisdom of Solomon is the Old Latin version which reflects an early translation dated to the second century CE. However, its composition is generally

"And in my mother's womb was fashioned to be flesh in the time of ten months, being compacted in blood, of the seed of man, and the pleasure that came with sleep."[33] Further, rabbinic biological constructions distinguished between the head and the navel as the center of the formation of the embryo, where the father was said to supply "the semen of the white substance out of which the child's bones, sinews, nails, the brain in his head and the white in his eye," while the "mother supplies the semen of the red substance out of which is formed his skin, flesh, hair, blood, and the black eyes. And the Holy one, blessed be He, gives him the spirit and the breath, beauty of features, eyesight, the power of hearing and ability to speak and walk, understanding and discernment" are formed.[34] Such perspectives bring the role of the woman, the man and God to the process of conception.

The blood and other fluids are not only understood in the context of conception, but also in the context of childbirth itself. In the discussion with Nicodemus, this birth is through "water and spirit": "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (3:5). The reference to the water likely refers to the amniotic fluids that break forth at birth while the crying child evinces the breath or spirit of life. Their reference to baptismal renewal could also be assumed.

"…will of the flesh…"

What is the "will of the flesh" and the "will of a man" in 1:13? It is generally assumed that the "will of the flesh" (θελήματος σαρκὸς) refers to basic sexual desires. Or, maybe, does the "will of the flesh" mean the same as "the pleasure of the sleep"' (ἡδονὴ ὕπνῳ) in Wisdom 7:2 cited above? The understanding of sexual desire, especially for women, has tended to be read either in light of Genesis 1:28 (with reference to procreation) or Genesis 3:16 (with reference to the curses). This creates a dilemma regarding women's sexual desire, since their desire would only be appropriate if it fulfilled their responsibility to procreate or, in a negative sense, reflected on their suffering under the curse of "desiring" their husband.

considered to be before 132 BCE (see Andrew T. Glicksman, *Wisdom of Solomon 10: A Jewish Hellenistic Reinterpretation of Early Israelite History Through Saipential Lenses* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011], 33).

33 δεκαμηνιαίῳ χρόνῳ παγεὶς ἐν αἵματι ἐκ σπέρματος ἀνδρὸς καὶ ἡδονῆς ὕπνῳ συνελθούσης (Wis 7:2).

34 Nid. 31a in Stol and Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia*, 14–15.

Against a Jewish background, we can observe competing views regarding this desire of the flesh leading to conception and birth, that is, sexual desire and sexual pleasure accompanying sexual intercourse. What was known for sure was the inevitability that this desire would depreciate or "fail," at least according to the rabbinic interpretation of Ecclesiastes 12:5, "…and desire shall fail: because man goes to his eternal home…" For the rabbis, "sexual desire," which brings peace between husband and wife,[35] is a positive thing and according to this interpretation, sexual intercourse is not only for procreation, but also for pleasure.[36]

In this view, the process of conception would have been a result of consensual relationship between a woman and a man. But the phrase, "of the will of a man," complicates the meaning here. The NIRV translate it "…Children of God are not … because a husband wants them to be born…" (1:13). Against the background of the participation of the woman with her contribution of blood and desire in the previous discussion, this androcentric reference to a "husband" as the agent for conception seems strange. Could this be a reflection of competing interpretations set by the injunction to be "fruitful and multiply" in Genesis 1:28? Ilan points to the centrality of this concept of procreation in understanding various dimensions of the Second Temple period "Judaism."[37] She observes the significance of this notion in the thinking of Hellenistic Jewish writers, such as Josephus, when they claim that the "sole purpose of marriage is to produce offspring."[38] Here, producing offspring is not necessarily opposed to the sexual pleasure as discussed above, but simply in obedience to the Torah. But whose responsibility was it to propagate? Was it for the woman or the man? One section of the rabbinic tradition saw the mandate to propagate (Gen 1:28)[39] as the prerogative of one and not both. "A man," says the *Mishnah,* "is commanded concerning the duty of propagation, but not a woman." But in typical rabbinic contestation we also have a different view. According to *R. Johanan ben Beroka*, concerning both of them it is said, "And God blessed them; and God said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply.'"[40] It seems as if John subscribed to both understandings since the birth by "bloods" and "desire of the flesh" would have

35 Lev. R. 18.1 from Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 109.
36 Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 107.
37 Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 105.
38 *C. Ap.* 2.199 in Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 105.
39 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28)
40 Yebam. 6:6.

included the woman while the "will of a man or husband" reflected the male prerogative.

In any case, this text raises serious implications on the responsibility of women over their bodies in childbirth. That such an issue is contested even in the gospel of John could be illuminating for contemporary context.

"…born in fornication…"

While maternity was taken for granted, paternity was not. In this light, we can fully appreciate the seriousness with which "fornication" has on the ego of the father, and hence the pride or shame of known or unknown paternity (8:41). Someone can only live temporarily in the household as a slave or remain permanently as a child; "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever" (8:35). But if one is a child, they better be legitimate children or else their status becomes the same as that of the slave. In this context, Jesus' ambiguous statement is provocative as it implies that his opponents have an unknown father: "I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father" (8:38). But lest he refers to some progenitor they do not know, they are quick to point out that Abraham is their father what Jesus contests on the basis of the contradiction between what Abraham did and what they do (8:39). For example, Abraham would not murder, Jesus says, but they want to murder him (8:40). Jesus then goes on the offensive and concludes that their behavior has been inherited from another progenitor and not Abraham. Since the paternity has not been disclosed, their natural reaction is to protest that they are not born out of fornication (πορνείας οὐ γεγεννήμεθα) (8:41).

Again referring to Ben Sira, Ilan shows that the greatest crisis of adultery was that such an "illicit relationship could produce an offspring, who lived in the husband's house as if they were his legitimate heirs when in fact they have no right to be there."[41] Since a man could not commit adultery except by another man's wife, since he could marry more than one wife, the precaution was to avoid "spending time with a woman and her husband at events at which wine is consumed and music is played."[42] Carson sees that the notion of adultery has to do with the mutual accusation of the Judeans and Samaritans of each

41 Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 135.
42 Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 135.

other's purity of origins.[43] In a context where paternity is so important, any slight suggestion that questions one's father would be quite provocative.

In his commentary on the Decalogue, Philo also shows how deplored children from presumably "adulterous relationships" are.[44] Philo considered that the

> most miserable of all persons must be the wretched children, who have done no wrong themselves, and who cannot be assigned to either family, neither to that of the husband of the adulteress, nor to that of the adulterer. Since illicit cohabitation produces such great calamities, adultery is very naturally a detestable thing hated by God, and has been set down as the first of all transgressions.[45]

In rabbinic interpretation of Deuteronomy 23, a person born out of an inappropriate relationship, called the *mamzer*, is presented as an outcast. Even in non-rabbinic texts, like Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, adultery is considered worse than barrenness.[46] What is clear is that the weightier burden of fidelity is put on the woman, as the shame would come on the man and the children. As has been observed by Lisa Grushcow, patriarchal societies tend to have a strong emphasis on female fidelity, because of male investment in—and anxiety about—"the paternity of the children their wives bear."[47] In this light, the reaction of the opponents of Jesus in John after his insinuations to their paternity is understandable.

This discussion highlights power wielded by women in determining the legitimacy of the child in antiquity. The implications in our discussion for the empowerment of women today is yet to be seen.

"…the birth pains…"

No matter how legitimate one's paternity is, the pain associated with childbirth brought sorrow (λύπη) to the woman. In John as in other texts of the Ancient Near East, the birthing process itself is presented as attended by many dangers to bother the mother and the child.[48] "When a woman is giving birth, she has

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43 Don A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 352.
44 See Maren Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, TSAJ 86 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 24.
45 Philo, *Decalogue*, 130–31.
46 Sir 16:3, "…to die childless is better than to have ungodly children." Wis 3:13, "For blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled, who has not entered into a sinful union…"
47 Lisa Grushcow, *Writing the Wayward Wife: Rabbinic Interpretations of Sotah* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 283.
48 Bergmann, *Childbirth as Metaphor for Crisis*, 63–65.

sorrow because her hour has come…." (16:21). One reason for such anxiety, apart from the obvious physical pain related to childbirth, were the many complications that tended to result in maternal mortality of as high as fifty-four percent to as low as five percent.[49] The metaphor of the birthing pain is told in the context of Jesus' imminent death in the farewell discourse. He tells them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (16:20). Interestingly, the language used here is familiar in relationship to two professions that were mainly associated with women, midwifery and mourning. The midwives witnessed to the extreme forms of pain, but also sometimes the death of the mother and child. This death would transition the role of midwifery into that of the mourners. In John the metaphor of birthing pains applies to them both. In John we see a number of situations where women mourn in the context of the loss of loved ones. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, is thought to be going to mourn her brother at the tomb (11:31–33). Mary Magdalene stands at the grave crying for Jesus (20:11-15). In all these cases, the same word is used (from the word κλαίω). It is, however, revealing that the word sorrow (λύπη) is juxtaposed with giving birth (τίκτω) in John 16:21 as well as in the LXX of Genesis 3:16.[50] Two dimensions of the beginning (birth) and end (death) of life are put next to each other making the metaphor strong. This pain is contrasted with the joy of having the child which helps one forget the pain of childbirth. In this, Jesus refers to the sorrow his followers will endure after his departure and the joy they will have at seeing him again in the future.

Implications for Anna Machaya

The above section has demonstrated how the Fourth gospel metaphorically uses the notion of childbirth in all its detailed aspects from conception, psychological sorrow and physical pain and the final delivery of the child. The gospel is also aware of this metaphorical function of birthing images when Jesus says that a time will come when he will no longer speak "in figures of speech"' (ἐν παροιμίαις), such as in the use of birth metaphor but plainly (16:25). What could be the import of such a network of metaphors in relationship to women and mothers in the situation of Anna Machaya in Zimbabwe and Africa in general? Let's pick some key ideas.

49 Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 118–19.

50 καὶ τῇ γυναικὶ εἶπεν πληθύνων πληθυνῶ τὰς λύπας σου καὶ τὸν στεναγμόν σου ἐν λύπαις τέξῃ τέκνα καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἡ ἀποστροφή σου καὶ αὐτός σου κυριεύσει (Gen 3:16).

First, that John presents motherhood in an affectionate way is something that could be drawn on. In this understanding, the mothering process is something to be defended and protected as Jesus is presenting his own mother to the beloved disciple to be taken care of in his absence. Such care for one's mother, while on death row, is a powerful image. But for Anna Machaya, she must be protected from being a mother before the right age. She need not to be exposed to motherhood complications when she is still a child. She needs extra protection within the faith community.

The second aspect relates to what the process should look like that fully emancipates women. The stories of transition of the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene are illustrative. Here, women are presented as agents of their own emancipation as they learn and discover who Jesus is also for them. Women are not presented as passive, but active agents who demonstrate the capacity to know and communicate liberating knowledge.

Third, is the metaphorical use of various categories relating to women from childbirth, death, and mourning. Metaphor is considered the way overall human thought and language work.[51] Tracing the development of the understanding of metaphor from Greek antiquity to Paul Ricœur, McFague sees the function of the metaphor as bringing "two active thoughts which remain in permanent tension or interaction with each other."[52] In other words, there must be some common point of contact that makes the metaphor and the idea it conveys relate to each other. But in order for it to have effect, McFague posits that the metaphor must be "sufficiently unconventional and shocking" so that the readers "instinctively say no as well as yes to it, thus avoiding absolutism."[53]

The different forms of childbirth metaphor in John are presented in permanent tension with what they are intended to convey. Women suffer both the pain and joy of childbirth. They are both agents and partners in the process of conception and childbirth where they are not only acting on the sexual passions of their husbands. This birth is not of blood but of water, not of flesh but of the spirit, not of human desire but of the will of God. The ordinary human process has been supplanted by a "supernatural" one, divinely "wrought."[54] This metaphor uses the familiar, natural but also inferior processes to introduce the unfamiliar but superior, spiritual processes. The tension lies in the statement,

51 Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982), 37.
52 McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 37.
53 McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 38.
54 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 263.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (3:6). As such, Nicodemus’ question whether a geriatric (γέρων) could return into his mother’s womb (3:4) operates at the literal level of the metaphor and not at its significance. The hearers or readers presupposed by the fourth gospel, the implied readers, can only marvel why such a learned man cannot understand this!

The metaphor of birth carries similar thrust regarding the paternity of that which is born. One of the most intimate relationships in the Fourth gospel is that of the Father and the son, what Jerome Neyrey observes as a typical “kinship relationship.”[55] Jesus came from the Father and returns to the Father (1:14; 16:28). Even though his earthly parentage is associated with Mary and Joseph (6:42)—sometimes associated with Samaritan descent as a way to demean him (8:48)—in the context of questioning the other’s paternity, Jesus maintains unwaveringly: God is his father. Here the metaphorical thrust of birthing with regard to one’s progenitor is that Jesus’ father has also become the father of those who believe. “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17). Here, becoming children of God becomes more important than coming even from the line of Abraham. This is true for male and female children of God. This kinship relationship of women and men in Christ must change objectification and commodification of women who join together in worship.

Autobiographical point of view

I can read the story of Machaya through the lens of the New Testament because my biblical studies training had a specific focus on the relationship between the text and the lived experience of readers. Behind the biblical text were real individuals and communities whose worldview of faith shaped how they understood their experiences. In other words, the biblical text was always a text of the faith community. New Testament studies therefore helped me to develop appreciation and competence of the ancient languages, history and cultures from which the text emerged and the religious context within which the text functioned.

Confidence and trust in New Testament studies comes from both the expertise with which it is developed and its utility. New Testament studies work with real ancient texts which are studied in the original language. The expertise

55 See Jerome Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 407.

required to dig deep into these historical documents is something that gives me confidence in the discipline. The study of the New Testament has also proved to profit in an intelligent way of processing faith. As a normative source of the Christian faith, the New Testament retains a special place in the formation of contemporary disciples of Christ. It has proved over the centuries of use that the New Testament is useful in standardizing the theology of Christians from diverse backgrounds. Even though diverse contexts can shape how different communities may develop their ethics, New Testament studies have proved to be a way of achieving this common standard.

My thinking as both, pastor and theologian has tremendously profited and continues to profit from New Testament research and teaching. First, such research aligns my thinking and actions to the spirit of the Bible. Second, the research and teaching bring an important element of critical thinking which is important in making faith life socially transformative. In my context, faith life sometimes tends to be a heart issue disconnected from reason. New Testament research and teaching fuses the heart and the mind.

My current career leading the ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe is shaped by my New Testament research and teaching. A critical approach to the New Testament is itself inherently ecumenical. From the use of the New Testament, Christians I work with from different faith traditions can find common ground. Further, in my work, I must handle many texts. My New Testament expertise in close reading of texts is very handy in dealing with these varied texts. Our ecumenical engagement is not only about creating internal coherence of faith among different Christian traditions. We also must engage with other actors in the shaping of the public sphere. My New Testament proficiency gives me authenticity in these engagements as we bring forth our own language and framing of issues in ways that must be consistent with our faith shaped by scriptures. This adds value to the shaping of the public sphere as a place for diverse discourses and worldviews.

Conclusion

The choice of the stories of women, childbirth and death were necessitated by the plight of young women who are forced into early marriages. One such young girl, Anna Machaya, died while giving birth in a makeshift maternity ward at the shrine of an African Indigenous church. Hers is only one example of the many young women dying while giving birth due to complications caused by the fact that they are too young to give birth. That this happens in religious space requires that we reread some of the religious texts that should give insights for mindset change. In this paper, I focused on the birthing text and other main texts with reference to the use of "woman" and "mother." The intention was to investigate feminine characters as they are presented in the narrative and in light of the social history of women in Palestine of the Second Temple period. The texts revealed the dignity of motherhood when it happens. They also showed the need for building agency of women to take charge of the whole process from conception and birth. These readings show that once born of the water and the spirit, men and women become God's children who are regarded as brothers and sisters, hence are challenged to protect and enhance each other's lives. Having said this, in order to have the implications of these readings translated into the lived experiences of women in Zimbabwe or Africa, new levels of critical consciousness must be achieved by those who use the scriptures read through the hermeneutic lens of "abundant life for all" that is espoused in John 10:10. Such a transformative reading of scriptures is shaped by my New Testament research and teaching proficiency. The New Testament is a huge resource in helping me contribute to the unity among Christians as they seek to contribute to the shaping of a harmonious, just and inclusive public sphere.

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Reading and Teaching the New Testament

A Concise Contextual Diola Interpretation of Gal 3:26–29 under Empires

Aliou Cissé Niang

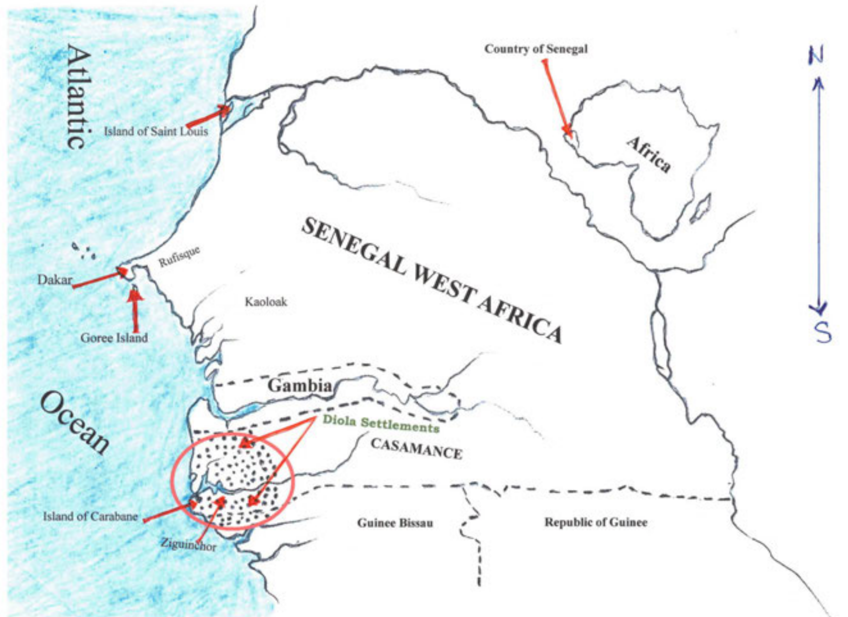
Introduction

As an African, native of Senegal, West Africa, *Reading the New Testament* is timely. My late Grandfather Abdoulaye Manga and Grandmother Fayinséni Dièmé (Kamout Bassène), Mother Lucie Bassène, and Aunt Kakaine (Kristine) Manga are of the Diola tribe of the townships of Mof Avvi but later settled in a village called Adéane located in southern Senegal, West Africa. I was born in Adéane and my early education in Diola ways started there. It was there that I attended the French school. My grandparents raised me and often took me to their native townships (Enampor and Séléki) of Mof Avvi to ensure that I know Diola rituals integral to Diola lived experience of the divine called *Butin* bat' èmit "Divine Path" or "path of the divine" that may be conceptualized to mean "What We Do" for western readers and hearers.[1]

I moved to Dakar, the capital of Senegal where I practiced Islam in the Senegalese Sufist tradition and later became a follower of Jesus when I met Bernice Clara martin, an Baptist missionary. Having studied in America from 1991 to 2006, and beginning my teaching career in 2003 (one year as an adjunct and full time since 2007), I have come to consider myself

1 Diola people do not have a word for "religion" as do many peoples influenced by Western culture.

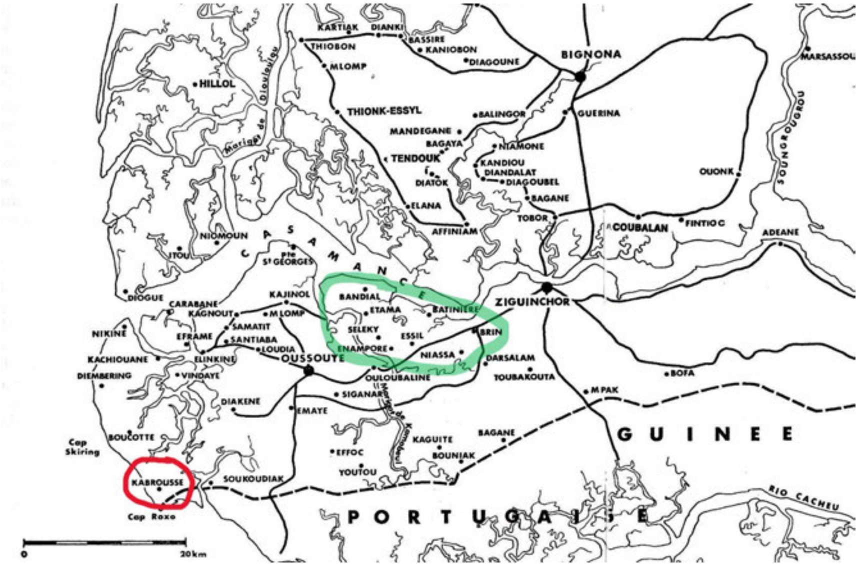
as a multivalent teacher.[2] Reading and teaching the New Testament is a momentous task given the plethora of models and methods.[3]



Map 1: Diola people settled in the dotted area and made up about 90% of the population in the Casamance Region. Aline Sitoé Diatta lived in the south near the coast of the Atlantic Ocean in the village of Karbrousse.

2 Self-definitions are sometimes misleading, as they do not capture the entirety of the person's complex experience. I am speaking of myself as being two-in-one heuristically to make a point knowing that persons may from time to time encounter complex experiences they must navigate in order to adjust or accommodate as much as possible. This is not only for the biblical figures we study but also us hermeneuts reading sacred text from our respective contexts.

3 William Baird, *History of New Testament Research Volume 1: From Deism to Tubingen* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); idem, *History of New Testament Research Volume 2: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); idem, *History of New Testament Research Volume 3: C.H. Dodd to Hans Dieter Betz* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013).



Map 2: My grandparents' townships are circled in the center and those of Prophet Aline Sitoé Diatta's on the left. The map is adapted from Pélissier, *Les Paysans Du Sénégal*, 666–67.

Education in America

My education in America started with a quest for positionality at Williams Baptist College (renamed Williams Baptist University), Logsdon School of Theology (recently closed), and Brite Divinity School. Upon setting foot in America, I realized that I had to assimilate some elements of American culture in order to accommodate as much as I could. I had to learn and apply the rigor of historical criticism to biblical texts but was unable to unearth the fixed, fossilized, and objective meaning it proffers. I read and translate Hebrew, Greek, Latin and am fluent in French and English. In spite of my philological skills, I realized that my interpretation of biblical texts is hardly objective. Shaped by a Diola culture, language, and social construction of egalitarian life, I could and would not be a neutral Bible interpreter.

The late Leo G. Perdue privileged me with a unique and invaluable opportunity to contribute to his *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the*

Collapse of History.[4] I was one of his Ph. D. students at Brite Divinity School in Hebrew Bible before I changed my concentration to New Testament. He was the first American scholar to encourage me to write as a Diola native of the country of Senegal, West Africa – one of the oldest French colonies. My essay entitled "Postcolonial Biblical Theology in Geographical Settings: The Case of Senegal" was in line with Perdue's main argument that the study of the Bible will no longer be the same as emergent voices are daring to interpret the Bible for themselves against some of the methodological guardrails set by the Enlightenment.

My New Testament mentor at Brite Divinity School, David L. Balch, taught me to read the New Testament with an eye for detail, taking seriously Greco-Roman visual representational art, coins, inscriptions, and classical literary traditions. In the process, I discovered that Greco-Roman material culture includes performative texts that embed themes ranging from constructed imperial violence, conquered peoples often visually portrayed as *other*, vanquished, and tamed barbarians who are helpless without the conquerors' cultural values deemed normative human civilization, and strategically constructed imperial apotheoses and ascensions. Exegesis is more than a technical objective analysis of written documents. It is a subjective journey into the making of many *public transcripts and hidden transcripts* (to echo James C. Scott's neologism[5]) enshrined in Greco-Roman as well as Senegalese material culture I fuse to offer new liberating insights. Under the tutelage of Balch, I completed my dissertation later published by Brill Academic Press in 2009 entitled *Faith and Freedom in Senegal and Galatia: The Apostle Paul, Colonists and Sending Gods*. The book reflects my conversation with social scientific criticism, classical texts, and anthropological conclusions on Diola people. My positionality is a journey gradually in the making.

Teaching, Research, and Writing

Although I taught as an adjunct instructor at the Department of Religion at Texas Christian University for two years, my full time teaching career began in 2007 at Memphis Theological Seminary. I applied traditional approaches to reading texts I learned at Brite Divinity School the best I could while trying to find my voice. I applied empire and postcolonial critical insight to my teaching

4 Aliou Cissé Niang, "Postcolonial Biblical Theology in Geographical Settings: The Case of Senegal," in *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 319–329.

5 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1900), 1–16.

of New Testament documents, especially emphasizing the role of Greek, Roman, and modern empires. The use of the Bible to colonize is an undeniable fact that New Testament teachers and authors cannot ignore, but it comes with risks as some New Testament scholars still frown at such innovative forms of engaging the Bible. My research informs my teaching.

After four years of teaching at Memphis Theological Seminary, I joined the Union Theological Seminary faculty in August 2011. My wife and our son Micah, who was then a year old, and I began a new chapter here at Union, taking it a step at a time to ensure a smooth adjustment to life in Manhattan, New York. Union has been transformative for me as an African, teacher, and scholar shaped by African Traditional Religion, Islam, Christianity, and the Négritude movement as conceptualized by Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first President of Senegal. Union Theological Seminary, the flagship of North American Seminaries, promotes justice concern for the religious, social, political, and economic wellbeing of persons in community. This vision was and is still being championed by Union's pioneering mission for innovative ministry that embodies sacred texts vision shaped by biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, and homileticians.[6]

It is in this context that I teach biblical texts interculturally drawing on my Senegalese Diola background in conversation with some traditional ways of interpreting scripture. Though evolving with the needs of a particular course, my pedagogy includes a strong interdisciplinary approach to exegesis engaged or participatory approaches to interpreting texts that feed off of "an innovate on diachronic and synchronic approaches."[7] This reading optic allows for a rich eclectic analysis of variegated sacred textual traditions (African, Graeco-Roman, and Ancient Near Eastern). In 2012, I co-edited a Festschrift, *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World*, with Caroline Osiek honoring Balch. In my chapter, entitled "Seeing and Hearing Jesus Christ Crucified in Galatians 3:1 under Watchful Imperial Eyes," I engaged Graeco-Roman literary traditions and visual representations, in conversation with Diola ethnographic works.

As I noted above, my research and writing interests are multivalent; however, Senghorian Negritude is one of the lenses I employ for reading Biblical texts in my recent book entitled a *Poetics of Postcolonial Criticism: God, Human-Nature Relationship, and Negritude.* As I was writing the book, James Wm. McClendon's

6 Robert T. Handy, *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987).

7 Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 3–24.

words became operative.[8] As the saying goes, there is no such a thing as a disinterested reader, writer, or hermeneut. In the many books and papers I have read, I have always been able to detect the authors' biographical elements meandering into their introductions, claims, plots, structures, contents, and messages. In my work on Senghor, I learned that unfortunate misunderstanding of his speeches and misreading of his writings clouded much of his contributions to Africa and the rest of humanity. Senghor was an African Christian, teacher, poet, president, and postcolonial critic who understood the dialogical nature of justice. His poems and speeches echo biblical themes and issues having to do with colonial injustice, exploitation, redemption, and forgiveness. Unlike Aimé Césaire's Negritude, his evolved over time – a trop that is always under construction. I argue that Senghorian Negritude was and still is *A Poetics of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*.[9] Senghor worked hard to liberate and rehabilitate his colonized compatriots and diaspora people of African descent whose lived experiences of French colonization embody generational traumas of colonial wars and abuse.

To make an argument promoting Senghorian Negritude the way I have done is risky. When I started my research, I noticed a trend among Senghor's fiercest critics who tended to reduce Senghorian Negritude to nothing short of a sellout because of some terse statements yanked out of the context of some of his speeches. For instance, Senghor said in one of his groundbreaking speeches, *I' émotion est nègre, comme la raison est hellène* "emotion is negro as reason is Hellenic" and *Car j'ai une grande faibless pour la France*[10] "For I have a great weakness for France." Some critics found the first statement denigrating to people of African descent and the second expressive of his admiration of French culture and language. Many of these critics mentioned above concluded that Senghor must have been a sellout. As a result, they characterized him as being

8 James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1974).

9 Aliou Cissé Niang, *A Poetics of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: God, Human-Nature Relationship and Negritude* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019).

10 Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté l: Négritude et Humanisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964), 24, originally entitled "Ce que l'homme noir apporte" and published in 1939; Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Hosties Noirs," in *Œuvre Poétique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964, 1990), 95. See Aliou Cissé Niang, "The Political Ethics of Léopold Sédar Senghor," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Social Ethics*, ed. Nimi Wariboko and Toyin Falola (Boston, MA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 257–281.

one among many African elites and heads of state assimilated to French culture who collaborate with the French.[11]

I have yet to read a book, book essay, or journal article that employs Senghorian Negritude as a critical lens for liberation exegesis of scripture (both Testaments). That makes my scholarship unique, innovative, and ultimately contributive to the field of biblical studies. Such a positionality comes with enormous challenges to say the least. My desire to contextualize the critical skills for interpreting biblical texts I acquired in the West was strongly encouraged by my teachers (Perdue and Balch). I knew there was a price to pay if I were to pursue that path but I did so knowing I was positioning myself on the trail of countless African thinkers before and after the colonial era. Many African biblical scholars (though who is an African is contested),[12] especially Takatso Mofokeng,[13] Itumeleng Mosala,[14] the late Justin Ukpong,[15] Musa Dube,[16] Gerald O. West,[17] (just to name a few) have paved the way calling for the indigenization of the same Bible once instrumentalized as a colonial tool. The locution often associated with this approach to scripture is African Biblical Interpretation, a critical way of reading the Bible with ordinary people in their cultural context.

My concerns echo those of many African biblical scholars who find liberation in employing African Biblical Interpretation. It is frustrating and unfortunate that many western scholars seldom pause to reflect on why they alone should be guardians of biblical interpretation. Ruminating on our shared frustration, Ukpong writes:

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11 Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

12 Chammah J. Kunda and Roderick R. Hewitt, eds., *Who Is an African? Race, Identity, and Diversity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018).

13 Takatso Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," *Journal of Black Theology* 2 (1988): 34–42.

14 Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

15 Justin S. Ukpong, "Reading the Bible in a Global Village: Issues and Challenges from African Readings," in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village: Cape Town,* ed. Justin S. Ukpong et al., (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 9–39, at 38.

16 Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000); Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley, *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space, and Power* (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

17 Gerald O. West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Brill Academic Press, 2016); Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, ed. *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories and Trends* (Boston, MA: Brill Academic Press, 2000).

> Africans have gone to the West, mastered Western methods of biblical interpretation, but the same can hardly be said about Westerners of African methods of interpretation of the Bible. The thinking in the West seems to be that there can be only one way to biblical interpretation, that is, the Western way in its different forms, and that precludes getting to know other ways. What people do not know always looks strange and weird. The first step to appreciating African biblical scholarship is to know it. Today African contributions to biblical scholarship can and should no longer be ignored, for continuing to do so would only deprive the discipline of much needed energy and vision to progress.[18]

Mastering western canons of biblical interpretation and innovating on their limitations to give voice to African biblical interpretation just to be ignored as being too subjective, uncritical, ideological, and therefore an inferior kind of scholarship, is *academic apartheid*.[19] Of course, there are exceptions among some western scholars who recognize the richness of African Biblical Hermeneutics and welcome its rightful place in the guild in spite of nagging pushbacks. Knut Holter is one of the key European scholars who not only values African scholarship, he has made several substantial contributions.[20] I would be remiss if I fail to mention the indispensable interdisciplinary work of Gerald O. West that is shaping the trajectories of African Biblical Hermeneutics. West is an engaged biblical hermeneut deeply informed by the lived African experiences in pre to post-apartheid South Africa. His magnum opus, *The Stolen Bible*, I cited earlier meticulously documents and anchors the daunting journey of African Biblical Hermeneutics.[21]

The interdisciplinary nature of my research benefitted from ethnographic works on Diola people. My gravitation toward these works is understandable. For decades, most of what is known about Diola people came from foreign and mostly western ethnographers and anthropologists. I began to interrogate myself about what a Diola would have said about Diola life and thought. With

18 Ukpong, "Reading the Bible in a Global Village," 38.

19 Ukpong, "Reading the Bible in a Global Village," 38.

20 Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa: Essays on Africa and the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); idem, *Old Testament Research for Africa: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography of African Old Testament Dissertations, 1967–2000* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

21 West, *The Stolen Bible; idem, Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in South Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995); idem, *The Academy of the Poor: Toward a Dialogical Reading* (Pietermaritzburg, ZA-NL: Cluster Publications, 1999/2003); idem, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg, ZA-NL: Cluster Publications, 1993); Gerald O. West and Musa Dube, *Semeia* 73: "*Reading with" African Overtures* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1996).

the exception of a handful of ethnographers, I found much of their works wanting, especially on conclusions drawn from field research on Diola people. Research on the Diola by Peter Mark and especially, Robert M. Baum was operative for me. [22] First, Peter Mark's damning observations yield insights into the European construction of Africans, especially Senegambian Diola people. European negative attitudes toward Senegambians were apparent at the verge of the sixteenth up to the early eighteenth century. Mark rightfully blames these attitudes on the following three factors, namely, "European ethno-centrism, the commercial relations which governed European-African intercourse, and the growth of the slave trade" and it is his belief during this period that

> Europeans expressed increasingly negative characterizations of Africans and their way of life. An ideology of African inferiority served, in part, to validate the Atlantic slave trade. It was easier to justify the enslavement of people who were considered less civilized or even a lower form of humanity. The formation of this ideology was facilitated by ethnocentric perceptions, which led to a bias in favor of more westernized peoples. One important parameter by which Senegambians came to be judged inferior to their European counterparts was in the area of religious beliefs and practices.[23]

The Senegambians whose religious beliefs Europeans lampooned are mostly Diola people. Their religious beliefs are very much part of what I consider to be African Traditional Religion (ATR). African Traditional Religion had been and is still grossly misunderstood and mischaracterized as polytheistic and barbarous superstition or right out evil and demonic. The mischaracterizations of Diola beliefs resulted from ethnographic conclusions believed to have been based on solid objective observations of Diola life and thought. Many ethnographers did not bother to learn as much as they could of the culture, life, and thought of the people they were observing simply because of their sense of superiority. This was the sentiment of most French and British ethnographers when they encountered Diola religious tapestry. As I wrote elsewhere,[24] Western ethnographic inquiry that values direct observation of African religious practices and

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22 Robert M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); idem, *West Africa's Women of God: Alinsitoué and the Diola Prophetic Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

23 Peter Mark, "'Marybuckes' and the Christian Norm: European Images of Senegambians and Their Religions, 1550–1760," *African Studies Review* 23/2 (1980): 91.

24 Aliou Cissé Niang, "Contested Spaces: Diola Christianity in Rural and Urban Sénégal," in *World Christianity, Urbanization, and Identity,* ed. Moses Biney, Kenneth Ngwa, and Raimundo Barreto (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2021), 101–122.

beliefs is wanting. As Jan Vansina rightly observes, direct field research that many Western ethnographers hail as objective is highly limited in that it fails to hear what persons they observe would say about their lived experiences of colonial occupation. Here are his observations of a colonized Congolese man:

> The old man stood there in his compound on the top of the hill, silent now, lost in dreams and gazing over the landscape. He had just retold us how the colonial soldiers came to capture the town and his freedom. He stood there for a long while, recalling perhaps all that happened to him and those he had known since then until this day in the waning years of the era these men had ushered in. If so, his vision of colonial history had certainly very little in common with the standard accounts one finds in textbooks about the period.[25]

Hearing Africans' accounts of their lived experience of colonization and religious practices should be trusted and not discarded as being too subjective. Second, Baum concurs with Vansina insisting that

> information from field research grows out of participant observation. By living in a community and joining in religious, work, and social activities, the researcher acquires a wealth of information about the relationships among religious thought, historical consciousness, and daily life. A religion is something that is lived, as well as practiced… I had to experience it… To understand his shrine, I had to perform its ritual.[26]

I am not devaluing the importance of direct field research; however, it should include accounts from native informants.[27] Seeing, hearing, and participating with the people being observed, namely to live with them, yields more insights for the ethnographer. I argue that this way of finding meaning through participation in a way of life Diola people understand as "Divine path" an expression that conceptually enshrines life as seeing, experiencing, and performing ritualized existence,[28] I call *embodied participatory inquiry*[29] from which, I believe, researchers can theorize and develop nuanced ways of reading. Diola "visible beings" are social beings whose social and religious interactions ("what we

25 Jan Vansina, *Being Colonized: The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880–1960* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 3.
26 Baum, *Shrines*, 17, 21.
27 Paul Diédhiou, *L'identité Jóola en Question (Casamance)* (Paris: Karthala, 2011). See also Boubacar Barry, *Le Sénégambie du XVe au XIXe Siècle*: *Traite négrière, Islam conquête coloniale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2017), 384–89.
28 Baum, *Shrines*, 17.
29 Aliou Cissé Niang, "Contested Spaces: Diola Christianity in Rural and Urban Senegal," in *World Christianity, Urbanization and Identity,* WCPR, ed. Raimundo C. Barreto, Kenneth N. Ngwa, and Moses O. Biney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 101–122.

do") under the aegis of their deity *Ala Emit*[30] shape their practice of equity and egalitarian vision. In this *imaginaire*, Diola epistemology is a function of ontology where one knows oneself and the other. Diola lived experience echoes much of what Aristotle understood about humans, namely that ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον. "A person is by nature a political animal" who in contrast to other animals, λόγον … ἔχει "possesses speech" (Aristotle *Pol.* 1253 a).

To do justice to cultures and people one studies, it is important to experience their lived experiences. As a Diola New Testament scholar from Senegal, West Africa, I relate how much my research informs my teaching and writing in a field of study still trapped in the quest for objective interpretation of texts, resisting the fact that the historical-critical paradigm has collapsed as Perdue has shown more than a decade ago.[31] I research, teach and write as an interested New Testament scholar whose context is as dynamic as is life. I now turn to a concise illustration of my work focusing on Gal 3:28 comparing The Apostle Paul and Aline Sitoé Diatta (a Diola Prophet).

Identity and Community Construction under Empire: The Apostle Paul and Aline Sitoé Diatta

I am undertaking this topic as a Diola Christian who finds echoes of scripture in Diola Faith Traditions, especially the voice of the Apostle Paul in the life and message of Aline Sitoé Diatta. Every culture has religious messengers who affect their community members for good or ill. One way in which this is done is through the empowering words they speak. Over a half century ago, J. L. Austin reminded us that words have the power to do "things," not every spoken word has that function, but only those he characterizes as "performative utterances."[32] Whether or not they claim to be apostles or prophets, some of the earliest

30 In Diola cosmology and "Divine Paths" the name of the supreme deity is either *Emit, Emitai, Ata Emit, or Ala Emit*. The differences in spelling is a function of Diola subgroup dialects. However, some Diola subgroups speak dialects I consider to be languages in their own rights. Nevertheless, the root word *Emit* is retained by the Diola language in general. The Diola of Mof Avvi, my ethnic subgroup, call their supreme deity *Ala Emit* or *Emit*.

31 Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994/2005).

32 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered in Harvard University in 1955,* ed. James Opie Urmson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 6; idem, *Philosophical Papers,* ed. James Opie Urmson and Geoffrey James Warnock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 220–39.

Christian leaders' use of this art of "doing things with words" to construct and assert their identities within and beyond imperial bounds is well documented.[33]

The Apostle Paul preached in city tenement house churches to urban audiences under imperial Rome often forced to create space at the margins of society as a site for articulating their "ambivalence."[34] From that liminal space, Paul and most of his converts constructed their "identity which is nurtured and nourished by their own goals and aspirations"[35] a postcolonial repositioning. In the African context, a unique element of "African biblical scholarship" according to Gerald O. West "is its dialogical character"[36] a comparative approach of reading scripture informed by the African lived experience, namely "social location."[37] This is true in the life and thought of Isaiah Shembe. As one of the "first generation of Christian interpreters of the Bible," Shembe's inculturation of the biblical message is indeed a major contribution to African Biblical Scholarship as West has clearly shown.[38]

My question is: might scripture, especially the voice of the Apostle Paul, be echoed in some Diola Faith Traditions as illustrated in the community and identity shaping messages of a West African illiterate and non-Christian female prophet, Aline Sitoé Diatta? It is from this perspective that I offer contributions on how in 20th century Senegal, West Africa, Aline Sitoé Diatta echoed Paul's call and community identity construction. As called messengers, both used words to shape the identity of their community members with a view to turning them into

33 Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983/1997); F. Gerald Downing, *Doing Things with Words in the First Christian Century* JSNTSup 200 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

34 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11.

35 Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, "From Orientalist to Post-Colonial: Notes on Reading Practices," *Asian Journal of Theology* 10 (1996): 24.

36 Gerald O. West, "Constructing African Christianity: The Voice of Paul in the Formative Teachings of Isaiah Shembe," in *Paul, Grace and Freedom Essays in Honour of John K. Riches,* ed. Paul Middleton, Angus Paddison, and Karen Wenell (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 130.

37 Fernando F. Segovia, "Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism: Ideological Criticism as Mode of Discourse," in *Readings from this Place Volume II: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 1–17; idem, "'And They Began to Speak in other Tongues': Competing Mode of Discourse in Contemporary Modes of Biblical Criticism," in *Readings from this Place Volume I: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States,* ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 1–32.

38 West, "Constructing African Christianity," 130–144.

a corporate participatory human agent. A critical analysis of Poems 4, 18, 19, 20, 27, and 35 of Aline Sitoé Diatta will show that she echoed Paul's voice, especially in Gal 3:26–29. I will begin with Paul's call and his community construction, move to Aline Sitoé Diatta's, and close with some conclusive insights.

The Apostle Paul: Call, Identity, and Community: Construction under Empire

Living in the diaspora somewhere in the Roman empire and writing to some of his community members, the Apostle Paul, a Jew by birth (Gal 1:13–14; 2:15; 1 Cor 9:1–4; Rom 9:2, Phil 3:3–6; Acts 22:5–7), insists his mission to non-Jews is divinely orchestrated (Gal 1:1, 11–16). His determination to destroy the church (Gal 1:13; Acts 9:1–2) was halted as God's son is revealed to him (Gal 1:16), an experience that shaped his life and inspired his new perspective on God, scripture, and humanity. Paul is called like the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa 49:1 and Jere 1:5)[39] but refers to himself as a "called apostle" (1Cor 1:1a),[40] and demarcates himself from Roman imperial identity constructions by ignoring the Tarsian and Roman citizenship the Acts of the Apostles ascribes to him. He claims to have seen Jesus Christ (1Cor 9:1–4) and was snatched up to paradise where ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι 'he heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat' (2 Cor 12:4).

Paul's is not an armchair theological construction of identity but one deeply informed by his divinely legitimated liminality[41] a fact evident in his combative defenses against his opponents (Gal 1:6–12; 1Cor 9:1–5; Rom 9:1; Phil 3:2–6). Some of his converts certainly considered him to be a prophet and he acted as such, a fact reflected in a handful of predictions he made.[42] Paul's physical appearance, probably affected by an ailment (Gal 4:13), might have given rise to some criticism leveled against him. Graeco-Roman authors associated

39 Krister Stendhal, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976), 7.

40 Aliou C. Niang, "Seeing and Hearing Jesus Christ Crucified in Gal 3:1 Under Watchful Imperial Eyes," in *Text, Image and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch* (PTMS; ed., Aliou C. Niang and Carolyn Osiek; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 160–182, especially page 174.

41 Christian Strecker, *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus: Zugänge zur paulinischen Theologie aus Kulturanthropologischen Perspektive,* FRLANT, 185 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 111.

42 David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World,* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 261, cites Rom 11:25–26; 1 Cor 12:3, 9; 14:37–38; 2 Cor 12:9; Gal 5:21; 1 Thess 3:4; 4:2–6, 16–17 as Pauline prophetic texts. He includes 2 Thess 3:6, 10, 12 considered by many scholars as disputed.

with physiognomics argued that physical appearance determines a person's character and rhetorical acumen.[43] Paul's determination to create and nurture alternative communities (1 Thess 2:5–7, 11–12) to those Rome founded might have been met with criticism against his persona, namely his physical appearance (Gal 4:13-15; 2 Cor 10–13) as Dale Martin argues.[44] Physiognomists like Ps-Aristotle (Ps-Aristotle, *Phys.* 810a),[45] Adamantius the Sophist (B 6–7) and Polemo (B 8, B 12) believed that a person's physical infirmity affects his or her character. Building on Martin, Mikael C. Parsons understands Paul's comment δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός "because of a physical infirmity" (Gal 4:13), to reflect how his physiognomically minded opponents might have viewed him.[46] They

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43 Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity & Disability in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), viii, observes that "the Greeks and the Romans stood head and shoulders, culturally speaking, above all other races on earth in part because they alone exemplified the ideal human type. Any departure from that ideal type, however trivial, was therefore interpreted as a mark of the despised barbarian, whose attributed physiological defects were regarded as an expression of the latter's cultural limitations. In short, ethnic deformity exemplified the critical difference between the Graeco-Roman Self and the other. As such it embodied in a literal as well as metaphorical sense the failure of the other to measure up to the civilised, classical norm."

44 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 53–5.

45 Jacques André, "Introduction," *Traité de physiognomie: Anonyme Latin* (Texte Établi et Traduit par Jacques André; Collection des Universités de France: Association Guillaume Budé; Paris: Les Belle Lettres, 1981); Polemon of Laodicea, "Poleomnis: De Physiognomonia Liber Arabice et Latine," *Scriptores Physignomonici Graeci et Latini,* 2 vols., ed. Georgius Hoffmann (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893), 93–294, now available in English translated by Simon Swain, *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemo's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Elizabeth C. Evans, "Physiognomics in the Ancient World," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 59/5 (1969): 1–101; Mikael C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 2006); Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, 2008); Mladen Popovič, *Reading the Human Body: Physiognomics and Astrology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hellenistic-Early Roman Period Judaism* (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, 2007), 1–4; idem, "Physiognomics in the Roman Empire," *The Classical Journal* 45/6 (March 1950): 277–282; Elizabeth Evans, "Galen the Physician as Physiognomist," *TPAPA* 76 (1945): 287–298; A. MacC. Armstrong, "The Methods of the Greek Physiognomists," *Greece & Rome* 5/1 (March 1958): 52–56; Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "The Pseudo-Aristotelian Kitāb Sirr Al-Asrār," *Oriens* 23 (1974): 141–257; and Jean Bottéro, "Symptômes, signes, écritures: en Mésopotamie ancienne," in *Divination et Rationalité,* eds. Jean-Pierre Vernant et al. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), 70–197), 82, 108–9, for an extensive discussion of physiognomics in antiquity.

46 Parsons, *Body and Character*, 48–9.

might have concluded that Paul's ἀσθένεια "physical deficiency" affected his character and rhetorical acumen.[47]

The author of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* provides an interesting picture of Paul, describing him as "a man of small size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, of noble men, with eyebrows meeting, rather hook-nosed full of grace" (*Acts of Paul and Thecl.* 3b). Explorations of ancient handbooks on physiognomics led some scholars to conclude that this is a positive description of Paul's physical appearance[48] used by his admirers and enemies alike.[49] Martin observes

> Whatever it was, Paul speaks of his personal presence in terms of such shame (Gal 4:13–14) that it is clear that he regarded it as an embarrassment and a potential hindrance to rhetorical success. Then there is the "thorn in the flesh" about which Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 12:7, where again he seems to be referring to some bodily disfigurement. In any case, it is a locus of shame and embarrassment for him. Paul himself seems to regard it as an indication of low status, one for which he must be content to let God's power compensate.[50]

Agreeably, one cannot rule out negative views of him to which he responded, reinscribing his opponents' notions of weakness (2 Cor 10–13) in order to subvert them with the strength only the God who sent him can effect in humans.[51] Put differently, hidden in his weakness is the crucified Christ, the power and wisdom of God, who lives in him whom he proclaims (Gal 2:20; 1 Cor 1:23–24).

In Francis Watson's observation, Paul's new reading of scripture counters prior readings that give preeminence to Abraham's faith that is inextricably linked to his heroic response to the divinely orchestrated test (the sacrifice of Isaac) human agency (Gen 12 connected to Gen 22 and 1Macc 2:50–54) rather

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47 Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 48–51.

48 Acts of Paul and Thecla, in *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in English Translation based on M. R. James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 364–372. For a detailed discussion of the evidence supporting a positive view of Paul's physical appearance in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla,* see also Abraham Malherbe, "A Physical Description of Paul," *HTR* 79 (1986): 170–6; Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 100–52; Heike Omerzu, "The Portrayal of Paul's Outer Appearance in the Acts of Paul and Thecla: Re-Considering the Correspondence between Body and Personality in Ancient Literature," *Religion and Theology* 15 (2008): 252–279.

49 Omerzu, "The Portrayal of Paul's Outer Appearance," 268.

50 Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 53–4.

51 Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 53–4.

than God as primary initiating agent.[52] This is why, according to Watson, Paul reads Gen 12:3 and 15:6 as he does (Gal 3:6) to emphasize God's promissory word that initiated Abraham's faith. Paul navigates tensions inherent in the Torah, deemphasizes human meritorious deeds that tend to promote *othering* (Gal 2:15–16a; 3:28) and focuses on the divine role in shaping communities of faith through Jesus (Gal 2:16b–18). Hence, as Troels Engberg-Pedersen observes, Paul's language of "Christ revealed *in* him" (Gal 1:16) is further developed in Gal 2:19–20 to emphasize his new identity as a "Christ person"[53] a relational life anchored in faith. Martinus C. de Boer posits that the cross "destroyed" Paul's "I" (Gal 1:19)—"the nomistically determined 'I' that was a zealot for ancestral traditions and persecuted God's church (Gal 1:13–14)."[54]

Exploiting tensions inherent in the Torah, Paul constructs a new identity for his Galatian converts that subverts imperial othering. As I stated in my earlier book, *Faith and Freedom in Galatia*,[55] clothing themselves with this empowering faith shatters and transforms the Galatians from uncivilized and dreadful, fickle and bestial people to Abraham's children, κατ᾽ ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι "heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29) and οἰκεῖοι τῆς πίστεως "household of faith" (Gal 6:10). Paul warns them sternly not to assimilate to Rome's hierarchical and tyrannical imperial system,[56] rather they must exercise the baptismal confession they embody to subvert the imperially maintained binaries (Jew versus Greek, slave versus free, and male versus female) with a *diverse-unity-equity* in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28a).

Intriguingly, binaries or pairs of opposites the Apostle Paul calls *stoicheia tou kosmou* in Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 20[57] were in view here, especially their power

52 Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 219, 268–9; idem, "Constructing an Antithesis: Pauline and Other Jewish Perspectives on Divine and Human Agency," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment,* ed. John Barclay and Simon Carthercole (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 99–116.

53 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 146.

54 Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary,* NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 161.

55 Niang, *Faith and Freedom in Galatia*, 131, cited in David Balch's "ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΩΝ Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function," in *Contextualing Acts: Luke's Narrative and Graeco-Roman Discourse,* ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 153.

56 Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished,* PCC (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

57 Renditions of the expression *stoicheia tou kosmou* range from "the elemental spirits of the universe" (RSV), "the basic principles of the world" (NIV) and "the elemental things of the world" (NASB).

to influence human behavior and decisions as understood in the Graeco-Roman world by Paul's time.

Empedocles thought of the *stoicheia* 'elements' (fire, earth, air, and water) as deities united in friendship, separated through strife and foundational for life—who are "shining Zeus and life-bringing Hera, Aidoneus and Nestis, who lets flow from her tears the source of mortal life."[58] For centuries, Greeks thought the cosmos owed its existence to the strife between air, water, fire, and earth--a belief also held by Ovid who states:

> The air hung over all, which is as much heavier than fire as the weight of water is lighter than the weight of earth. There did the creator bid the mists and clouds to take their place, and thunder, that should shake the hearts of men, and winds which produce lightning and thunderbolts. To these also the world's creator did not allot the air that they might hold it everywhere. Even as it is, they can scarce be prevented, though they control their blasts, each in his separate tract, from tearing the world to pieces. So fiercely do these brothers strive together.[59]

They wondered whether these conflicting polarities could end up tearing the universe apart—a concern the author of Ps. Aristotle *[Mund.]* addresses. Strikingly this peripatetic philosopher echoes Gen 1:27 and Gal 3:28c insisting that "nature actually has a liking for opposites; perhaps it is from them that she creates harmony, and not from similar things, in just the same way τὸ ἄρρεν συνήγαγε πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ 'she has joined the male to the female'."[60] To him the polarizing nature engenders a harmonious relationship that sustains the cosmos—a harmony, he argues that is maintained by the immanence of divine power. As Johan C. Thom observes, Ps. Aristotle sees

> harmony (ἁρμονία) … not as a product of something else (e.g. the constitution of nature or some action) but as an active force that has arranged (διεκόσμησεν) the composition of the universe by means of the mixture of the opposites principles. It is described as power (δύναμις) pervading all things, a power that set everything in order. It has created (δημιουργήσασα) the whole cosmos from diverse elements

58 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 76–77b, says Ζεὺς ἀργὴς Ἥρη τε φερέσβιος ἠδ' Ἀϊδωνεὺς Νῆστίς θ', ἣ δακρύοις τέγγει κρούνωμα βρότειον·This means Zeus is fire, Hera is earth, Aidoneus is air, and Nestis is water. See Aristotle, *Gen. corr.* 314a25–315a25; 318b20–320b10 for his discussion in conversation with Empedocles. Walter Wink, "The 'Elements of the Universe' in Biblical and Scientific Perspective," *Zygon* 14/3 (Sept. 1978): 231, See entire discussion in pages 225–48.

59 Ovid, *Metam.* 52–60. See also, Cicero, *Tusc.* 18–19 and Philo, *Mos.* 2.121, 125, 133.

60 Ps-Aristotle, *Cosmos.* 392a28–396b9, especially 396b5. See Niang, *Faith and Freedom*, 106, 106 n50.

> and compelled them into agreement. The agreement (ὁμολογία) or concord (ὁμόνοια) between the opposing elements results from the equality or equilibrium enforced by cosmic power, which thus ensures preservation (σωτηρία) for the whole.[61]

In spite of the various changes in the sublunary world, the cosmos is constantly being preserved by "the agreement of the elements (*stoicheion*; see Gal 4.3, 9 and Col 2.8, 20)," not by the immanence of god in the world but the deity's power (Ps-Aristotle, *[Mund.]* 333–9)—a polemic against the stoic doctrine of divine immanence.[62] My question is might the Apostle Paul have joined this debate?

There isn't a consensus among scholars as to what these elements are and what Paul might have meant by them. Taking his cues from Aristotelean metaphysics (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 986a28–986b9), Martyn maintains that Paul and his Galatian converts knew these philosophical debates on the binary nature of elements (Gal 3:28; 6:14–15) of the old cosmos—a polarizing and enslaving power (Gal 4:3–5) they will no longer be able to exercise in the new creation καινὴ κτίσις (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17) being abrogated by the Christ event (Gal 3:26–28), the proleptic beginning of the new creation.

To Paul, elemental spirits affect all people; namely, in the binary parlance of his day, both Jews and non-Jews alike (Gal 4:3 and 9) and how they view each other (Gal 3:28). According to de Boer, Paul uses the expression

> τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου as a *summary designation* for a complex of religious beliefs and practices centered around the four elements of the physical cosmos, to which the phrase concretely refers … The gods the Galatians worshiped were so closely linked to the four *stoicheia* that the worship of these gods could be regarded as tantamount to the worship of *ta stoicheia* themselves … These involved venerating the *stoicheia* (the physical elements of the universe) as gods and instituting various calendrical observances in connection with these *stoicheia.*[63]

As a result, Paul reminds his converts that the *stoicheia tou kosmou* are vanquished. The Christ event abrogated their power (Gal 3:1–4; 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 18, 20) and embodying this new reality is a counterconquest activated by their baptismal confession (Gal 3:26–28) that shatters the binaries once empowered by the now defeated elemental spirits. Deconstructing the binaries Jew versus

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61 Johan C. Thom, "The Cosmotheology of *De mundo*," in *Cosmic Order and Divine Power: Pseud-Aristotle, On the Cosmos,* ed. Johan C. Thom (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 111.

62 I owe some of the conclusions drawn here from crucial correspondences with David Balch and Frederick E. Brenk whose invaluable insights shaped and informed my reading of how these ancient views of elements might have shaped Pauline discourse, especially the Galatians.

63 De Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, 256.

Greek, slave versus free, and male versus female within their communities would engender a *diverse-unity-equity* in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28a)—a process that will reach its cosmic culmination at the eschaton (Rom 8:19–39; Rev 21–22; 2 Peter 3:10). In the meantime, their public exercise of the baptismal confession should give rise to alternative communities/house churches to those constructed by imperial Rome,[64] communities of Christ related persons, corporate human agency (Gal 3:28) living in participation with the divine agent. Conceivably, Paul's construction of identity and community is a function of Abrahamic antecedents. The baptismal confession evokes and manifests lived experiences that embody and actualize God's promissory word (ἐπαγγελία) to Abraham of σπέρμα "progeny" (Gen 15:5b) κλερονόμος an "heir" (Gal 3:29; cf. Gal 3:16–18).

The author of Acts has Paul preaching under house arrest to people who came to him (Acts 28:30–31) while the rest of his life remains a chilling suspense. I will now turn to how Paul's prophetic voice is echoed by Aline Sitoé Diatta.

Aline Sitoé Diatta: Call and Community: Construction under Empire

Aline Sitoé Diatta[65] was born around 1920s during the peak of French colonization of Senegal of the Her/Haer Diola subgroup located in the southern part of the Casamance region, a district known as Kabrousse.[66] She lived in a world in profound transition and in which orature provides a literary tapestry for the reconstruction of Diola ancestry and identity back to *Ala Emit*[67] "God," the creator and founding ancestor.[68] The fact that Aline Sitoé Diatta ended up in Dakar, the oldest French colony in West Africa, where she worked as a house cleaner and cook at age twenty-four is not unique. Some Diola adolescents would have often ventured into cities like Ziguinchor or Dakar during the dry season to find work but would return during the rainy season to farm rice. Aline Sitoé Diatta was shaped by treasured faith traditions once objectified by French

64 See 1 Cor 1:11, 16; 16:15; Phil 4:22; Luke 10:5; 19:9; Acts 2:46; 8:3; 9:31; 11:14; 15:3, 41; 16:15, 31; 18:8; 20:20, 28.

65 Spellings of her name range from Aliin Sitooye Jaata, Alinesitoué Diatta to Aline Sitoé Diatta. The latter spelling will be used henceforth.

66 Jean Girard, *Genèse du pouvoir charismatique en basse Casamance* (Sénégal) (Dakar SN: IFAN, 1969), 240; Christian Roche, *Histoire de la Casamance: conquête et résistance: 1850–1920* (Paris: Édition Karthala, 1985), 40.

67 In the Diola dialect of Aline Sitoé Diatta's subgroup, the word for God would be *Ata Emit* or *Emitai*. Except in direct quotes, I will henceforth use *Ala Emit,* which is how a Diola of Mof Avvi would have referred to the same deity.

68 Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Les Diola: Essai d'analyse fonctionnelle sur une population de Basse-Casamance,* Tome 1 & 2 (Dakar, SN: Imprimerie Protat FrPres, Mâcon, 1959), 2.489–90.

colonists due to their stern resistance to any foreign intrusion into their stateless world. Labels thrown at Diola people ranged from primitive, forest dwelling savages and anarchists,[69] to bibulous and fickle.[70] Most of these unfortunate invectives persist to this day.

Whether she was with disability "much earlier in her childhood," or more likely, contracted a divinely caused illness that inflicted her leg with a limp,[71] this would not have done much to change her public image. By "divinely caused illness" or impediment, I am alluding to similar biblical occurrences like Zechariah's divinely caused muteness (Luke 1:20) and the Apostle Paul's sight being impeded by Christophany (Acts 9:8) to get his attention. Similarly, Jacob wrestled with a person (he calls God) who dislocated his hip inflicting him with a limp (Gen 32:25–31). I am familiar with many stories that consider her illness as a direct outcome of her reluctance to accept her prophetic call, as documented by Girard and others—something far from being outlandish. Disability in an agrarian context might pose an existential challenge when it comes to the labor-intensive rice farming but not always. A divinely caused illness in Diola culture is not an end in and of itself but a means to an end—a divine way of forcing a would-be messenger or person to either accept his or her call or perform a much-neglected ritual.[72]

French colonial dawn in Diola country forced some Diola people to rethink their faith traditions and identities[73] an overwhelming sense of displacement that inspired prophetic activities long before Aline Sitoé Diatta. The Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers introduced Christianity in Diola country as early as 1880. The gradual spread of missionary Christianity was smooth at first but then it became a major competitor of extant Diola faith traditions well before

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69 Philippe Meguelle*, Chefferies Coloniale et égalitarisme diola: Les difficultés de la politique indigène de la France en Basse-Casamance (Sénégal), 1828–1923* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 48; Peter Mark, "Fetishers, 'Marybukes' and the Christian Norm: European Images of Senegambians and Their Religions, 1550–1760," *ASR* 23/2 (Sept. 1980): 95–7.

70 Roche, *Histoire de la Casamance*, 34–5.

71 Girard, *Genèse*, 240; Waldman and Baum, "Innovation as Renovation," 249, contra "The Woman Who Was More than a Man": Making Aline Sitoé Diatta into a National Heroine in Senegal" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 39/2 (2005): 350, who thinks she was with physical disability "all her life" according to her family members. Again here, as Toliver-Diallo maintains, to say a person was with disability his or her entire life does not mean in Diola syntax from birth. Such a statement could simply mean a person's adult life or a long time. Diola concept of time is not western. This is also true in scripture where forgiving seven times seventy simply means timeless, or wandering in the wilderness for forty years simply means for a long time.

72 Diédhiou, *L'identité Jóola en Question*, 292–3.

73 Robert M. Baum, "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity" *Africa* 60/3 (1990): 375–6.

the birth of Aline Sitoé Diatta. A handful of Diola converts to Christianity parted ways with their faith traditions; some remained somewhat connected to their traditional path but most rejected the missionary brand of Christianity altogether.[74]

Aline Sitoé Diatta, Girard observes, was approached by divine messengers who appeared to her in the main city market called Sandaga in 1941, led her by hand to the seashore; and there, they said to her "God sent us to you. Tell your people they must perform a 'charity' we will show you. So they will receive rain."[75] Baum records a slightly different but detailed version of this call story:

> She heard a voice that she attributed to Emitai … Emitai told her that she would receive a spirit shrine that would provide the Diola with new rain rituals. Emitai … had chosen her to carry out Its instructions and to teach people to perform the 'charity' of *Kasila*.[76]

Kasila or *Kasarah* means "charity"—the latter is a loan word from the Wolof language. At an earlier stage, the Diola of Yutu's name for practice of "charity" was *Balibë* which, due to ethnic contact, was Wolofized into *Kasarah*. According to Paul Diédhiou, all these locutions derived from the original Diola word *Jibasasor*.[77]

This event marked the initial call of Aline Sitoé Diatta. After many failed attempts to avoid her call, she returned to her Kabrousse home to deliver the message. She was sent to address the needs of Diola people promising them rain and divine deliverance from French colonial occupation. Her salvific message from drought and imperial occupation echoes the soteriological needs enshrined in many African faith traditions—salvation from all sorts of calamities.[78] French colonial officials saw in her ministry an existential threat to imperial interest—a strong feeling that eventually resulted in her arrest, trial, exile, and ultimately death in hands of empire.

On arrest and trial, Colonel Sajous, a French colonial official, interrogated her and Aline Sitoé Diatta unflinchingly responded: "God [*Ala Emit*], who appeared to me many times, sent me. I am just transmitting the orders God dictated to me." Ongoing oneiric divine revelations inspired her to innovate on extant

74 Baum, "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity," 370–398.

75 Girard, *Genèse*, 240, "Nous sommes envoyés par Dieu auprès de toi. Il faut faire comprendre aux hommes qu'ils doivent faire la 'charité' que nous t'indiquerons. Ainsi, ils auront la pluie."

76 Baum, *West Africa's Women*, 140.

77 Paul Diédhiou, Paul. *L'identité Jóola en Question (Casamance)* (Paris: Karthala, 2011), 287.

78 Tukunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1979), 94.

religious traditions and restore some neglected but equally important religious practices. She reinforced Diola treasured praxis—"a communitarian ethic" that emphasizes communal mutualism in thought and deed.[79] To her community members, her deity is the same *Ala Emit* of old who is graciously shaping an inclusive communion of people Diola, and non-Diola, into a diverse unity of people under the aegis of her "charity shrine."[80] Her *Kasila* echoes much of Paul's language in Gal 3:26–28 as it reemphasized the long held egalitarian traditional praxis exercised by most Diola people that makes no distinctions "between old and young, rich and poor, male and female"[81] stranger and community member. Some among her 35 poems recorded by Jean Girard communicate her countercolonial message.[82]

> I am very pleased to show you what it takes
> To cut the neck of a bull
> For I regret to see the Europeans killing people with their long guns.
> A day will come when God will inflict a harsh punishment on them
> For what they do is not right
> And God does not like wrongdoers (*ASDP* 35).

She and her community members pray directly to God (*ASDP* 18, 19, 20, and 27) as she persuades her followers to resist the policies introduced by Imperial France.

> I, God, Creator of all human beings,
> I ask you always to address your prayers for health to me
> And to live in peace throughout your life.
> I ask you to do acts of charity which you will come to learn from the example of Alinsitouë,
> Keep that well in mind
> And you will be able to ask God to grant you rain (*ASDP* 18).

> Oh God! You must have pity on us, your children.
> We wish that the Europeans will not return any more.
> Why do the Europeans want to do nothing but squander our lands?

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79 Baum, *West Africa's Women*, 141.

80 Girard, *Genèse*, 242.

81 Marilyn Robinson Waldman and Robert Baum, "Innovation as Renovation: 'The Prophet' as an Agent of Change" in *Innovations in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change,* ed. by Michael A. Williams; Religion and Society 31 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 251.

82 Girard, *Genèse*, 347–56, recorded poems 1–35, referred to henceforth as *ASDP (Aline Sitoé Diatta's Poems)*. Most of her unrecorded songs were etched in Diola orature.

But we wish all the more that God will hold their spirits in her hand
So that they will not have the idea of returning to Africa (*ASDP* 19)

Look, the French are coming!
Attention! Ready yourselves!
Everyone arm himself with his gun!
Let us do something, like the Europeans.
What have we done to them?
Why do they come to maltreat us?
To exhaust us?
But we can say that it is the Good God who has led them to us
For no reason but to maltreat us! (*ASDP* 20)

Oh! Human beings!
God has charged me to bring his word
To make you understand that the world belongs to him
And that even the houses are his.
But everyone stays
To make a deal between the Europeans and the Africans,
For the Europeans have come to snatch the land out of our hands,
Yet they live like everybody else
And are on this earth only by the will of God (*ASDP* 27)

While poem 35 is read as a song of resistance to colonization, embedding an eschatological hope in divine vengeance and liberation for community members, poem 4 provides intriguing insights into Aline Sitoé Diatta's community construction.

Let us sing, and encourage ourselves with joy
For God invites all persons who live in this world
To demand of him reasonable satisfaction for their needs,
Even the most secret ones.
Oh God! We believe, and are sure that
Our guide Alinsitouë received this opportunity from you,
For her piety would radiate no power at all
If it did not derive from you. . .
The wind that blows carries our voices into the distance,
And inspires the strangers who surround us.
By his kindness, our leader [Alinsitouë] chose
A strong, courageous, steadfast woman like an elephant,
And who sung in our midst.

She told him to take a cooking pot and to prepare
A meal for the strangers.
Oh God! I who sing for you,
I chose this woman to take
A cooking pot and cook food for strangers.[83]

A critical reading of some of the following lines of the poem evince her impartial theology of community and identity construction. They are permeated with analogical echoes of God's feedings of Israel in the Wilderness (Exod 16:3–31), Jesus' feedings of his followers (Mark 6:32–44; 8:1–18; Matt 14:13–21; 15:32; Luke 9:10b–17; John 6:1–15), and Pauline Eucharistic communalism (Gal 2:11–14; 1 Cor 11:17–27).

Let us sing, to give us courage with joy
For God invites all persons who live in this world
To ask of him reasonable satisfaction for their needs,
Even the most secret ones. …
The wind that blows carries our voices into the distance,
And inspires the strangers surround us.
… take a cooking pot and prepare
A meal for the strangers
… cook the food for strangers (*ASDP* 4).

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83 Jean Girard, *Genèse du pouvoir charismatique en basse Casamance* (Sénégal) (Dakar SN: IFAN, 1969), 348–49:
Chantons, donnons-nous du courage avec joie
Car Dieu invite toute personne vivant en ce monde
A lui demander la satisfaction raisonnable de ses besoins,
Même les plus secrets.
Oh Dieu ! nous croyons, et sommes sûre que
Notre guide Alinsitouë a reçu cette chance de vous,
Car son pieu ne rayonnerait d'aucune puissance,
Si elle ne le détenait de vous. . .
Le vent qui souffle emporte nos voix au loin,
Et attire les étrangers qui nous entourent.
Par sa gentillesse, notre guide choisit
Une femme forte, courageuse, brave comme l'éléphant,
Et qui chantait au milieu de nous,
Elle lui dit de prendre une marmite et de préparer
Le repas des étrangers.
Oh ! Dieu, moi qui chante pour vous,
Je désigne cette femme pour qu'elle prenne
Une marmite et apprête la nourriture des étrangers.

The first line begins with a prayer for divine strength and joy amidst the pressures of imperial France. At the time when some Diola collaborate and accommodate to imperial demands, Aline Sitoé Diatta, in the name of her *Ala Emit* (God), invites all people to join her alternative community. In Diola language, the expression "God invites all people who live in the world" means people of all ethnic groups whether they be Senegalese or foreigner, old or young, male or female, Diola or non-Diola. Potential adherents would pray for their needs and those of the community under empire. The idea of voices being carried by the wind to the would-be future community members echoes the biblical motif of creation by word and the activity of the spirit in Gen 1:2 and Acts 2:1–4.

Singing the poem is a creational act in which words would be moved and directed by the life-force/wind/spirit of *Ala Emit*[84] to the would-be future community members. The prayers are performative; they do things. Her community meals are shared with strangers—a way for adherents to actively participate in welcoming strangers and sharing meals with them. This ritualized mutualism echoes Eucharistic practices the Apostle Paul advocates (1 Cor 11:23–26). The last lines of the poem capture such a reality:

> … take a cooking pot and prepare
> A meal for the who strangers
> … cook the food for strangers.

Commenting on her community and identity construction, Dominque Darbon agreeably maintains that the "religious, cultural, social, economic, and political" dimensions of the message of Aline Sitoé Diatta foster equity and encourage "neighborly love, mutual help, solidarity and charity" to be exercised as mutual communalism in meal sharing and extending hospitality to the stranger.[85] French sociologist Louis-Vincent Thomas, who spent many years teaching in Senegal at the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal, West Africa, during and after the colonial period and undertook many studies of Diola people, has this to say about Aline Sitoe Diatta's identity and community construction:

84 The language echoes divine agency especially when read against the backdrop of Gen 1:2b, Ps 103:4, and John 3:8 that use the term pneu/ma "spirit, wind" in LXX and רוּחַ "wind, spirit" in the MT.

85 Dominique Darbon, "La Voix de la Casamanace … Une Parole Diola," *Politique Africaine* 14 (Jan 1985): 131–2. This is not an entirely new development in Diola faith tradition as Diédhiou, *L'identité Jóola en Question*, 280, maintains. It is the very expression of the collegial nature of the Diola shrine and faith traditions.

> Le culte rassemble en une fraternité, presque en une église, 1a totalité des adhérents la vérité d'Alinsitüé, quelles que soient leurs origines ethniques et leurs autres pratiques religieuses. II s'agit d'une sorte d'initiation à l'échelle humaine qui prend l'allure d'un mystère ouvert à tous les hommes de bonne volonté, les regroupant en un mouvement unitaire axe sur le Bien, ce dernier répondant aux aspirations économiques de l'époque : la satisfaction des besoins alimentaires par l'agriculture.[86] [The cult gathers into a fellowship, almost in a church, the totality of adherents to the truth of Alinsitüé, whatever their ethnic origins and their religious practices, a kind of initiation on a human scale that takes on the appearance of a mystery open to all people of good will, regrouping them into a unitary movement focused on Good. The latter responding to economic aspirations of the era: meeting food needs through agriculture.]

To Aline Sitoé Diatta, children of God are called to act responsibly toward one another. After all, this is what Diola Faith Tradition—"Divine Path" has always fostered, nurtured, and practiced.

Conclusion

The call-stories and ministries of Paul and Aline Sitoe Diatta share many key points but also differ. Paul was divinely encountered and sent to share a message of faith in the cross event—a reality that engenders an alternative egalitarian community under the Roman Empire (Gal 1:7–16; Acts 9:1–12). He saw (ὁράω) a light (Acts 26:13) and heard (ἀκούω) a voice (φωνή) addressing him by name (Acts 9:4; 22:7 cf. Gal 1:11–16). Aline Sitoé Diatta, like the Apostle Paul (Acts 14:9–10; 18:9; 26:19; 2 Cor 12:1–2), saw many theophanies and heard divine voices commissioning her to rainmaking and reemphasizing egalitarian community construction. Paul ministered to the children of the ancient Celts known as Galatians—a people objectified by Greeks and Romans as barbarians, warmongering bestial and fickle savages,[87] encouraging them to exercise the baptismal confession that incubates a diverse unity of equals and children of Abraham (Gal 3:26–29). Aline Sitoé Diatta served a French-occupied and objectified Diola people with a similar message.

86 Thomas, "Les 'rois' Diola," 164.

87 Polybius, *History* 18.17.9–12; 18.41.7; 2.32.8; 3.78.2; 24.14.7; 3.3.5; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* iv.151e–152b; Livy, *Hist.* 38.17.9–10. David Rankin, "Celts Through Classical Eyes," in *The Celtic World,* ed. Miranda J. Green (New York: Routledge, 1995), 21–33, provides a concise discussion of typologies the above ancient authors apply to Celts, Gauls/Galatians. See also Iain M. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians Through Roman Eyes* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 3–6.

In spite of perceptions about Paul's physical appearance that might have been affected by an ailment and Aline Sitoé Diatta's limp, their message was effective in creating and sustaining mixed communities of equals whose shared allegiance rests on the divine agency that initiates, sustains and empowers it. In this respect, Aline Sitoé Diatta's message for identity and community construction echoes Paul's voice (Gal 3:26–29). She was not a follower of Jesus but a messenger of *Ala Emit* who called people to a communion of equals open to all people in spite of overwhelming pressure exerted on the Diola by imperial France. Paul and Aline Sitoé Diatta both had followers and opponents and were considered a threat to empire and therefore were charged with generating stasis by disturbing the peace.

In this respect, Aline Sitoé Diatta's community centered message echoes Paul's voice (Gal 3:26–29). As I noted earlier, Paul was a follower of Jesus and Aline Sitoé Diatta was not. In their own words, they were messengers sent by God under imperial rule. Much of their teachings aimed at reconstructing the image of their community members from colonial objectifications by emphasizing the role of divine agency in transforming them into corporate human agents whose allegiance is to exercise communal mutualism and equity. My question is might echoes of Paul's voice in Aline Sitoé Diatta's messages offer actionable ideas for a lasting interfaith engagement today?

Aussie Men, Roman Men, and Fashioning the Evangelical Man from 1 Timothy 2

Lyn M. Kidson

1. Women's Experiences in Australia's Sydney Anglican Diocese

Women are problematic in many evangelical circles.[1] For many women attending evangelical churches in Australia, they are barred from holding leadership positions such as the senior minister or pastor, elder, worship leader, or ministry leader. So women are confined to speaking to other women at women's events and teaching children. When I first heard it said that the Bible was "clear" that women shouldn't teach or lead men, I was a relatively new arrival to the Christian ministry scene. In 1993, I joined the evangelical group, Student Life, and I was ministering on the campus of Macquarie University in Sydney. Student Life at the time was relatively laissez-faire about the gender of its leaders since the focus was on leadership ability. However, over in the Anglican dominated group Christian Union, there was a different story.[2] And it was from that leadership that I first heard the idea that the "Bible said that women shouldn't teach or lead men." Little did I know that I was a participant in a major cultural and theological shift in evangelicalism in Australia.

It was in 1992 that the Sydney Diocese held a conference to discuss the ordination of women.[3] The report given by the committee sets out the contributions of those for and against the ordination of women. It is rather even-handed. However, it was only when I read this document for myself that I discovered that cogent arguments were made for the ordination of women in the diocese. What I had heard up until then was that those who allowed women to teach and lead men were "unbiblical." 1 Timothy 2:12, we were told, clearly said that

1 K. Giles says that it is described as "the woman problem" in the Sydney Anglican diocese, *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are they Related in Any Way* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 17.

2 Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

3 Ordination of Women to the Priesthood, SDS: https://www.sds.asn.au/1091-ordination-women-priesthood-1993.

women should not teach men nor have authority over them. I have observed that this stance against women's ordination coloured the reception of women in ministry in many churches and ministries in New South Wales. On at least one occasion I was ruled out of the running for a ministry position at a Baptist church because of my gender. And I suspect that this happened with several positions I applied for over the course of the decade 2002 to 2012. Since then I have shifted my career focus to New Testament studies. The purpose of this current volume, in part, is to demonstrate the "system relevance" of New Testament studies to the church. I will be drawing on my studies on gender and 1 Timothy to engage with the women's ministry debate in evangelical churches in Australia.

There is another side to the discussion about women's role in ministry. Originally in the 1980s/90s, there was an effort made to keep roles and ontology distinct. It was a woman's role to submit.[4] It was not because of her essential being. However, over time there has been a noticeable shift in this, particularly in the realm of social media. Just as there is a shift to see women as created as submissive beings so there is a shift to see men as created to be active and leaders. This has profound consequences for how men and women relate to one another within the church community, and ultimately how they view the relationships within the Godhead. While it is not my intention to discuss the Trinitarian debate that recently arose at the conference of the Evangelical Theological Society (2016), what we are considering does have implications for how evangelicals view their relationships with each other and with God.[5] In this essay, I want to propose that the "complementarian" reading of 1 Timothy 2 creates a problem for the evangelical man because complementarians do not take into account the ideal Roman man.[6] I propose that a reading that lacks this context creates a superficial and weak vision of masculinity. In this essay, I will be briefly looking at a number of Australian evangelicals and their reading of 1 Timothy 2 and analysing them in terms of their implied stance on masculinity. Following this, I will offer a reading of 1 Timothy 2 in the light of Roman masculinity, and then we will consider the similarities and differences between the two readings. Then I will make some comments about the implications of

4 G. Knight III, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1977), passim.

5 Issues dealing with the claims that gender hierarchy relates to a hierarchical ordering within the Trinity are comprehensively dealt with by K. Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).

6 For the term "complementarian" see J. Piper and W. Grudem, "Preface," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (eds. J. Piper and W. Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 1991), xiv.

the complementarian view and the increased risk of domestic violence during the COVID 19 pandemic.

There are three readings of 1 Timothy 2 by complementarians I would like to consider. The first essay is by Glenn Davies, now retired Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, from a book edited by Barry Webb, *Personhood, Sexuality and Christian Ministry* (1987).[7] The essay was a paper given at Moore College at the height of the debate in the 1980s. The second essay is by Anglican Claire Smith in a book she wrote defending the complementarian view, *God's Good Design* (2012).[8] Lastly, we will be looking at Baptist Hefin Jones in a paper presented at a symposium at Morling Bible College in Sydney.[9] I was on the panel at this symposium and our papers and responses can be found in the book, *The Gender Conversation* (2016). All of these works are aimed at the popular level. So an investigation of this literature is an important step to understanding how the complementarian reading has translated into the life of the evangelical church in Australia.

A methodological problem arises in how to analyse these three complementarian readings. My object is to analyse their studies in terms of their conception of an ideal man, which is more assumed than discussed. Since a clearer picture of the ideal man is our objective, then a useful framework can be derived from modern masculinity studies.[10] The study of masculinity came as a response to feminism and women's studies in the 1980s. While it is now recognised that there is no such thing as 'masculinity,' since this concept varies depending on a person's sub-group, ethnicity, sexual orientation, we will stay with the term "masculinity."[11] My assumption is that the ideal masculinity that is being

7 G. Davies, "Biblical Study Paper: 1 Timothy 2:8–15," in *Personhood, Sexuality, and Christian Ministry* (ed. B. Webb; Homebush West, N.S.W: Lancer Books, 1987), 83–95.

8 C. Smith, *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2012).

9 H. Jones, "Women, Teaching, and Authority: A Case for Understanding the Nature of Congregational Oversight as Underlying 1 Timothy 2:11–12," in *The Gender Conversation: Evangelical Perspective on Gender, Scripture, and the Christian Life* (ed. E. Murphy and D. Starling; Macquarie Park; Eugene: Morling Press; Wipf and Stock, 2016), 143–154.

10 K. Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 1–16; G. Olson et al. (eds.), *Masculinity Studies: Contemporary Approaches and Alternative Perspectives* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018), passim.

11 This is assuming that the North American homogeny applies to Australia; R. Connell, "The Study of Masculinities," *Qualitative Research Journal* 14.1 (2014): 5–15; L. Gerber, "Grit, Guts, and Vanilla Beans: Godly Masculinity in the Ex-Gay Movement," *Gender and Society* 29.1 (2015): 26–50.

promoted in Evangelicalism is fairly uniform, even across national borders.[12] One could argue that the masculinity being promoted in many western countries including Australia is a North American variety.[13] One of the assumptions of masculinity studies that is relevant for our study is "the idea that masculinity had to be made visible, to be brought out as an object of study, and to not be considered an unmarked category."[14] However, masculinity/ies studies is primarily a field of the social sciences and our object is to analyse literary outputs for their construction of masculinity. Helpfully, the volume edited by Stefan Horlacher, *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*, has made the case for analysing literary texts to describe representations of masculinity.[15] While our texts are not fictional, the object for the writers is to persuade their readers that their view of masculinity in 1 Timothy is the only correct and 'biblical' one. As Horlacher says, quoting Peter Murphy, "literature has played [a role] in reinforcing the assumptions about masculinity and, at times, [in] helping to establish the norm of manhood."[16] Therefore, our method of analysis will be to describe how each writer presents men in their texts. Words that refer to men in relation to 1 Timothy will be used as keys to note the construction of masculinity by the writer. Further, it will be noted when the writer observes a contrast between men and women in their discussion.

2. Davies: Men Teaching in Public, Women in Private

The first text to be analysed is Davies' "Biblical Study Paper: 1 Timothy 2:8–15." Since this paper was offered in the heat of the ordination debate, our analysis will focus primarily on this text. The other two texts by Smith and Jones will be considered in the light of this analysis in terms of repeating conclusions or differences in emphasis. Smith and Jones are offering what they perceive to be a consensus on the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2.

The first thing to note about Davies' paper is that there is no introduction so that its purpose remains obscure.[17] It is only in the conclusion that the purpose becomes apparent, "the passage under review has been the centre of much

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12 Connell, "The Study of Masculinities," 9.

13 Ibid., 9.

14 T. W. Reeser, "Concepts of Masculinity and Masculinity Studies," in *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice* (ed. S. Horlacher; Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2015), 11–38 (12–13).

15 Reeser, "Concepts of Masculinity," 12.

16 S. Horlacher, "Configuring Masculinity," in *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*, 1–10 (4).

17 Davies, "Biblical Study Paper," 83.

debate in the Christian community."[18] The purpose is to outline Davies' reasons for why this passage should be read to exclude women from ordination, "there is no role for [women] in the teaching of congregations where men are present."[19] Thus, this paper is far more than an exegesis of a passage for the benefit of the students at a Bible college. It is a polemical response arguing against a change of practice. The paper is divided into six sections, moving from "the context of the passage" through to overviews of the verses "8–10," and verses "11–12." The section "Reasons for Paul's Prohibition [vv.13–14]," is divided into two subsections "i. Adam was formed first then Eve," and "ii. Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived." The last section is "Women and the Bearing of Children, 1 Timothy 2:15," followed by the conclusion. For the of sake brevity, we will focus on the first two sections.[20]

In the first section Paul and Timothy are described in narrative terms, "Timothy who is resident in Ephesus, Paul expects to come to Ephesus." There is no mention of the genre or the salutation. There is a discussion of "certain false teachers," and "these people." Davies says the opening verses of chapter 2 refer to the prayer offered in the congregation. It is quite striking that Davies uses the more antiquated term "men" (he is not quoting) to refer to humanity in a paper discussing men and women.[21]

In the next section "Paul's desire for Prayer, vv 8–10," Davies says that Paul's "concern is the manner in which men pray."[22] Paul's use of βούλομαι, he says, "carries a strong authoritative tone."[23] He goes on to say that it is a "strong desire of apostolic authority that he lays upon the men in their prayer life."[24] But then he shifts his focus from the men because "the assumption" (Davies' assumption?) is that "Paul is still speaking of the life of the congregation, that is, of the public prayer offered when Christians assemble."[25] He then generalizes what the men are to do to the whole congregation, saying "their prayer is to be prayer offered with clean lips or holy hands." Davies has inserted "clean lips" here, even though this phrase is not used in 1 Timothy. This recalls Isaiah 6:5–7 where Isaiah is made clean for service, but this is unsaid. He says that the raising of "holy hands" is "a metaphor for purity of intention, and is to be paralleled by purity of life." The implication is that the call to lift "holy hands" is metaphorical

18 Ibid, 93.
19 Ibid, 94.
20 Ibid., 83–88.
21 Ibid., 83.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 84.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.

so that the action itself ceases to be the focus. The application is not just to the men but to the whole congregation as a metaphor for the "purity of life," which is to "be seen especially in the relationships that members have with one another."[26] The instructions to the men become the instructions to the whole congregation and therefore the men are representative of the congregation.

He then moves to discuss the conjunction ὡσαύτως, "likewise," as it "links what follows with what has preceded."[27] This conjunction is problematic, "the exact nature of this link may not be certain." Davies seems to be signalling that there is doubt as to how ὡσαύτως works in connecting the instructions to the men and the instructions to the women. The problem for Davies is not reading from men to women as "at the very least" the "same sphere in verse 9" is in consideration as in "verse 8," that is "the behaviour of Christians in the congregation."[28] What was an assumption in the previous paragraph is now a certainty, even though nothing is explicitly said about the meeting of believers. He says that "Paul could also be expressing his desire for the way in which women ought to pray when they do so in public assembly" and then points to 1 Corinthians 11:5, which is explicitly addressing the assembly of believers. The problem is how the rubrics that Paul gives for the men and the women are interchangeable (in light of the ὡσαύτως). Twice in this sentence, Davis mentions the "public assembly." Davies says that the instruction not to quarrel or express anger could apply to women: there is no problem carrying the instructions forward. What is odd is that he qualifies this instruction to the men saying the quarrelling and anger could be a particular problem with the men in Ephesus or it may be because the Christians were "following the Jewish custom of allowing only men to pray."[29] How this relates to a command not to quarrel or be angry he does not say. But this ambivalence allows him to move on and rule out the idea that the instructions about apparel do not apply to the men, "it probably would not have occurred to men to wear the kind of apparel which Paul prohibits in verse 9" nor is Paul prohibiting "the men from braiding their hair with gold or pearls or costly attire."[30] Thus the instructions about attire and hair are specific to women but not to men. Further, nothing is mentioned about "good works" in verse 10, which could have general relevance for the whole congregation.

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.

The next section is "Learning and Teaching" and Davies is primarily focused on the women (1 Tim 2:11–12). He says that "verse 11 is concerned with one particular issue, the manner in which women learn, whereas verse 12 is concerned with the prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over men."[31] There is a shift here in theme from the manner in which something is accomplished to the activity itself. However, nothing is mentioned about Paul shifting focus. After a discussion about ἡσυχία, "silence," Davies reiterates Paul's authority saying, he "does not permit (ἐπιτρέπω, which is a word of strong injunction) a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a *man*."[32] Davies shifts from the plural to the singular throughout this section without comment. He says in concluding his discussion on αὐθεντεῖν, "to have authority over" (or domineer), that "what is pertinent to Paul's remark is that this authority is not to be exercised over a *man*."[33] He then adds to this sentence "presumably Paul would be happy for women to exercise authority over women, but what is prohibited for women is their exercise of authority over men."[34] So although Davies emphasizes "man" and "men," no explanation is given as to why he shifts from the singular as it is in the text of 1 Timothy 2:12 (ἀνδρός) to the plural. Further, he makes no mention of his shift from the singular "woman" to "women." It would appear that since Davies has assumed that the context of the passage is the meeting of the congregation then Paul must be talking about the men and women who would be in a meeting of believers. Davies is adjusting the language of the text to suit his assumptions.

In the next section of his argument, Davies writes of other "interpreters," who he does not reference. He says that some want to retain the KJV's translation of αὐθεντεῖν as "to usurp authority" so as to remove the difficulty of "Paul's prohibition of women exercising authority over men."[35] He says however that they embrace a greater difficulty, "for if Paul is denying women the opportunity of usurping authority, surely this injunction would equally apply to men as well as women. Yet the reason that Paul gives is unique to women and indeed could *not* apply to men (vv 13–14)."[36] He then makes the argument that if αὐθεντεῖν is to be read in its negative nuance, to usurp authority or to "domineer" and in this instance is being applied to women but not to men, then the inference is that "men are permitted [to usurp authority] or to domineer." The same "logical

31 Ibid., 84.
32 Ibid., 85.
33 Ibid.; Davies' emphasis.
34 Ibid.; again Davies' emphasis.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 85–86.

inference" applies to those who wish to infer that Paul is prohibiting women from teaching falsely. This argument is not actually logical.[37] In terms of our analysis, Paul's authority is at the forefront. He is the one prohibiting women from teaching and exercising authority over men. He can do this because he is an apostle but subliminally it is because he too is a man with authority. So there is something unique about women which means that the apostle needs to command them not to teach or have authority over men. This implies that there is something unique about men that means that they cannot have a woman teach or exercise authority over them, although this is not stated.

The last part of this section deals with "the exact nature of teaching and the exercise of authority that Paul had in mind."[38] Davies needs to deal with this because his argument has created a problem since "it is obvious that in Paul's teaching elsewhere that every Christian is able to teach." A critical problem is in Acts 18 where Priscilla and her husband Aquilla teach Apollos. To deal with this he says that the evidence suggests that "there are two levels of teaching operating in Paul's mind: the private one-to-one level and the public one-to-many level."[39] He then proceeds with a series of inferences about what Paul is saying the light of this conclusion. First, "it is not permitted for women to take the *role* of a teacher," and this role is "given only to the few." This leads to the next inference that "the role of the teacher is part … of the role of the elder."[40] Paul, says Davies, includes "women among those who are eligible for the office of deacon and, by inference, excludes women from the office of elder (or bishop)."[41] The criterion of aptitude to teach for the elder, says Davies, is "not to deny the general permission … of women in one-to-one situations to teach and admonish any disciple, be they male or female."[42] He says that the concern throughout chapter 2 "is the conduct of the congregation and in the congregation the public office of teaching is to be reserved for men and not for women."[43] He goes on to discuss the nature of the role of a teacher without any reference to 1 Timothy. This does seem somewhat contrived, but the point of this section is to demonstrate that "there is an authority invested in the office of teacher," that teachers are leaders, and leaders "have the authority to admonish." He is then able to conclude that Paul is prohibiting women from taking the

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37 In private communication with Dr Robert Anderson, retired lecturer in logic, Notre Dame University, Sydney. It is an example of an argument from silence.

38 Davies, "Biblical Study Paper," 86.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 87.

43 Ibid.

authoritative role as a teacher. The authoritative role would also "include ruling, but it is specifically teaching that Paul has in mind."[44]

Davies finishes this section of his argument on verses 11 to 12 by dealing with the question of prophesy since it would seem that "prophecy is virtually equivalent to teaching, or preaching."[45] Davies makes a distinction between "*words* given [to the prophet] are directly from God. Whereas the authority of the [teacher] is in the *person* as well as the *words*."[46] He is, therefore, able to conclude that teaching in the Old Testament was "given to priests, who were exclusively male," but the "task of being agents of God's revelation … was given to male and female alike" because the words of the prophet are given to them directly from God. He concludes the section by saying, "the existence of prophetesses, therefore, in no way detracts from Paul's instruction that women ought not to teach or exercise authority over men."[47]

What can we conclude about Davies' vision of masculinity that emerges from this analysis? The first thing to note is that masculinity is essentially normative.[48] The actions prescribed to men, "lifting holy hands" while in prayer, are generalised by describing them as a metaphor for "purity of life" so this action becomes applicable to the whole congregation. The instructions to the women are particular only to the women, as Davies said, he cannot imagine the men of Ephesus or Paul being concerned about dress or hair. In this way, men's bodies dissolve as an issue and women's bodies become a special concern, particularly in the public sphere. Paul might want the men of Ephesus to lift holy hands, but this can be laid aside for the contemporary man as it is only a metaphor. The contemporary woman, on the other hand, is obliged by the command of Paul to consider her conduct in terms of her dress. This masculinity is not concerned about the deportment of a man's body nor his dress or hair.

Further, since verses 9 to 11 concern only women, the good works, which women are instructed to concern themselves with are therefore not normative in this instance. Good works are not even mentioned, thus they do not contribute to the picture of masculinity. This means that women are portrayed as passive and their activity within the congregation is essentially confined to women's only activity. They are prohibited from "authoritative" activity in the public sphere of the congregation. Men, on the other hand, are permitted to act as authoritative and are not portrayed in the negative. Even when he discusses the

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 88.
46 Ibid.; Davies' emphasis.
47 Ibid.
48 On "normative masculinity" see Gerber, "Grit, Guts, and Vanilla Beans," 30–31.

injunction to avoid anger or dissension, Davies mitigates this by introducing an ambiguity about the interpretation of this verse. Therefore, nothing hinders the men of Ephesus from taking up the role of teacher or elder. Thus for Davies, masculinity is defined as official role bearing from which women are excluded. Only a man can admonish a man. His masculinity is encompassed by the voices of men in the public sphere of the congregation. He may learn something from a woman in a one-on-one private situation, away from the ears of other men. Overwhelmingly, however, judging by the repetitive use of the words "teaching" and "authority" (or synonyms), a man teaches others with authority in a public role. It is a picture of masculinity that is public, which fulfils a role, which is active, and which exercises authority over others. These things obscure the man's body and any failing in relation to his anger or propensity for conflict. For Davies, this fades into an ambiguous background.

In summary, the men and women are being sorted into two categories and this perhaps best represented in a table.

Men	**Women**
Aren't concerned about their dress or hair	Are concerned about their dress and hair
Are public	Are private
Take up the role of teacher	Are prohibited from the role of teacher
Are elders	Are not elders
Exercise authority	Do not exercise authority
Are leaders	Are not leaders
Admonish	Don't admonish
Are agents of authoritative interpretation	Passively report words of revelation (prophecy)

Tab. 1: Categorizing Men and Women

This critique forms the basis of the engagement with the next two Australian evangelicals, Smith and Jones. For the sake of brevity, we will discuss where they extensively agree with Davies on verses 8 to 12 and where they depart. Smith (2012) in the second chapter of her book, *God's Good Design*, aims to give a "plain reading" of chapter 2 of 1 Timothy. Like Davies, she is portraying her approach as an exegetical reading of the text. This is a book for a popular audience and is primarily aimed at women asking questions about feminism and the Bible. Her purpose is to defend a common English translation of verses 11–12 as a straightforward interpretation of the underlying Greek without any reference to the Greek text.

3. Anger Management and Dress Codes: Claire Smith on "God's Good Design"

Smith takes "every place" in 1 Timothy 2:8 as inferring that verses 8–15 refer to the corporate meetings of believers.[49] Like Davies, she focuses on how prayer is offered, but unlike Davies makes an unambiguous acknowledgement that the second part of verse 8 references "male aggression and self-promotion." Verses 9 to 15 she says addresses the women, but says nothing about the problematic ὡσαύτως, "likewise." In her reading the women's issue is different from the men: it is not "anger management."[50] Like Davies, her focus is on the women's dress, but unlike him, she mentions that women are to be "proactive in doing good."[51] Her theme is that women are to show quiet decorum; they are to learn but "not to teach or to exercise authority over a man." Smith sums up by saying that "when it comes to teaching the gathered Christian community, women are to keep quiet. They are not to teach. Teaching is someone else's responsibility, not theirs."[52] In other words, it is the responsibility of men, and the emphasis is on the women's silence.

She then adds a caveat. Women can teach but not in a role that involves being ordained.[53] The thrust of her argument is that this is self-explanatory from the English rendition of this passage.[54] However, no acknowledgement is made that the concept of "ordination" is anachronistic when it comes to reading this text. She goes on to address questions about her "plain reading." It's important to her project to addresses the issue of submission; it "is a common Christian response," which is not just confined to women.[55] However, she goes on to argue that "in quietness" used in verses 11 to 12 is the "underlining the main point about the conduct of women." Although she acknowledges that quietness is a point the writer has already made about the Christian life, she does not generalise the women's quietness as an example of the Christian life. This quietness is particular to women as they cannot "teach" and "exercise authority." It's not that

49 Smith, *God's Good Design*, 27–28.
50 Ibid., 28.
51 Ibid., 29.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 30.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.,

women submit themselves to "all men, all the time" but only when they are "in church, when teaching is happening, to what is taught and those men who are teaching it."[56] Again we have a few men to whom women are to submit when they teach. These men "labour in preaching," so they are active in this public space, while all the gathered women are passive learners.

This brings her to Adam and Eve. She says that there are two reasons for restricting women from "the authoritative teaching role." The first reason is Adam "was made first," and as the firstborn has "the responsibilities that go with that."[57] Thus "Paul" gives instructions "based on the way things are meant to be; the way God originally created men and women."[58] The second reason is "based on what happened when God's ideal was disobeyed … She gave some to the man … and he ate too … [Adam] disobeyed God by eating the fruit … and by abdicating his responsibility of leadership to his wife."[59] This is the pattern of "male leadership and female submission … the [Ephesian] women are not to usurp the male leadership God has provided."[60] Thus the argument is that men are created to lead, for a woman to lead is disobeying God's created order. The image of masculinity here is one that is created to have authority and to lead, and there is an expectation that the women in the congregation will submit to what is taught by a few men. It is a masculinity that can be devolved if it obeys a woman's teaching. How any of this relates to Eve's deception is difficult to see. There appears to be a lot of interpretative weight brought to bear on the text based on an elaborate reading of Genesis 2.

4. Hefin Jones: Equality of Interdependence between Men and Women

The last writer to be considered is Jones (2016), who takes for granted that his readers are familiar with the argument that 1 Timothy 2:12 "prohibits women from authoritatively teaching men, and thus bars women functioning as overseers."[61] Like Smith, he sees "in quietness" forming "a wrapper for the instruction for women to learn and the prohibition of them authoritatively teach men."[62] "Full submission (2:11)," says Jones, does not apply to men in general

56 Ibid., 35.
57 Ibid., 36.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 36–37.
61 Jones, "Women, Teaching, and Authority," 144.
62 Ibid., 145.

but to whoever is their instructor (which would be a man).[63] He argues that the two infinitives are to be understood as "one composite activity" so that "Paul prohibits women from authoritatively teaching men."[64] There is then a detailed exegetical discussion where he qualifies Philip B. Payne's argument that Paul is discussing equality between men and women in 1 Corinthians 11:11, by saying that "this isn't a symmetrical equality or an equality of equivalence but rather an equality of interdependence."[65] In conclusion, he says that "it is the combination of authority with teaching that provides the key contextual indicator that Paul is prohibiting women from functioning as overseers."[66] Like Davies and Smith, he repeatedly insists that teaching a congregation from the Scriptures is an authoritative function and this should only be done by men.

In sum, the view of masculinity promoted by these three writers over the course of three decades has changed very little. Masculinity is the normative state for the Christian. In men reside all the attributes that our society takes for granted are positive: a man is active, he is a free agent, he is expected to participate in the public sphere, and in him resides legitimate authority. When he speaks from the Scriptures he does so authoritatively. The exercise of authority is the cornerstone of Christian manhood. But this is a picture of masculinity that is inherently weak as it needs to be defined against womanhood. Further, it can be undermined by the exercise of authority of a woman, even if she is faithfully teaching the Scriptures. One wonders if Davies' man who is taught by a woman in private would be able to bear the affront to his masculinity.[67] The image of masculinity that is projected by these writers is frail. There is a sense in which it is constantly in reference to the women and whether they are in public or private contexts if the Scriptures are being spoken about. In summary, the masculinity that these writers are promoting is at its most complete when it is in charge, active in the public sphere, and expounding Scripture. Masculinity is normative and for this reason, the man's body is dissolved; he teaches by his speech. Women are silent, but men speak and are listened to. The identity of the Christian man is tied to his speech and the response of the women who listen to him. Fundamentally, his identity is inherently unstable as it is tied to the response of those he expects will listen, but these may become deviant and not listen.

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 146.
65 Ibid., 151; P. B. Payne, "The Bible Teaches the Equality of Man and Woman," *Priscilla Papers* 29 (2015): 3–10.
66 Jones, "Women, Teaching, and Authority," 153.
67 Davies says there is a "private one-to-one level," "Biblical Study Paper," 86.

5. Beyond Domination: Masculinity and Femininity in 1 Timothy

Is this really the view of masculinity in 1 Timothy? For the last decade, a lot of scholarship has been done on the Pastoral Epistles. Concentrated efforts have been made on understanding the writer's use of rhetoric to persuade his audience away from the false teaching.[68] In light of these advances I would like to propose that in 1 Timothy 2, masculinity and femininity are secondary issues to the writer's prime concern. His view of masculinity and femininity is being shaped by his response to the false teaching that is being promoted *within* his Christian community and by the missional demands of the believers' political and social context.[69]

Nearly all commentators see the writer of 1 Timothy as reinforcing traditional, patriarchal expectations about women.[70] However, I would argue that careful attention to the purpose of the letter and its structure provides coordinates for a reading that takes into account the writer's strategy against his opponents. In my recent book, I argued that the purpose of 1 Timothy is to remove or reduce the threat to the community by the false or "other instruction" (1 Tim 1:3–4).[71] 1 Timothy 1:3–4 forms the purpose statement of the letter; "certain men" (τισιν) and, as it turns out, women (1 Tim 2:12; 5:15), are commanded not "to teach the other instruction" (μὴ ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν) and return to God's "administration" (1 Tim 1:4).[72] My argument is that all the commands form part of this "instruction" (διδασκαλία), which is sound (1 Tim 1:10) and good (1 Tim 4:6) as opposed to the "instruction" (διδασκαλία) of spirits and demons (1 Tim 4:1). Therefore, any discussion of "church order" is subsidiary to the primary purpose, which is to put an end to the promotion of the "other instruction."[73]

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68 Eg. L. R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986); M. Harding, *Tradition and Rhetoric in the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998).

69 C. T. Hoklotubbe, *Civilized Piety: The Rhetoric of Pietas in the Pastoral Epistles and the Roman Empire* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2017), 103–104; C. R. Hutson, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Paideia; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 62–71. Christianity as an act of political sedition, E. A. Judge, *Paul and the Conflict of Cultures: The Legacy of His Though Today* (ed. J. R. Harrison; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 154–155.

70 Hoklotubbe, 103; D. R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983), 59, 100; J. A. Glancy, "Protocols of Masculinity in the Pastoral Epistles," in *New Testament Masculinities* (ed. S. D. Moore et. al.; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2003), 235–264.

71 On the translation of διδασκαλία as "instruction" see L. M. Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men: The Rhetorical Strategies of 1 Timothy 1* (WUNT 526; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 112–120.

72 Ibid., 136, 138.

73 Ibid., 1–2; 274–275.

My focus in *Persuading Shipwrecked Men* is on the ethical digression in chapter 1, verses 5 to 20.[74] Verse 5 is designed to win the goodwill of those listening to the letter since love is the virtue all would agree is praiseworthy.[75] This is an important step because throughout the digression the writer is exercising frank speech (παρρησία) to stimulate his opponents' consciences (1 Tim 1:5; 19).[76] He wants to convince them to turn from potential disaster, shipwrecking their faith, to faithfully implementing Paul's instructions. Paul's relationship with Jesus Christ acts as an exemplar of this repentance (1 Tim 1:16).[77] Paul had been a man of arrogance and ignorance, and like the opponents, a blasphemer (1 Tim 1:13). Hymenaeus and Alexander act as exemplars of shipwrecked men; they have been "turned over to Satan" to learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim 1:20).[78] These men were once in the community and are now outside of it. However, the opponents or potential opponents that are being addressed in this letter are still within the community. Thus this letter is a warning to those inside the community not to promote the other instruction lest they shipwreck their faith.

It is important to see the connection of chapter 2 to what has proceeded. Only Smith noted the conjunction, (οὖν) "then," and says that "this lets us know that what follows is … dependent on what went before" and this is that "Paul charged Timothy with the duty of resisting the false teaching."[79] However, she abandons this insight to focus on prayer conducted in the church meeting. Structurally, the whole chapter (1 Tim 2:1–15) is intimately connected to the ethical digression in chapter 1:

1 Timothy 2:1 Παρακαλῶ οὖν		
	1 Timothy 2:5 εἷς γὰρ θεός	
1 Timothy 2:8 Βούλομαι οὖν		
	1 Timothy 2:9 ὡσαύτως καὶ γυναῖκας	
		1 Timothy 2:10 ἀλλ'
	1 Timothy 2:12 διδάσκειν δὲ	
		1 Timothy 2:12 ἀλλ'
		1 Timothy 2:13 Ἀδὰμ γὰρ
	1 Timothy 2:15 σωθήσεται δὲ	

Tab. 2: Ethical digression in 1 Timothy 2:1–15

74 Ibid., 180–182.
75 Ibid., 190.
76 Ibid., 263–267.
77 Ibid., 218–220.
78 Ibid., 218–220; 270–271.
79 Smith, *God's Good Design*, 26.

Laid out like this one can see the connectedness and development of this chapter to the proceeding digression. As Runge describes each connective brings "its unique constraint to bear in the context."[80] The οὖν in particular is significant as it is found on high-level boundaries where "the next major topic is drawn from and builds upon what precedes."[81] At 1 Timothy 2:1 the οὖν is performing this function: the writer is urging his readers, in the light of Hymenaeus' and Alexander's destruction of their faith and their blasphemy, to offer "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings … be made for everyone" (NRSV). The context is not the public gathering of the church, rather it is thematic. The believers are to offer supplications etc. "so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life (ἤρεμον καὶ ἡσύχιον βίον) in all godliness (εὐσεβείᾳ) and dignity (σεμνότητι)" (NRSV, 1 Tim 2:2). These character qualities stand in contrast to the character qualities of Hymenaeus and Alexander, who are blasphemous. As examples of Paul's former life they are also self-promoting and men of hubris.[82] They belong to the group of "certain men/people" who have turned to meaningless talk and want to be teachers of the law but are ignorant (1 Tim 1:6–7). In contrast, the writer wants the believers to be pious and dignified.

Hoklotubbe describes the relationship of the Greek εὐσέβεια, which "tended to signify both a reverent attitude toward and proper ritual conduct before the gods," and the Roman *pietas*, which "encompassed an affectionate dutifulness directed also to one's parents, homeland, and emperor."[83] *Pietas* is summed up by Cicero as "the feeling which renders offices and loving service to one's kin and country" and arises from "the knowledge of the gods" (*Inv.* 2.53.161; *Nat. d.*2.61.153).[84] *Pietas* was the fulfilment of one's filial, religious, civic, and imperial obligations that sustained reciprocal relationships. As Hoklotubbe argues the prayers for all men and kings was an expression of piety toward the emperor and was supportive of imperial ideology.[85] In 1 Timothy the basis of this piety is built on the theological basis: "For there is one God" (1 Tim 2:5). Paul's relation to this foundational basis serves as his call into service (1 Tim 1:12), but adds in 1 Timothy 2:7 that he is "a teacher to the Gentiles." In other words, he is the Ephesians' teacher as opposed to Hymenaeus and Alexander. This foundational

80 S. E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Pub., 2010), 19.

81 Ibid., 43.

82 Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 218–220.

83 Hoklotubbe, *Civilized Piety*, 5–6.

84 Ibid.; the English word piety is based on the Latin word; as Hoklotubbe persuasively argues both the Greek and Roman aspects are anticipated in the Pastoral Epistles.

85 Ibid., 105–110.

point, however, takes the writer away from his main point: the character and conduct of believers.

The οὖν can resume a main topic of discussion after a digression.[86] So in 1 Timothy 2:8, the οὖν resumes the topic of piety and dignity. This informs how we should read the instructions to the men. Since the focus is on their character and conduct in opposition to the opponents, then who they are and what they are doing with their bodies comes into focus.[87] In the first century, a man's deportment was of great significance.[88] How he walked, talked, gestured indicated his moral rectitude.[89] For example, Cicero describes what a man did with his hands as a matter of propriety (Latin *decorum*),

> And they [Cynics] assail modesty with a great many other arguments to the same purport. But as for us, let us follow Nature and shun everything that is offensive to our eyes or our ears. So, in standing or walking, in sitting or reclining, in our expression, our eyes, or the movements of our hands, let us preserve what we have called "propriety" (*Off.* 1.35.128).[90]

Thus as Dugan explains, Cicero attests "to the traditional Graeco-Roman view that the orator's bodily self and his words are connected."[91] In the oration *Against Timarchus*, Aeschines describes Solon, Pericles, Themistocles, and Aristides as models of *decorum* (σώφρονες) because they addressed the assembly with restrained gestures and kept one arm inside the cloak (1.25). Gesturing signals other important virtues, including piety. Outstretched hands are the right attitude for prayer. Plutarch describes Marius washing his hands and both he

86 Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 44–45.

87 See A. Corbeill's criticism of those scholars, "who valorize language over bodily movement … an anachronism for early Rome," "Gesture in early Roman law: empty forms for essential formalities," in *Body Language in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (ed. D. Cains: Swansea, Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 157–174 (159).

88 Glancy, "Protocols," 235–264.

89 A. J. Malherbe, "The *Virtus Feminarum* in 1 Timothy 2:9–15," in *Renewing Tradition: Studies in Texts and Contexts in Honor of James W. Thompson* (ed. M. W. Hamilton, et al.: Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 45–65 (58).

90 *De Officiis: With An English Translation* (trans. W. Miller. LCL 30; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913); H. North describes how Greek σωφροσύνη relates to the concept of propriety, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 222. She comments on Cicero's use of σωφροσύνη, "In the *Tusculans* Cicero observes that the Greeks apply the term σωφροσύνη to the virtue that he calls *temperantia* or *moderatio,* occasionally *modestia,* or even *frugalitas,*" 268–285; Malherbe, "The *Virtus Feminarum,*" 56–59.

91 In commenting about Cicero's *De oratore*, J. Dugan, *Making the New Man: Ciceronian Self-Fashioning in the Rhetorical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 157.

and Catulus, "lifting them up towards Heaven" while making vows to the gods.[92] A Christian example is Clement of Rome, who urges the Corinthians:

> Let us, therefore, approach him in holiness of soul, lifting up to him pure and undefiled hands, loving our gentle and compassionate Father who made us his own chosen portion (29:1).[93]

Here there is a close connection between the lifting up of pure and undefiled hands and what could be considered a pious attitude towards God. Not only does appropriate reverent conduct need to be directed towards him because he is the divine, but also "loving service," as Cicero says, because God is the Christian's true father.

In 1 Timothy the lifting up of "holy hands" is "without wrath (ὀργῆς) and dissension (διαλογισμοῦ)" (NSAB). Therefore, the man of verse 8 is to demonstrate his piety through his bodily deportment.[94] On the other hand, conflict demonstrates the contrasting vice of hubris.[95] Such men not only lack piety but moderation (σωφροσύνη), demonstrated by their willingness to be angry and cause dissension between believers.[96] And internally they are deformed because they have seared their consciences (1 Tim 4:1–2). Their seared consciences allow them to promote the "other instruction" while ignoring Paul's commands.[97] The writer describes this as a sickness; these people are sick for controversy and disputes about words (1 Tim 6:4). Thus the writer views the masculinity of these men as ill.[98]

But it is not just the men who are infected with this disease and need to be urged to be pious. The ὡσαύτως is pointing forward to describe the degree with which an action is done.[99] This explains the somewhat redundant exhortation to the men in verse 8. Since the writer has spent all of the digression discussing the behaviour of the men, among who are Hymenaeus and Alexander, then there seems little point in repeating the need for the men to be pious (1 Tim

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92 Plutarch, *Marius*, 26.3.2–4; cf. 22.2.2–3; cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 32.82 &12.61.

93 *First Clement*, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (trans. Michael W. Holmes; 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

94 Deportment signals "a certain aptitude" including "a high-minded nature free from anger," M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 60–61.

95 North, *Sophrosyne*, 41–42.

96 Ibid., 64–65, 114; Glancy, "Protocols," 240–241.

97 Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 264–266.

98 A. J. Malherbe, "Medical Imagery in the Pastoral Epistles," in *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity: Collected Essays, 1959–2012* (ed. C. R. Holladay et. al.; Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 117–134; Gleason, "Protocols," 260.

99 Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 68.

1:4b–5; 2:1–2) and refrain from anger and dissension (1 Tim 1:6–7; 13, 19–20). The ὡσαύτως, however, connects the women's attitude and behaviour to the men through the careful use of conjunctions. The women are to demonstrate the same pious and reverent behaviour through their deportment as do the men.[100] Singled out is their clothing, hair, and accessories as these are indicators of a woman's moderation (σωφροσύνη), which is closely linked to their piety.[101] Indeed, the writer makes this explicit by using "but" (ἀλλά) to contrast and highlight the object of these instructions, which is "proper for a woman making a claim to godliness (θεοσέβειαν)" (NASB; 1 Tim 2:10).[102] This highlight strengthens our argument that the theme of verse 8 is piety and dignity. This would mean that the women's pious behaviour acts as a general principle: both the men and women are to make "a claim to godliness by [their] good works" (NASB). The following sentence, verse 11, belongs to this contrast and sums up the women's quiet deportment, or dignity, and is an expression of her pious good works.[103] Through the connection to the digression, the women are to be like the men, submissive to Paul's command (1 Tim 1:3–4).

The δέ in verse 12 is related to the οὖν in verse 8 and marks a new development. There is therefore a break in thought between verse 11 and verse 12, which our commentators gloss over, even arguing for a chiasm.[104] However, our writer is indicating a close connection between this new section and the previous focus on piety and dignity. The repetition of "a woman" and "quietness" in verses 11 and 12 is an example of the writer's use of "hooked keywords"; it is a structural device used to link units of argument together.[105] As a development of his previous argument, the writer has shifted from the plural "women" and

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100 Anger is comparable to self-indulgence in men, "to be arrayed in purple, to be roofed in gold," Seneca, *Ira* 1.21.1; Glancy, "Protocols," 241.

101 North, *Sophrosyne*, 42–43, 62, 64, 95, 323; Malherbe, "The *Virtus Feminarum*," 48–63.

102 Runge, 55–56; this word is an intensification of εὐσεβεία inferring "real godliness," J. D. Quinn and W. C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (vol. 1. ECC; reprint; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 220–221.

103 Lyn M. Kidson, "'Teaching' and Other Persuasions: The Interpretation of *Didaskein* 'to Teach' in 1 Timothy 2:2," in *The Gender Conversation: Evangelical Perspective on Gender, Scripture and the Christian Life* (eds. E. Murphy and D. Starling; Macquarie Park; Eugene, OR: Morling Press; Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 125–137 (131–133).

104 Smith, *God's Good Design*, 29 and Jones, "wrapper," "Women, Teaching, and Authority," 145.

105 Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 188–189; B. Longenecker, "'Linked Like a Chain': Rev 22.6–9 in Light of an Ancient Transition Technique," *NTS* 47 (2001): 105–17; H. van Dyke Parunak, "Transitional Techniques in the Bible," *JBL* 102 (1983): 525–48; applied to 1 Timothy see R. van Neste, "Cohesion and Structure in the Pastoral Epistles," in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (eds. A. J. Köstenberger and T. L. Wilder; Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 84–104.

"men" to the singular "woman" and "man." Our commentators barely mention this transition, but it marks a change in view. While the men and women/woman of verses 8 to 11 are in the public view making a claim to godliness, we now turn to the husband and wife and a private viewpoint in verses 12–15.[106]

This section is on what the writer does not want and stands in contrast to what he wants in verse 8. However, the indicative verb and its negation "I do not want" are displaced by the infinitive "to teach" (διδάσκειν). Since the Greek word order is not as constrained as in English, this infinitive at the beginning of the sentence marks it out as the focus.[107] This infinitive belongs to a hendiadys normally translated as "to teach nor have authority over" (NRSV). However, in this marked position, διδάσκειν is indicating a resumption of a theme or argument in the earlier part of the letter. The command "let a woman learn in quietness in all submission," indicates a submission to Paul's command at the beginning of the letter. But the infinitive "to teach" (διδάσκειν) reiterates this command in 1 Timothy 1:3 that "certain people" are not to "teach the other instruction." The second part of the hendiadys refines the unwanted behaviour, "and not to domineer her husband."[108] The word "man" (ἀνδρός) rightfully belongs to the αὐθεντεῖν and not to the word διδάσκειν.[109] This is a reiteration of the "some" in 1 Timothy 1:7 who are "without understanding either what they are saying or things about which they make assertions." This behaviour is leading to anger, verbal wrangling, and disputes. Thus if the wife were to do the same it would lead to a similar breakdown in her marriage. And this is the finale that the writer has been moving towards since the οὖν in verse 8. There is something particular that the wife is potentially doing that is not covered by the first command at 1 Timothy 1:3–4. The answer to this is found in 1 Timothy 4:1–3. "Certain people" are paying attention to spirits and demons and are forbidding marriage and requiring a certain diet.[110] In other words, this is an ascetic program (1 Tim 4:1), which is the "other instruction" of 1 Timothy 1:3–4. The writer perceives a threat that the wife could persuade her husband to take up this ascetic program, which he opposes.

106 The transition signalling a change in topic to husband and wife, Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy,* 221.

107 Runge, 190.

108 αὐθεντεῖν = to domineer, Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 380–394; Cynthia Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 305–311.

109 Payne, *Man and Woman*, 353–356.

110 L. M. Kidson, "Fasting, Bodily Care, and the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–15," *EC* 11.2 (2020): 191–205.

This anxiety on the part of the writer gives us a rare insight into the Christian marriage at this time. While he has provided Hymenaeus and Alexander as examples of men who have shipwrecked their faith, he provides Eve, the first wife, as an example for the wives who are tempted by the other instruction.[111] They are not to become like Eve and be deceived and sin. Our commentators see the sequence that Adam was formed first then Eve as indicating a hierarchy of relationship. I would like to suggest, however, that the emphasis is on the "was formed," which is taken directly from the Septuagint (Gen 2:7). Adam was formed (ἐπλάσθη) then the woman, Eve, was taken from him so that Adam could cling to her (Gen 2:24).[112] This pictures the intimacy of husband and wife in fulfilling the command of God in Genesis 1:28 "to be fruitful and multiply."[113] In refuting the ascetics in 1 Timothy 4:4–5, the writer calls God the good creator, who created marriage and food to be "received with thanksgiving."[114] Thus Adam and Eve are the basis for the writer's command to the wife not to teach the ascetic program to her husband. The wife and her husband were created for marriage; in other words, sexual relations. The reiteration of the command to the wife to be in quietness in verse 12, stands in contrast to a wife who is trying to persuade and pressure her husband into taking up the other instruction. The contrastive ἀλλά in verse 12 repeats the contrast in verse 10. She is to conduct herself with a quiet deportment both in public and in the bedroom.[115] This woman is a model Roman matron, who conducts herself with piety toward the divine and her husband.

Therefore, the writer foresees a danger within the married relationship because traditionally wives advised husbands.[116] A man could be saved from dishonour by the sage advice from his wife.[117] Men relied on their wives for sound advice and were thought to be particularly vulnerable to a wife's persuasive words, thus the strong injunction by the writer to the wife of verse

111 For examples of Eve as Adam's wife see LXX: Genesis 4:1, 25; Tobias 8:6; Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, 1:40; Jubilees 3:4–7. That γάρ can be used to introduce an example Plato, *Republic*, 551C.

112 This phrase implies sexual union, G. W. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word; Waco: Word, 1987), 70–71.

113 Wenham, *Genesis*, 33.

114 On the relationship between diet and control of sexual desire, Kidson, "Fasting, Bodily Care," 196–202.

115 P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 21–24.

116 Proverbs 31; for Roman wives, Brown, *The Body and Society*, 15.

117 Ajax might have saved himself by listening to his wife's counsel, Sophocles, *Ajax*; North, *Sophrosyne*, 59–60.

12 not to teach/persuade and domineer her husband to take up the ascetic program.[118]

The vision of masculinity in 1 Timothy is one that is far more robust than many modern commentators. The man might be in danger of being persuaded by his wife to take up the other instruction, but this is because of their unique relationship. The writer is not thinking that all men are somehow weakened in their masculinity by hearing a woman teaching in the gathering of believers. Nor are they constantly anxious about the spoken words of the women in the congregation. The command at the beginning to "certain people" (1 Tim 1:3) is primarily directed at the men as the example of Hymenaeus and Alexander demonstrates.[119] Logically the men of the congregation are in danger of being deceived into taking up their ascetic program, which is why some men must be warned or commanded not to be engaged in teaching it. Equally, there are some women who are trying to win their husbands over to the ascetic program, and these are singled out in verses 12–15. There is an even-handedness to the writer's instruction, first to the men, then to the women. He sees them both in danger of seduction by the "certain men," but both are equally able to heed his command. Both the men and women are to be submissive to Paul as he instructs both to give attention to God's administration. This is the implementation of Paul's sound and good instruction.[120] In 1 Timothy there is an assumed equality between the men and women in their relationship to Jesus Christ; Paul's relationship is the model for all believers. And this model assumes all are called into service (1 Tim 1:12), although this service is tempered by cultural restraints.[121] Men and women exhibit their service in a culturally appropriate manner. But this does not imply that a man should be fundamentally anxious about his masculinity in the face of a woman's service.

6. Implications for the Complementarian Interpreters: the Risk of Domestic Violence

The goal of this present volume is to raise awareness of new directions in New Testament studies and draw connections to current socio-political debates. We have drawn upon the emergent gender studies to focus on the masculinity constructed by certain evangelicals in Australia. The commentators we have

118 L. McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 62, 70–71; North, *Sophrosyne*, 62.
119 Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 108–110.
120 Ibid., 132–136.
121 Hutson, *First and Second Timothy*, 62–71; 80–85.

examined have crafted a masculinity that is inherently unstable as it must continually examine itself in relation to the women in the congregation. The vision of masculinity in 1 Timothy, however, is one that is crafted as a response to the "other instruction" (1 Tim 1:3; 4:1; 6:3). So while the writer may view the errant men as diseased, it is a far more robust view of masculinity than the present-day commentators. The men's masculinity is not diminished by their relationship to the women in the congregation, but by their submission to the "other instruction."

This analysis raises serious concerns about relationship between men and women in the home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. In recent years, journalist Julia Baird has been highlighting the connections between complementarianism and domestic abuse in Sydney Anglican churches.[122] She highlights research conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which concluded that "the gender norms and beliefs surrounding male dominance and male superiority, created by power hierarchies … accord men greater status." In our analysis, we have observed the idea that men are inherently "designed" to be leaders and to be obeyed. Not to do this is deviant on the part of the woman. Although our writers are at pains to say that women and men are interdependent and women can teach in private, this subtle message could be missed by men who irregularly attend church.[123] In this time of social disconnection because of the pandemic, the rates of domestic abuse appear to have increased.[124] It could be surmised that a reduction in church attendance and a faulty view of masculinity could put evangelical wives at risk of abuse by their husbands. Baird's call for more attention to the increased risks that complementarian women face is even more salutatory. The inherent weakness in the complementarian view of masculinity means that any conflict in the home could result in husbands feeling that their masculine identity is challenged.

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122 J. Baird, "Is Your Pastor Sexist," *New York Times*, April 19, 2017, 25; "Domestic Violence in the Church: When women are Believed, Change will Happen," ABC report posted 23 May 2018, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-23/when-women-are-believed-the-church-will-change/9782184. J. Baird and H. Gleeson, "'Submit to your husbands'": Women told to endure domestic violence in the name of God," ABC report posted October 2018: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-18/domestic-violence-church-submit-to-husbands/8652028?nw=0; cf. Giles, *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women*, 5–17, 32–38, 41–42.

123 Baird and Gleeson, "'Submit to your husbands,'" based on the finding that men who attend church on an irregular basis are more likely to commit domestic abuse.

124 A. Galloway, "Domestic violence on the rise during pandemic," *SMH* July 13, 2020: https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/domestic-violence-on-the-rise-during-pandemic-20200712-p55b8q.html.

However, a renewed vision of the masculinity of 1 Timothy would secure the contemporary man's identity to his relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. Contextualization: Theoretical and biographical perspectives

Reading the New Testament in Manifold Contexts of a Globalized World

Exegetical Perspectives

Armand Puig i Tàrrech

1. New Testament Scholarship in a Catalan Context

'Latin Europe' provides the broad cultural background for my research, with the Mediterranean Sea as one of its principal cultural and historical axes and the open and cosmopolitan Mediterranean city of Barcelona as my primary place of work. Most of the around ten million native speakers of Catalan are bilingual, in Spanish, French, or Italian, and in my particular case I am comfortable at a linguistic and cultural level in all four of these Latin-based languages, a category to which Portuguese, for example, also belongs. This Latin culture, which lies at the heart of European civilization, should not, however, risk isolating itself, and needs, therefore, to engage with other Western-European cultures, specifically those associated with northern Europe and expressed principally in English and German (as well as in the Scandinavian languages and Dutch). Accordingly, much of my academic activity is the result of cooperation with biblical scholars who publish in German and English, the dominant global language at present. I also maintain scholarly contacts with the mainly Slavic-speaking countries of Eastern Europe as well as with Greece and Israel.

New Testament research has itself often been the source of and motivation for my engagement with European colleagues and, through them, with the world as a whole. This has been greatly facilitated by the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (SNTS), over which I had the honour of presiding from 2011 to 2012 and in which I have also formed part of the 'Liaison Committee' for Eastern Europe (EELC) and for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACLC). SNTS offers a privileged opportunity not only for the sharing of advances in academic teaching and research but also for the development of scholarly self-awareness and cross-cultural understanding. This fruitful model, will, I am convinced, become even more relevant in the era following COVID-19, encouraging exegetes to maintain warm and friendly relationships and not simply to adhere to the latest trend or to reject it outright.

The south of Western Europe ('Latin Europe') is under cultural pressure from a global, English-speaking, civilization, in which the USA plays a major role. The historically Catholic identity of 'Latin Europe' is being rapidly transformed in its value system and way of life. Catholicism no longer plays a role in shaping dominant social ideas and is viewed as increasingly powerless. In Spain, in particular, there seems to be a general indifference towards the Church among a wide range of groups. Some see it in terminal decline, lacking authority, and burdened by child abuse and other problems. In contrast, there is widespread interest in social and political issues with an obvious ethical dimension, such as systemic corruption, family models, euthanasia, the dubious role of the judiciary, tensions regarding nationhood, particularly in relations between Spain and Catalonia, youth unemployment, poverty (even among the middle class), domestic violence, 'fake news,' and authoritarianism, typically portrayed through the lens of nostalgia for or hatred of the Franco era.

It should also be noted that in 'Latin Europe' culture is closely tied to national boundaries and there is a clear inability to cross these. Opinions and cultural developments deriving from the English-speaking world are widely known and publicized, whereas what is talked about in an immediately neighbouring country is often unknown. In Spain, especially, the conveyors of public opinion have usually themselves been nurtured in this rather impoverished cultural environment, which, while not directly affecting New Testament research, does impact on its dissemination and socio-cultural impact.

To illustrate, in the 1990s and early 2000s research on the historical Jesus was taken up by the mass media, generating significant public interest. I myself sold thousands of copies of my book *Jesús: un perfil biogràfic* (2004), translated into seven languages and for several weeks the best-selling non-fiction work in Catalan.[1] Another example is National Geographic's interest in the Gospel of Judas (2006) and the latter's subsequent publication in, for example, four different Spanish editions in one year.[2] At present, however, interest in biblical studies is markedly less evident and there have been no widely publicized

1 Armand Puig i Tàrrech, *Jesús. Un perfil biogràfic* (Perfils 50; Barcelona: Proa, 2004).

2 Armand Francisco García Bazán, *El Evangelio de Judas* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2006); Herbert Krosney, *El Evangelio perdido de Judas* (Barcelona: National Geographic & RBA, 2006); Rudolfe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, and Gregor Wurst, eds., *El Evangelio de Judas*, transl. Domingo Almendros (Barcelona: RBA, 2006); José Montserrat Torrents, *El Evangelio de Judas* (Barcelona: EDAF, 2006).

sensational 'discoveries' that might serve to call into question the Church's traditional views and beliefs. In a time that seems quite different from what has gone before, for the Church to be viewed as relevant it needs to engage more deeply in both social and spiritual issues and to display willingness to develop new contributions to such issues.

Albeit a statement of the obvious, the first literary works that come to mind in connection with New Testament studies are the actual 'books' of the New Testament. Over the last three centuries since the Enlightenment, European and North American scholarship in this field has mainly focused on philological study. This was, for example, the starting-point for my teacher, Dom Jacques Dupont, and it is also mine. More recently, however, this primary focus of interest has been properly and necessarily extended to a variety of texts, artefacts, and concepts from the Jewish and Greco-Roman world, out of which Christianity emerged and spread, and generated its own literary corpus, the New Testament, and also to the patristic literature of the early post-apostolic period. Current research also has a significant archaeological dimension, reflecting in its evidence the material setting of literary compositions (whether Christian, Jewish, or Greco-Roman) and the ideas they express and, in some cases, supporting the veracity of details included in those compositions.

In my own scholarly work, I have not given exclusive preference to any particular one of these sources. When I began this work forty years ago my background at the Faculty of Theology (Barcelona) and the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome) led me naturally to Jewish sources contemporaneous with the New Testament (third century BC to third century AD). Subsequently, I also worked to some extent with Hellenistic and Greco-Roman material for research focussing primarily on the historical Jesus and his Jewish identity. This research also considered archaeological evidence as a source of background information about a historical person. In short, investigation of the historical and material context has become a significant element of my research. Similarly, I have also worked with patristic sources, both to see the early impact of specific biblical texts and to draw attention to the interpretations of the Church Fathers, who were close in time to the era in which the New Testament emerged and to the world it represented. Additionally, I have become very familiar with Gnosticism, as a form of Christianity alternative to the version that would eventually prevail, and with its particular interpretations, which demonstrate the rich plurality of readings of the same New Testament text (see my recent book *Diez textos* *gnósticos: traducción y comentarios*, 2018).[3] In sum, I have attempted in my scholarship to open up the New Testament text to the various parallel sources of the time without moving my primary focus from the text itself.

2. Interpreting the New Testament in a Catholic Context

My work is undertaken within the context of my membership of the Catholic Church and on the basis of its established interpretative methods. A fundamental point of reference here is the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 1993 document, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," which reflects and puts into practice the Second Vatican Council's 1965 dogmatic constitution, *Dei verbum*. "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" offers a forward-thinking broad and comprehensive range of interpretative possibilities, explains different approaches, and analyses readings according to text-critical methods. I regard such methods as essential for understanding the New Testament and for avoiding the risk of fundamentalism, which, as the document says, "invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide" (I, F). It is my personal experience that study of the biblical text on the basis of this inclusive Catholic hermeneutics and in keeping with the spirit and the letter of the Second Vatican Council is a guarantee of interpretative freedom and scholarly exchange.

Moreover, the presence of a clearly laid out interpretative framework of this kind and acceptance of its overtly confessional orientation help guard both against prejudiced interpretations and against interpretations that attempt to be completely "neutral" and/or free of ecclesiastical influence (while, however, often being informed by other ideas and even ideologies). "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" rightly assumes, on the one hand, that it is impossible to study the Bible in an intellectual vacuum, and, on the other, that the systematic application of any particular method is no guarantee of a correct and adequate interpretation of a text or an ancient material object. This realization also lays behind the Church's formal encouragement of a historical-critical approach to the Bible in the 1943 encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, which in effect addressed issues raised by the long-standing "modernist crisis" in the Church, a crisis characterized in large measure by the rejection of a critical reading of the Bible. It may be said in this regard, as often in the twentieth century, that significant change came to the Catholic Church from the top downward. Acceptance of and adherence to papal instruction by all

3 Puig i Tàrrech, *Diez textos gnósticos: traducción y comentarios* (Estella [Navarra]: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2018).

Catholics underpins the transformation in Catholic biblical studies in recent times, a transformation epitomized by the Second Vatican Council (1962 to 1965), which facilitated the development of biblical studies as a recognized academic discipline and presented afresh the liturgy and the Bible to the people in whichever language they spoke. In this way, some of the main ideas of the Reformation four centuries ago were finally accepted by the Church of Rome.

The concept of revelation is central to the Church's interpretative framework and is focussed on the salvation that comes through the Word of God, of which Scripture itself is one expression. Even though Scripture lies at its heart, this Word is not confined to the limits of Scripture, for Scripture forms the core of the Church's tradition, defined as the Church's beliefs, liturgy, and praxis, as transmitted through the ages. Against this background, tradition is not a straitjacket for forcing a particular reading of the text, but rather constitutes a context in which a text can be reborn and grow in accordance with a wide range of interpretative possibilities. As Fr. Yves M. Congar, one of the most representative theologians attending the Second Vatican Council, said, we need to distinguish between "Tradition" and "traditions" and not to confuse the fundamental and the transient.[4] For example, the Creed, made up of mainly biblical texts, should be interpreted in the light of those texts, with such interpretation forming an integral aspect of the hermeneutics of Catholic dogma. Not to do so would imply the risk of fossilizing even some of the most important elements of the Church's tradition. Exegesis definitely ensures that formulations of dogma do not become sclerotic, but are continually re-read and re-stated for the faithful in the present.

New Testament study may accordingly be regarded as "critical" in a highly positive sense. Critical exegesis does not seek to pose a threat to the faith of Christian believers or to embarrass those who do not believe or who feel themselves to be far away from (not necessarily opposed to) Christian faith. The Reformation of the Church is in large measure achieved when the "living voice of the Gospel" (*viva vox Evangelii*) — constituted by the words and deeds of Jesus's ministry — resounds in the Church and the world through the power of Scripture and in particular the New Testament. We see this attested in two surprisingly similar texts, the first by Martin Luther (*Weimar edition* 12,259.8–12), the second from the Second Vatican Council (*Dei verbum*, 8). Purification of the Church and the restoration of its holy character (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) derives above all from this returning to the Word. Therefore, the study of the Bible

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4 Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions. An Historical and a Theological Essay* (London: Burns and Oates, 1966).

in the interpretative framework outlined above has to be accomplished on the basis of the faith the Church confesses. The Church, a “mother” according to Cyprian’s well-known statement,[5] is meant to encourage this interpretative work, conducted in a spirit of openness to all Christian communities, so that it may be known about and applied beyond the academic circles that produce it. I understand tradition as a mighty surging river made up of different streams, all of which have the Gospel as their source and all of which flow towards a fuller Christian fellowship.

3. Searching for the Historical Jesus as a Continuing Challenge

I turn now to the area that has most occupied my recent research: the historical Jesus. My teacher, Dom Jacques Dupont OSB, had worked on the synoptic gospels and in particular the parables, employing the methods of Redaktionsgeschichte, and it was against this background that I wrote my doctoral thesis on the parable of the ten virgins (1983).[6] After completing a variety of other scholarly projects, notably coordination of the inter-confessional Catalan translation of the Bible (1993), in 2000 I published an article in Biblica about the research on the historical Jesus according to the model of the so-called Third Quest.[7] My subsequent exchanges with John P. Meier, Gerd Theissen, and James Dunn led to the publication of my previously-mentioned book on Jesus (2004).[8] In the following years I have returned many times to the central points of Jesus’s ministry, with the aim of building up an overall view from a perspective known in medieval times as the *mysteria vitae Christi*. My latest contribution is a book (*El sacramento de la Eucaristía*, 2021) in press on the Last Supper in the life of Jesus, the New Testament, and the early Christian liturgy, which may be seen in some ways as a synthesis of how my research has unfolded over the last twenty years.

My investigation here includes a focus on the development of traditions relating to Jesus’s words and deeds, to his birth and family life, to his preaching about the kingdom of God, to his attitude towards violence and towards wealth, and to his possible status as a mystic. All these areas are treated in my *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey* (2010), and, for the question of Jesus’s place of birth,

5 Cyprian, *Unit. eccl.* 6: “No one can have God for his father, who has not the Church for his mother.”

6 Puig i Tàrrech, *La parabole des dix vierges (Mt 25, 1-13)* (AnBib 102; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1983).

7 Puig i Tàrrech, “La recherche du Jésus historique,” *Biblica* 81 (2000): 179–201.

8 See note 1.

in the *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 4.3409–36.[9] However, my attention has been drawn principally to the major events that shaped Jesus's life. As well as the accounts of the circumstances of his birth, discussed in the article just cited, and their contribution to our understanding of Jesus's earthly roots, I have also examined eight other major areas, or "mysteries," in Jesus's life: a) his baptism in the Jordan; b) his healings and his expulsions of unclean spirits as contrasted with the presence in Jesus of the Holy Spirit; c) the parables; d) the transfiguration; e) Jesus's attitude towards Scripture; f) his final discourse, on what the disciples may expect to experience in the historical future and beyond (Mark 13 par.); g) the Last Supper and the significance of Jesus's coming death on the cross; h) the post-resurrection appearances to the disciples. All these topics are included in my biography of Jesus, the cornerstone of my subsequent research, which in turn has led to my adoption of more nuanced and sometimes different positions.

A common dimension in all these issues is the nature of Jesus's relationship with God and, accordingly, God's will for Jesus. Jesus is shown as being conscious of a special closeness to God but at the same time as having only a limited awareness of God's design for him (cf. Matt 11:27 par. Luke 10:22 & Mark 13:32 par. Matt 24:36). For example, in the indisputably historical case of Jesus's baptism in the Jordan, what is it that impels Jesus to leave Nazareth and to be baptized like many others by John? It might seem at first that just like those many other people Jesus decided to undergo baptism as a mark of repentance for and forgiveness of sin.

However, there is another possible interpretation, which differs from the one commonly found in the history of exegesis, namely, that Jesus's baptism is a reference to the humility of Christ, who wants to stand alongside sinners even though he is himself sinless. Thus, I interpret Jesus's baptism as demonstrating that he has understood the words and actions of John the Baptist as the divine sign that he had been awaiting in order to bring about one of the greatest changes of his life, leaving Nazareth to begin the eschatological proclamation of the kingdom of God, which was just beginning to appear in the world. Thus, Jesus correctly understands the signs that prove John to be the herald of God's imminent judgment but changes that coming judgment for the present salvation of the Kingdom. Jesus's decision to undergo baptism receives divine legitimization in the vision that follows the baptism, when Jesus comes up out of

9 Puig i Tàrrech, *Jesus. An Uncommon Journey* WUNT II/288 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010); idem., "Why Was Jesus Not Born in Nazareth?," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 4, edited by Tom Holmén and Standley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3409–3436.

the water to the river bank and "sees" the heavens open and a dove descending and hears a divine voice speaking to him. This experience in the Jordan, not shared by anyone else, just like Jesus's vision of the fall of Satan (Luke 10:18), convinces him that God's *kairós* had begun and that his kingdom was starting to be established on earth.

Jesus's character is multifaceted and has been handed down in many forms, a plurality also evidenced in the diversity of New Testament and patristic Christology. Jesus's identity should not, however, be limited to post-resurrection Christology as it appeared in different ways over the course of Christian tradition and developed in the various practical contexts of early Christian mission. Although the basic unity of the sources is less obvious than their diversity and there is a danger of underestimating the differences, historical and theological questions concerning Jesus of Nazareth should not be disregarded and there are sufficient materials for attempting an answer. Here I am referring to the theological significance of Jesus and his ministry not for the various theologies attested in the New Testament, which are themselves constructs of particular images of Jesus, but for Jesus's earthly life and his interaction with God, critically viewed through the lens of these sources.

What I am trying to do, then, is to reflect not so much on what is the image of the God of whom Jesus constantly speaks (following Dupont, Schlosser, and others) and more on how Jesus presents himself in relation to God, that is to say, on how Jesus reveals himself as he speaks of God and acts according to God's will. I have developed this idea in a recent article ("The Figure of Jesus According to the Canonical Gospels," 2020), based on a paper presented at the 7th East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars (EELC – SNTS) held in Moscow (2016).[10] The concept of Jesus as "Son of God" expresses an emergent self-understanding which was only gradually revealed to Jesus himself. His self-identity is constructed principally through what is said about him by others (God, the unclean spirits, his disciples, the crowds, his adversaries) as well as through what Jesus himself says and does—although Jesus rarely speaks about himself.

However, one constant in Jesus's ministry is his assumption that he has been sent by God, an assumption sometimes explicitly formulated by Jesus: "whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" (Mark 9:37b par. Matt 10:40b par. Luke 10:16b; cf. John 13:20). This concept of the "messenger (of God,

10 Puig i Tàrrech, "The Figure of Jesus According to the Canonical Gospels," in *History and Theology in the Gospels. Seventh International East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars, Moscow, September 26 to October 1*, edited by Tobias Nicklas et al., WUNT 447 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 207–234.

of the Father)" is notably developed in John (see John 3:34 et passim), and the authority with which Jesus expresses himself and the fact that he speaks in his own name and not in the manner of the prophets (characterized by the Old Testament formula "the word of the Lord") give his preaching a unique quality, which inspires both great loyalty (from the apostles and Jesus's other followers) and complete rejection (by the priestly and, with few exceptions, other leaders of the Jewish people).

The issue of the historical Jesus cannot be limited to the synoptic sources. The Gospel of John should be included in such research and ought not simply be regarded as a theological re-reading with hardly any reference to Jesus's real life. It is quite possible that the author(s) of the fourth gospel was (were) familiar with the synoptic gospels, or at least with the traditions about Jesus they transmit, while at the same time having access to additional traditions, which were also incorporated in the Johannine version. John contains accounts that are close to those of its synoptic counterparts, for example, Mary's anointing of Jesus (12:1–8), as well as some similar sayings, for example, Jesus's previously mentioned presentation of himself as God's envoy (13:20). Such evidence indisputably suggests a relationship, the range and extent of which needs to be established while not underestimating the differences. Flexibility of method is needed and there are still many loose ends in the quest of the historical Jesus.

Having said that, there are many things that we do know about Jesus. Although exegesis should be critical and doubt is a central heuristic principle, it should also be constructive and receptive to generally consistent arguments in favour of a particular position. What we know about Jesus is much more than what is known about many other characters from antiquity. For Jesus we have direct, indirect, and contextual evidence, as well as evidence about the effect of his person and message on both his followers and his opponents. Always following the criterion of historical plausibility (Gerd Theissen), when taking account of this array of evidence concerning the historical Jesus we need to pay attention to the prior context of the different forms of ancient Judaism, the later context of the Church and of non-canonical Christian sources, and the common background of the all-pervasive Greco-Roman world. The extent and nature of the examination of this range of contexts will depend on the specific topic of research.

As is well known, research into the historical Jesus—particularly from the early twentieth century to the 1950s, dominated by Formgeschichte under the leadership of R. Bultmann—was distrustful of the reliability of traditions about Jesus. Material relating to Jesus, whether his deeds or his words, would have undergone so many changes of every kind that often a synoptic unit with Jesus as its central character would have ended up as a *Gemeindebildung*, a literary construction of heterogeneous material that in many cases is difficult to attribute to Jesus himself. This lack of confidence in the historical reliability of much of the synoptic evidence and the practical exclusion of the Gospel of John has led to doubt about the value of this field of research. Such a position has been represented in recent times by John P. Meier and, curiously, by some Catholic exegetes, who with regard to the historical value of traditions about Jesus are still extremely sceptical.[11] It hardly needs to be mentioned that here, at least, I do not share the views of my Catholic colleagues!

As I see it, when traditions concerning Jesus first emerged there would have been no attempt to modify what was being said about him but, rather, a desire to maintain and to preserve it and to transmit it as faithfully as possible. Any differences among the three synoptic gospels (or between them and John) will require an exegetical explanation but should not be viewed simply as the result of carelessness in transmission or the influence of theological interests of the tradition itself or of the gospels' final authors. Of course, such theological interests are expressed in the gospels, but it should be assumed, as recent research on traditions about Jesus has stressed, that there was an underpinning requirement for these traditions to be reliable. This was indeed the case, especially for the sayings of Jesus, as the early Formgeschichte had already established.

In fact, the comparison of the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke reveals great respect for Jesus's words and the differences do not significantly affect their content. This is because the words were handed down as "sacred" and on a par with the words of God himself. This is true not only of the Gospel of John but also of the synoptic gospels (compare Luke 24:44 and John 2:22). In the synoptic gospels, then, what Jesus says is sometimes reformulated but not substantially modified. Any such modifications are explicable on the basis of elementary rules of interpretation, which find their origin in, for example, a similar expression (a word, a phrase, a name) attested in two or more of the superficially different texts.

If so, scholarly effort should be directed at explaining changes of this type by reference to reinterpretation of one or more other texts from the tradition relating to Jesus, while always bearing in mind the particular interests of each ancient document. Different units would sometimes have come into contact with each other, and quite simple interpretative techniques would not have

11 John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1–5 (New York: Yale University Press, 1991–2016).

radically altered the words of Jesus, but rather saved them from any significant change in form or meaning. The modifications that were admitted are derived from other sayings of Jesus or, of course, from Scripture, the holiest of words.

The parables are a striking case in point. For example, in the parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1–14) there is an apparent contradiction. While in v. 10 the "bad" are admitted to the banquet, in vv. 11–13 a man "without a wedding robe" is thrown out of the banquet without a second thought. If the "wedding robe" is taken as a generic representation of good works, there is a glaring disagreement here. Only when it is accepted that the good works in focus are those of mercy towards the poor, "the least of these my brothers" (see Matt 25:31–46), it does become plausible that even the wicked can enter the banquet of the Kingdom, if they had been compassionate to those in need. The interpretative relationship between Matt 22:11–13 and Matt 25:31–46 is based on verbal affinity and thematic correlation. Verbal connections are: "kingdom" (of heaven, in Matt 22:2, of "my Father," in Matt 25:34), "king" (God in Matt 22:7,11,13; Jesus in Matt 25:34), "son" (of the king in Matt 22:2, "the Son of Man" in Matt 25:31), "all" (Matt 22:10; "All the nations" in Matt 25:32), "prepared" (the banquet in Matt 22:4; the kingdom in Matt 25:34; "eternal fire" in Matt 25:41). Thematic correlations are as follows: "burned their city" (Matt 22:7) / "the eternal fire" (Matt 25:41); "throw him out into the outer darkness" (Matt 22:13) / "eternal punishment" (Matt 25:46); "wedding," "wedding banquet," "wedding hall" (Matt 22:2,3,4,8,9,10) / "eternal life" (Matt 25:46). It is clear that each of these two texts, Matt 22:1–14 and Matt 25:31–46, should be read in the light of the other.

4. The Theological Imperative to Interprete the New Testament Interdisciplinary

From what has already been said, it is evident that I approach the New Testament from a theological perspective. However, I consider the figure of Jesus in, to use a neologism, "theologal" terms, that is to say in terms of his relationship to God. The nature of Jesus's relationship with God is determinative both for implicit pre-resurrection Christology and for its explicit development after the resurrection. The earliest community shaped Jesus's subsequent identity by using the so-called "Christological titles" that encapsulated its faith in him. Against that background a major theological question concerns the connection between what Jesus expresses about himself—through his words and actions—and the Christological statements found in the early post-resurrection Christian community, that is to say, between Jesus and the Church, between history and faith. The confession of faith, already explicitly outlined in the New Testament, led to the Symbol of the faith, or Creed, which represents the core beliefs of the apostolic Church and of the Christian Church through the ages.

Alongside my penchant for the theological in exegetical study of the New Testament, I try to deal with early Christianity as one instance of a variety of religions between the first and fourth centuries AD. For that reason, it is more appropriate to examine it on the basis of categories that in practice avoid later dichotomies, such as canonical/apocryphal, apostolic/gnostic, and orthodox/heretical, and in the context of "early Christian writings" rather than simply of the "New Testament." There is also a need for more nuanced and less antithetical consideration of differences, commonly expressed in the New Testament, between Christianity and Judaism and between Christianity and paganism, as well as for greater understanding of the theological, liturgical, and social dimensions of Greco-Roman religion, which remained dominant until the fourth century, as well as of the numerous cults, beliefs, and philosophies across the Roman empire. Without taking properly into account these contemporaneous expressions of faith, it is difficult to explain how the teaching of a first-century itinerant Galilean preacher, unaffiliated to any Jewish group of the time, had been transformed by the end of the fourth century into the official religion of the western and eastern empire.

According to *Dei verbum*, 24, "the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology," indicating the influence of Scripture throughout theology and clearly affirming the New Testament's central role in all areas of theological study. Although this relationship had been previously expressed in Leo XIII's 1893 encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus*, 35, it was not fully implemented in many areas of Catholic theology until restated by the Second Vatican Council in *Dei verbum*. Today there appears again to be an imbalance between the central place that the New Testament should have within Christian theology and the real influence it has on dogmatic writings.

Notwithstanding the abundance, especially among non-Catholics, of joint studies by systematic theologians and New Testament scholars, it is difficult to find convincing examples of clear interdependence between theology and New Testament studies, and this makes me wonder whether the New Testament has "systematic relevance" for theological issues. One reason might be the difficulty of gathering New Testament evidence and incorporating it into a particular theological framework, another the gradual shift away from biblical studies to religious studies, leading to less theological interest on the part of biblical scholarship. The introduction of academic religious studies across western Europe should not in principle have caused a decline in the study of theology, but in practice it might well have contributed to the diminution of opportunities for academic research into the New Testament.

This is hardly surprising in a change of era (not only an era of changes, as Pope Francis often says), in a civilization that rejects the holding of strong ideas and the notion of a pan-European culture, and in an atmosphere of increasing tensions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affects the socio-economic equilibrium and other fundamental areas of human existence, and also of an ever more obvious decline in Christian faith throughout Western and Eastern Europe. Even so, it is still incumbent on us to say that Europe should not abandon its three great symbolic cities: Athens, Rome, Jerusalem!

5. Prospects and Future Tasks

There would seem to be three large-scale contexts in which future study of the New Testament might appropriately be undertaken, namely, Christian theology, Christian Churches, and global culture. The order may vary but none of the three elements should be overlooked. Having already offered my thoughts on the first two contexts I turn now to global culture. This does not imply any undervaluing of more local or specific contexts but rather gives due importance to a perspective that tries to integrate the "global" and the "local," without which New Testament study risks being perceived as less and less relevant. Biblical scholars, and theologians in general, should contribute to the development of what Pope Francis called in 2013 "new narratives and paradigms" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 74).

The New Testament as the central text of Christianity has in fact throughout the history of Europe contributed to the generation of numerous narratives of this kind, which have been determinative for European culture and given rise to a great variety of paradigms across different areas of thought (social, economic, political, aesthetic), areas in which biblical studies should engage. For example, as Peter Brown has shown, the end of the fourth century represents a shift among the Roman empire's rich and powerful from making donations for the erection of public statues in their memory to extending their wealth towards the service of the poor and to the Church's charitable activities.[12] This illustrates the impact of the Gospel on public life when the Church disseminates the New Testament message at a time of great social and economic change, when the poor come to be perceived as a blessing for a society in crisis—just like today.

12 Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Late Roman Empire* (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 2002).

At the present time when measures of success are based on the latest TV box set and many people dream only of material well-being, I firmly believe in the potential of the New Testament, when creatively presented by biblical scholars and the Church, as a source of healing for this infirm world, for its distress and wounds. New Testament study should be solid and serious but not sterile and aloof, and its scholars should enter the arena of public discourse positively, along with their cultural and social baggage, resounding the message from two thousand years ago as something vibrant and fresh, just as it was when it first emerged from the earliest Church. It would be a mistake to remain in the shades of academia and not to engage with the society and its debates, for humanity is the intended recipient of the salvation expressed in each and every one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Such engagement requires courage and commitment when many people cannot cope with their present reality. If we have learnt anything from the New Testament and early Christianity in general, it is that our response to the present should be one of hopefulness, a response that sees humanity as recovering and enjoying a much more positive future.

The message arising from New Testament scholarship has even more urgency in the current pandemic, which affects the entire planet. We are under attack from a virus that cannot be controlled without individuals and large groups of people giving up a significant degree of freedom of movement and action, resulting in serious difficulties at a personal and social level and in significant damage to the economy, in turn leading to an increase in people requiring help. In such a situation some can feel like outsiders in a strange land and can even lose the will to live. On the other hand, those who do not remain closed up in themselves are able to move forward, beyond the desert, without resignation or resentment but gazing positively towards the future.

Although the New Testament comprises a diversity of texts they coincide in ascribing a fundamental role to the sense of history. For the New Testament, the collective dominates over the individual, the community is greater than any single baptized person, the “we” is more important than the “I.” Christian faith is, of course, experienced personally, but can never be restricted to one individual. The New Testament arises from a phenomenon that cuts across existential boundaries, Jesus, the Christ, who is sent by God, and who dies, and is resurrected, transforms life and leads those who receive him into a common shared dream. At the present time, when humankind seems both closer and more separated than ever, we are in need of a vision of our shared history not as something that condemns us but that offers us freedom, not as a burden but as a gift. In short, New Testament study and its scholars can help to show history in terms of solidarity with the poor and fellowship with all who make up one common humanity.

New Testament Interpretation in the United States

A Perspective from a Cultural Observer

Francisco Lozada, Jr.

In the United States, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the winter/spring of 2020, it is well attested now that Latinx, African Americans, Native Americans, and many other ethnic/racial populations, including the impoverished across many identity groups, bore the brunt of the virus[1] (and continue to do so). This should come as no surprise since many within these communities—even though they live in a wealthy and well-resourced country—experience daily a complex health care system that keeps them from regular physical examinations that might be able to diagnose issues before turning into chronic illnesses and diseases. What is more, the lack of proper nutrition among these communities of lower economic status coupled with other poor wellness habits contribute to unknown and known underlying conditions that challenge their body to fight off pandemic-level viruses. And, many within these communities, including the poor, are on the front line of the pandemic as essential workers, exposed regularly to people who might be shedding the virus. We have certainly

1 See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Disparities in Incidence of COVID-19 Among Underrepresented Racial/Ethnic Groups in Counties Identified as Hotspots During June 5–18, 2020–22 States, February–June 2020," August 14, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6933e1.htm (accessed August 16, 2020). See also Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Equity," July 24, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html. See also Ed Young, "How the Pandemic Defeated America" (online version). *The Atlantic* (08/04/2020): https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/coronavirus-american-failure/614191/ (accessed August 5, 2020).

witnessed that COVID-19 contributes to many of them being hospitalized at a higher rate than "white"[2]—working from home—affluent communities.[3]

The COVID-19 pandemic—with the Omicron surge now sweeping the nation and globe as well—continues to expose the fault lines within the United States that reveal that some U.S. Americans lack the same privileges in society of other U.S. Americans. In other words, even though systemic disparities were already well known within many marginalized and vulnerable communities, the pandemic has revealed fracture lines existing in society in health care among white society compared to ethnic/racial minoritized communities, and among the economic privileged compared to lower-socioeconomic classes. Prior to the pandemic, in my opinion, a veneer existed in the United States showing our society as a relatively homogenous culture. This was a view especially popularized by the privileged in our society—especially after President Barack Obama's election as the first African American president—that we are now in a post-racial country. However, many like myself, who exist in a minoritized community as well as others who were part of marginalized and vulnerable communities knew very well that this notion of a homogeneous society was a myth. The pandemic and other social events over the last few years deflated this myth.

For instance, with the backdrop of the pandemic, two other realities also revealed further fault lines in our society. First, the murder of George Floyd, an African American, on May 25, 2021, by a Minneapolis, Minnesota, white police officer and the latter's attempted self-defense discourse revealed the systematic racialization and violence that exist within institutions of the state. I am also remembering many other victims such as Breonna Taylor (and others), and the attacks on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders that takes us back to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and its systematic exclusion and oppression of Asian Americans as not belonging in the United States. Second, the pandemic also revealed the disparity between citizens and non-citizens. Many vulnerable

2 "Whiteness," like other racial/ethnic markers, is a construction. It bends and expands depending upon its use in history and politics. See Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 2010. "Whiteness" is a construct that traditionally referred to Anglo-Saxon Protestants, but it has expanded over time to include those once perceived as "less than white" such as Italian and Irish Catholics and Jewish Americans, to name a few. See Natalie Masuoka and Jane Junn, *The Politics of Belonging: Race, Public Opinion, and Immigration* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 17.

3 In this essay, I am relying much on my own read of New Testament interpretation as a practitioner as well as my own account of the national and global currents regarding COVID-19.

immigrants bore the brunt of racialized immigration policies such as Title 42.[4] Broadly speaking, Title 42 grants the United States government the authority to deter entrance into the United States due to communicable diseases.[5] It is a statement that is found in the 1944 Public Health Services code and used initially to promote quarantining newcomers in the twentieth century.[6] It was not intended to expel those seeking asylum, for example; however, the Trump administration employed it to deter immigrants from entering the United States particularly from the Global South. As of this writing, it is still in place under President Joseph Biden's administration.

With this U.S. socio-historical context in mind, how has it challenged or altered the way I teach and do research in the field of New Testament interpretation? The short answer is that I have incorporated—and more so recently—along with the practice of a strict disciplinary "exegete," the practice of a cultural observer with the interest of commenting critically on the world around me. Although I am asked to practice the traditional way of doing New Testament interpretation, that is, the explication of texts, I also engage texts as a cultural observer in analyzing how the New Testament has been employed in history, in communities, and by institutions, but also how the cultural world informs my reading of the text and how the world around me influences my optic of the field itself. It is this latter area that this essay reflects. For example, the topic of racialization (as it is construed in the United States) and its role in systemic epistemological discourses (criminality, archeology, literature), such as biblical interpretation, is a strong interest of mine. During this time of pandemic, I have used many moments in the classroom and at professional meetings to rethink everything anew, including my field of New Testament interpretation. The traditional or modernist "Western" ways of doing biblical interpretation have failed to keep up with the reality of lived experience of racialized and vulnerable communities during this pandemic and other racialized public discourses, such as the vitriolic attacks on immigrants and other vulnerable communities such as the impoverished.

To understand the contexts and conditions under which I carry out New Testament interpretation, I prefer to look at the past to understand the present.

4 See the *New York Times'* Editorial board's appeal to cancel Title 42, "It's Time to End the Pandemic Emergency at the Border," November 13, 2021: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/13/opinion/immigration-trump-biden-covid.html?referringSource=articleShare. See also, the American Immigration Council's Fact Sheet on Title 42: "A Guide to Title 42 Expulsions at the Border," https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/guide-title-42-expulsions-border.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

As someone who is also engaged in another academic area, Latino/a/x studies, as my professional title indicates, I intend to use U.S. immigration history as a filter to reflect critically on the development of New Testament interpretation. I do so not to make any direct correlations, but to demonstrate that when New Testament interpretation is in action, New Testament scholars can no longer fail to engage the geo-political world that is behind them or exists around them. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that we are all connected and linked in some fashion. Viruses see no borders! What one person states or does impacts another person or community in some way. Thus, I cannot do any sort of interpretation without looking at what is happening in my world during the writing or research process—even when engaged in a strict disciplinary practice of interpretation. To do so is like writing commentaries on the Gospel of John without acknowledging the world around me.

In this essay, to provide some framework, I shall structure the remaining sections around three temporal and topical markers. Given my particular interest in the U.S. history of immigration as well as my intent to reveal a glimpse of one aspect of the world behind the development of New Testament interpretation during my lifetime, I shall use certain immigration significant moments to speak about the progression of New Testament interpretation, more or less, from 1965 to the present. These moments are not intended to correlate with the development of New Testament interpretation—though there are some curious affinities—but rather the moments are to be used as touch points to reflect critically on the discipline. I will begin with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act. It coincides with the year I was born, but more importantly, changes the national identity of those immigrants permitted to enter the United States. Another important marker is the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which granted amnesty to established non-citizen residents making them now eligible to apply for citizenship, but also generating much xenophobia by white U.S. Americans as a result. And finally, the year of 2001 or 9/11 which marks the temporal moment to the present with the "illegal" immigrant now seen as the enemy other—the "invader." Employing these temporal markers as aids to frame the discourse, I shall discuss the development of New Testament interpretation in the context of these immigration policies. To bring the discussion to further focus, I shall give special attention to the role of the reader in the interpretative act and use these temporal markers as launching pads to reflect on the role of the reader. In short, the essay is an example of what I mean when I say that my role as a New Testament scholar has incorporated the task of the cultural observer. It is this function that I see myself now adopting in my work in New Testament interpretation. These challenging times has exposed many institutions (e.g., health, civil rights, and immigration) as broken, and I can no longer look away.

1. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965: The Birth of the Reader

a.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 is an important immigration policy that aimed to open immigration to those living in the Eastern hemisphere (more or less). To understand this Act, it is important to compare it to the Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the Johnson-Reed Act). The 1924 Immigration Act, which was saturated with nativism and xenophobia in its development, limited the annual number of immigrants from a specific country to 2 percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States based on the 1890 census data.[7] The Act based authorized immigration to the United States on one's nationality. However, the law favored Western and Northern European immigrants over Eastern and Southern European immigrants (such as Jewish, Italian, and others from Eastern Europe). In 1890, there were more Western and Northern European immigrants in the country compared to how many Jewish European and others were in the country. In other words, if there were 100,000 Germans in the country in 1890, that meant 20,000 Germans were permitted to enter.[8] And if there were 10,000 Italians in the United States in 1890, that meant that only 2,000 Italians were allowed to enter. Thus, it favored Western European migrants over immigrants from other non- or less-than white perceived countries. Interestingly, the 1924 Act did not apply to the entire Western hemisphere because the U.S. agricultural industry needed Mexicans for cheap labor. This 1924 Act was pushed by nativists coupled with the so-called science movement of eugenics. In fact, a *New York Times* editorial endorsed the law on April 5, 1924. It was titled "Preserving the American Race." And a *Los Angeles Times* headline cheered "A Nordic Victory!"[9] The largest share of those entering the United States in 1924 went to Great Britain with 65,721 slots, Germany was second with 25,957, and Ireland was

7 See Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014). This volume is essential for my understanding of the Immigration Act of 1924 and deserve particular recognition.

8 Ibid.

9 See Reece Jones, *White Borders: The History of Race and Immigration in the United States from Chinese Exclusion to the Border Wall* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2021), 20–21.

third with 17,853. The Asian ban (the Chinese Exclusion Act) of 1882 was still in effect.

The Immigration Act of 1924 with its method of nationality quotas would be in place until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which will set the main principles for immigration regulations that are still enforced today and more recently, severely challenged over the last five years by the Trump administration. As mentioned above, since 1924, quotas (maximum limits) determined who could emigrate from each country during a one-year period. The 1965 Act would remove this quota system and replaced with it with a hemispheric quota system. The hemisphere quotas would "open" the door for nationalities that have been traditionally excluded since 1924 especially those from the Global South.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, at the moment, applied a system that made it easier for immigrants to apply for residency based on family reunification, employment opportunities, and refugees arrivals, and for the first time it will cap immigration from within the Americas such as from Latin America.[10] The 1965 Act aimed to address problems of exclusion from the past, but it did not anticipate the neo-liberal economic policies' (privatization, deregulation, and reduction of governmental expenditures) that would impact Latin Americans, directly pushing them to the North for better economic opportunities to name a few push and pull factors. The civil wars of Central America later in the 1970s and 1980s would also contribute to the push of Central Americans to the United States. If the 1924 Immigration Act "closed" the door for certain immigrants, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 "opened" the door for these who were once excluded immigrants from the Global South. In so doing, the policy would not only change the "color" of the face (and character) of the nation, it would open a path for new immigrants to introduce their new ideas and questions.

b.

Along with the so-called "open-door" policy that favored the Global South came biblical scholars across the globe to the field of New Testament in the United States. These scholars, energized by the U.S. civil rights movements as well as by the global movements of the late 1960s and 1970s championing decolonization, anti-war effects, and transparent democracy, would bring new questions to all sorts of academic fields, including New Testament interpretation. These

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10 See Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 21–55.

new immigrants would introduce questions of power, liberation, and economic disparities. Questions such as the role of apartheid, indigenous rights, and the economic justice would be brought to bear upon the study of texts.[11] The role of the reader in the process of interpretation would begin to break through the ground and participate in the projection of meaning from the "margins." That is, questions of the social location of the reader would be studied and embraced by many who did not believe the historical critical approach, with its ethos of objectivity, and who were asking important questions about the world in front of the text. For sure, it would take some time for this question of the reader to find space to develop and mature, but at this time this question was being nurtured by other developments in the field in the United States.

Also, what is happening in the United States are several other developments, namely, the civil rights movements supported by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights and Immigration Acts of 1965, both providing more opportunity for ethnic/racial communities to participate civilly and politically in the country. At this moment, other questions would emerge principally by minoritized scholars such as the role of gender and race in the production of meaning. Other social factors on identity would develop later. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 not only redefined the nation when it came to its identity as an immigrant nation, the questioning by a new diverse line of scholars came to change the development of the field itself. The text for these scholars, particularly from the Global South and marginalized communities in the United States, was no longer seen as a depository filled with meaning that needed to be unearthed through various historical approaches such as source, form, or redaction criticisms. Rather the text was seen as an ideological product that serves to sustain and legitimate systems and values of power. The text was seen as a site of struggle and the task of the readers who came to the text was to recover the meaning that existed in this struggle.[12] The end game for these readers or critics was liberation, that is, reading for liberation to challenge the oppression employed by others with these texts, and that was applied to the real world. A good example is critics who read a text *with other women or the oppressed* with the goal of constructing a liberative reading that would

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11 Many of these questions would eventually be introduced and reflected in Rasiah S. Sugitharajah, *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

12 See Fernando F. Segovia, "'And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues': Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism," in *Reading from this Place, Vol. 1, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 25.

aid in their respective socio-political context.[13] Thus, the celebrated reform of immigration law in the United States follows the celebration of the pulling apart the pieces of the dominant and authoritative ethos of the task of New Testament interpretation, namely, objectivity and positivism.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 all contributed in some fashion to chipping away some long standing xenophobic and racialized policies that restricted marginalized communities from full participation in society. It also, I believe, provided an opportunity for New Testament scholars in general to explore and experiment with new approaches to the study of the New Testament text.[14] One such new approach was the development of the socio-cultural criticism and cultural anthropology approaches which mark a new direction in the field. Scholars began to dialogue with economics, sociology, and anthropology to study the value systems, for instance, in the ancient world. In so doing, these critics aimed to understand the mindset of the ancient people who composed the ancient texts. Some also were identifying the social codes for this world as sociologists and cultural anthropologists were doing during this general period. Thus, critics focused on understanding the wealth and poverty, patronage and loyalty, and honor and shame. These were all studied at a macro and micro level but rather than reading these social-ideological perspectives from their present position, they were more interested—like historical critics—in how these perspectives functioned in the ancient world. Interestingly, while this period is marked by a spirit of social justice and human freedom reflected in the spirit of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and others, to do socio-cultural criticism and cultural anthropology was still strongly colored by those same principles such as objectivity and positivism. What is more, the role of the reader, while given the opportunity to surface, was still pulled to stay invisible for the most part.

However, there is one caveat in this socio-cultural orientation. In Latin America, for instance, many scholars employ the socio-cultural criticism but with the goal of liberation. They unearth the social codes of the text to read the contemporary world and its socio-cultural world. For these Latin Americans and later Latinx scholars, reading *with* the poor will be their hermeneutical posture

13 See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

14 See the Society of Biblical Literature's *Semeia* journal, whose description between 1974 through 2002 calls it "an experimental journal devoted to the exploration of new and emergent areas and methods of biblical criticism." See https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/Books_semeiaJ.aspx.

as scholars. Unlike the immigrants who live in the shadows of our society so as not to be deported, the reader in this case was emerging from the shadows and challenging the myth that interpretation is a scientific-objective enterprise.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 would mark the beginning of a turn toward the agency of new citizens in the nation. At the same time, coincidentally, it will mark the beginning of the role of the reader in the field of New Testament interpretation that led to many minoritized groups (gender and sexuality formations, class formations, and ethnic/racial formations) demanding an equal place in the field. And they would do so by continuing to explore and employ the role of the reader during the interpretive process.

2. 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act: The Emergence of the Reader

a.

Another important marker in the history of immigration of the United States in the latter third of the twentieth century is the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) 1986 (also known as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act). IRCA came into play under President Ronald Reagan to deal with increased migration to the United States. Through IRCA, Congress provides amnesty for those established residents (unauthorized) in the United States who are not citizens. At the time, an estimated 2.6 million people who were already in the country became legal residents then, making them eligible to apply for citizenship ten years later.[15] This was a celebrated moment for many immigrants who qualified to apply for legal residency. However, for some anti-immigration citizens, IRCA failed to stem the tide of "illegal" entries. Instead, what it did was spark a Latino backlash that is still felt today in the United States. As this amnesty law was enacted, at the same time cable news was growing nationwide (and globally) along with conservative talk-radio programs that espoused this anti-Latino sentiment. For this conservative constituency, these media outlets provided a heightened perception that all Latinos/as particularly from the Global South were "illegals." This notion of illegality remains in the air today, along with far-right cable news outlets and talk-radio shows who are providing false narratives about immigration based on fear. IRCA also increased border enforcement, expanding the number of border patrol agents, building walls and fences, high-tech surveillance of the land and air, enhanced requirements

15 Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on "Illegals" and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge, 2010 [2002]), 104, 179.

of employers to demonstrate that their workers were "legal," and expanded guestworker visas programs to ensure there was a viable work force, especially for those jobs that citizens refused to do.[16]

This increase in undocumented migration would lead to another immigration act called the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA). With the passage of the North American Free Trade Act in the 1990s under President Bill Clinton, federal authorities stepped up enforcement of immigration restrictions by adding border policing and asking for verification of employment credentials. Clinton was motivated by wanting to look tough on securing the boundaries of the United States. It was also a way to implement another initiative by the immigration apparatus to prevent movement of people through deterrence rather than apprehending migrants after they cross (Operation Gatekeeper, 1994).[17] This strategy of prevention through deterrence remains in place to this day. What is more, with IIRIRA, if you break the law, you are now subject to automatic deportation regardless of how long ago the crime occurred. Before 1996, the list of crimes consisted of major felonies. Afterward, selling marijuana, committing domestic violence, driving drunk, and any other conviction that carries a sentence of one year or more will lead to deportation. As such, the beginning of an immigration crackdown, increased criminalization of unauthorized immigration, and families and their children held in detention centers would emerge at greater levels. On a personal note, this is the backdrop that existed at the time when I was in the process of writing my dissertation on the Gospel of John from a literary critical point of view.[18] It is not until the last chapter that I attempted to bring the world around me—in a modest way—into my work.

b.

As mentioned, IRCA was unsuccessful at stopping unauthorized migration into the United States. By 1989, migration from the Global South revived. While this resurgence was occurring at the geo-political national level, in the field of New Testament biblical interpretation, coincidentally (but no correlation), the development of the role of the reader was also emerging and, this time,

16 Ibid, 1–16. See also Reece Jones, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* (London, Verso, 2017 [2016]) for an overview of this technological direction by the immigration apparatus of the United States.

17 See the volume by Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond* (see n. 15) for a detailed discussion on this strategy of preventing immigration in the 1990s.

18 Francisco Lozada, Jr., *A Literary Reading of John 5: Text as Construction* (Studies in Biblical Literature 20; New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

with much more force, which is still felt today in various cultural interpretative expressions (e.g., Latinx, African American, Asian American interpretations). With the development of narrative criticism that arrived on the scene in the 1980s, with its focus on how a narrative plot is advanced, how characters are developed, or how irony is introduced and developed, for example, it also called attention to how readers are expected to be affected or impacted by the text (reception). This question also remains today in the field but in a different way.

While narrative criticism made its way to the field of New Testament interpretation in the 1980s and 1990s, some scholars, particularly those working with Pauline literature, employed an approach called rhetorical criticism. Like narrative criticism, the focus was on the work or text itself, particularly the argument it is trying to make but also on how that argument is made. They would study Greco-Roman types of arguments to understand the various appeals an author is trying to make to readers' faith, emotions, or logic. But like narrative criticism, the attention is more on the text and less on the role of the flesh-and-blood reader.

Narrative criticism will open a path to a new development in the field of the 1980s and 1990s. Where the focus was on the text for many New Testament interpreters, now the attention for some turned to the role of the reader in the process of interpretation with more energy. This attention led to reader-response criticism, which will explore how readers contribute to the process of interpretation. One strand of reader-response approach would focus on how the implied reader of the text participated in the process of interpretation, but many gender and ethnic/racial marginalized readers (and including Anglo-American readers) began to study how those social factors of their own social location (gender, ethnicity, class, etc.) affected the way they (as flesh-and-blood readers) engaged the text and helped to reach what they think the text means in the present. Some scholars also decided to study how a particular text (e.g., Revelation or John 4) had been read throughout history and how it had been employed in theological discussion, preaching, art, or even film.

Again, this would provide space for scholars, particularly those that were finding their agency or voice over the years, to explore how the New Testament texts might be read from a flesh-and blood reader perspective. Not to suggest that these perspectives began at this moment in the history of New Testament interpretation, for they have been around and gradually building momentum prior to my noting its articulation, but rather that they take off in a way that would impact the entire field and beyond. A variety of feminist, womanist, Latina, or mujerista perspectives would appear interpreting texts from their particular social locations and problematizing gender formations in the text but also in front of the text. Postcolonial interpretations would appear, with the help of scholars located outside the United States, deconstructing the binaries of powers that existed in the text but also bringing to the fore perspectives of marginalized and colonial oppressed peoples from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Even in my own work, I am not only questioning the ideological perspectives of the authors or implied authors themselves, I am also scrutinizing the ideological assumptions that these texts may inherit from their particular socio-literary-historical worlds.[19]

IRCA like IIRIRA attempted to stop the flow of movement of peoples. As we know, this was unsuccessful. In the field of New Testament interpretation, as much as historical criticism tried to hold off the developments by minoritized folks entering the field by preventing the role of the reader to enter in exegetical exercises of the text, it also was unsuccessful. The reader—the flesh-and-blood reader—could not be contained. No wall or disciplinary borders could keep a reader from crossing into new territories and exploring the opportunity to create new meanings.

3. Homeland Security Act: From September 11, 2001, to the Present

September 11, 2001 will have an impactful effect on the way immigration policies are scripted in the future in the United States. Prior to 9/11, migrants were casts as "wetbacks," undocumented, "illegals," aliens, and sometimes combined as "illegal aliens." After 9/11 they would be portrayed as the enemy-other, as others such as Muslim Americans.[20] The far-right political anti-migrant person will graft the identity of the terrorists of 9/11 with migrants entering the United States unauthorized. These migrants, the new enemy-other, would be portrayed on cable news and conservative talk radio shows as invading the United States, destroying a way of life in the United States, and destroying the value of freedom that is part of the U.S. exceptionalism narrative. What is more, a heightened rhetoric of building a border wall between Mexico and the United States would also influence a chorus of U.S. American citizens fearful of new immigrants in general. In fact, prior to 9/11, there were approximately 16 border fences or barriers in the world, and after 9/11 there are about 70 around

19 See Francisco Lozada, Jr., "Contesting and Interpretation of John 5: Moving Beyond Colonial Evangelism," in *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space, and Power* (The Bible and Postcolonialism, 7; ed. Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey Staley; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 76–93.

20 See Reece Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1–52.

the world, including India-Bangladesh, Israel-West Bank, Greece-Turkey, and Spain-Morocco.[21]

The events of 9/11 would lead to the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS, 2002), where Customs Border and Protection (CBP) and Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) would be housed. The Secretary of Homeland Security acted quickly to achieve operational control over U.S. international land and maritime borders including an expansion of existing walls, fences, and surveillance.[22] Thus, the political climate of the time as expressed through the creation of DHS is one of fear and security. This fear would be translated into xenophobic language of otherness opposite to "whiteness," and a fear that would lead to "securing" the border in any way possible in the years to follow. For instance, the 2006 Secure Fence Act which was signed by President George W. Bush, led to the building of 850 miles of "at least" two layers of "reinforced fencing," with patrol roads in between at certain stretches along the southern boundary.[23] The Act also paid for drones, a virtual wall, blimps, radar, helicopters, watchtowers, surveillance balloons, razor ribbon, and provided funding to test fence prototypes. This "security" rhetoric and buildup will have other effects. For instance, in 2008, South Carolina banned undocumented students from enrolling in public colleges and universities; in 2010 Georgia voted to ban the undocumented from attending the state's five most selective public universities; in 2010 Arizona passed the Senate Bill 1070 which is commonly known as the "Show me your papers" bill, which conflated Mexican, immigrant and "illegal" all together, and which resulted in a legal justification for racial profiling; and in 2011, Alabama worked on denying immigrant access to every facet of regulated life (from water utilities to dog tags).[24] All these xenoracist acts only produced a hostile climate toward immigrants and ratcheted up all levels of alarm and fear toward immigrant communities.

President Barack Obama, in a similar way to his predecessors, took a hypermasculine "get tough on immigration" approach. However, before I speak about the policies he enacted, as the first African American president he is the first to experience "immigrant' xenophobia leading up to his election. One of the first things that happened to him was that his opponents seized on the idea he was not "American"—raised, if not born, beyond the boundary—dealing with Donald Trump and the nativist right (Tea Party, anti-immigrant Republicans/Libertarians; Anti-Latino organizations, Border Minutemen), who

21 See Jones, ibid., 1–11, where the interpretation is emanating from in my essay.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 29–47.

24 Jones, *Border Walls* (see n. 20), 26–52. See also Jones, *Violent Borders* (see n. 16).

would all be quite vocal and powerful. Thus, even someone who runs for President and becomes President is not immune to the xenophobia that filled the air around immigration issues at that moment.

President Obama came to be known as the "Deporter in Chief." He hoped that stepping up border security and deportations (over 2 million during the first five years in office) would open a space for compromise with Republicans for immigration reform. Of course, that never materialized. As a response to the a lack of a compromise he issued an executive order called the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which provided protection to some undocumented residents who had entered the country as minors. But DACA also increased the funding and staff of the nation's border, customs, and immigration agencies. The backlash from his opponents to this executive order would be fierce.

Also, because of neo-liberal and anti-drug policies and violence in Central America, a surge of Central American children—tens of thousands every year between 2009 and 2014—began arriving at the border from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The surge was seen by Obama's opponents as an "invasion" that demanded a military action. All of this is to say that the events of 9/11 continued to push rhetoric and policies toward the call for more border security, while also perpetuating the idea that migration from the Global South was an invasion by the enemy-other.

Finally, it is important to remember that President Trump's campaign capitalized on *xenophobia* and fear that the United States was being invaded by the Global South. After winning the 2018 election, Trump comes into office and through an executive order puts forward what would come to be known as the "Muslim Ban" that prohibited travel and refugee resettlement from select predominantly Muslim countries. After the Supreme Court would uphold most provisions of a third version of the ban, the order was enacted January 27, 2017. Executive Order 13769 is called Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.

It is true that the federal government possesses broad power to regulate immigration, to determine who can enter, who can stay and on what terms, and who must leave, and that it can exercise this power in ways that might otherwise be deemed to violate constitutional rights.

The Trump administration seized on this power and supported the Zero-Tolerance for Offences Act that was enacted on April 6, 2018. With the midterm elections coming up, Trump via his attorney general Jeff Sessions, announced that families arriving at the border would be split up, with the children taken away and parents placed in jail and prosecuted as child-smugglers. Then, in January 2019, Trump orders what is called the Migrant Protection Protocols

(MPP) or "Remain in Mexico Policy." This policy means that asylum seekers arriving at ports of entry on the U.S.-Mexico border will be returned to Mexico to wait for the duration of their U.S. immigration proceedings. The policy is dangerous, for it placed migrants in direct danger with criminals. Migrants faced kidnapping, murder, disappearance, extortion, and violence both at the hands of organized crime and enforcement agencies and across Mexico and Mexico's northern border states, the very places migrant would be returned. When President Joseph Biden came into office, the MPP policy and Title 42 mentioned above would remain in effect.

b.

With this immigration backdrop, the role of the flesh-and-blood reader in field of biblical interpretation would not retreat or stay invisible. The disciplinary borders of the field could not keep the flesh-and-blood reader from perforating what biblical studies is and ought to be. While the United States was supposedly building a "wall"—the rhetoric about the wall isn't so much about building the wall as it is a constant opportunity to talk about the building of the wall to create fear in the nation[25]—the field and its practitioners were stretching the boundaries of how to practice New Testament interpretation. Much more attention was given to the critical reflection on the process of interpretation, including the objective to explore what interpretation should be, and in which ways various passages might be meaningful toward the liberation and transformation for immigrant and minoritized, for instance, communities.

Recently, the role of the flesh-and-blood reader remains a point of discussion in the process of interpretation, but also other questions are emerging, such as, How are scholars doing history? I am not talking about the traditional methods of "exegesis," with its emphasis on explicating or dissecting the layers and traditions that gave rise to the composition of texts. I am speaking about nuancing the difference between "what happened" in the world behind the text and "that which is said to have happened" through either secondary or primary sources of the text.[26] For instance, did John say the Johannine community split off from the Jewish community, or did it really happen? "Sources are not created equal."[27] As Trouillot states, "the past is only the past because there is a present."[28]

25 See Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019), 267.

26 See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015 [1995]), 2.

27 Ibid., 47.

28 Ibid., 15.

In other words, as we construct the past, we choose based on the selection of "facts" what sources to use to create the past. We even reposition the sources in a way to support the narrative that we as scholars have in mind.[29] Trouillot continues to problematize the process of working with the past. He says there are "the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)."[30] At these four corners of historical production, I believe, is where the role of the reader turns toward an interdisciplinary approach to doing biblical studies. This is what the state of New Testament interpretation can benefit from these days, namely, an interdisciplinary approach that takes the best of approaches and study a text, or its reception, or in its bringing to bear the world in front of the text.

For example, as indicated above, the role of the reader remains hidden in whatever fashion under the historical critical paradigm. To do biblical interpretation, as I read the "rules," one must read as a "white" scholar. What does this mean? It means one must assume the assumptions and practices that the "white" scholar assumed. Any mention of the voice of the interpreter or the social location of the interpreter would not be permitted until later in the twentieth century. It probably was never considered due to the dominant ethos to remain neutral and objective in how one would read the biblical text. To belong, like many Mexican immigrants did to receive citizenship, you had to behave and be defined and be seen as "white." Even when Mexicans could claim blackness, they opted for "whiteness" because they saw "whiteness" superior to blackness.[31] In comparison, this happens with many racial minoritized biblical scholars who want to do a dissertation in say, the Latinx hermeneutics tradition, but put it aside to write a dissertation as a "white" person would write it, using historical criticism through an objective lens and remaining neutral. This does not happen to all minoritized readers. I do have colleagues who truly believe that the best approach to biblical study is taking a neutral or impartial position, that is, no mention of the role of the social location of the reader. However, I do wonder if deep down there is an epistemological hierarchy at play with "scientific" leaning approaches at the top of the hierarchy and "contextual" leaning approaches at the bottom. I wonder because I was once at this place where abstract knowledge is considered superior to experience. Again, the issue is not that the historical critical approaches bear no fruit; they do. The point here

29 Ibid., 27.
30 Ibid., 26.
31 Molina, *How Race Is Made in America* (see n. 7), 48.

is that biblical interpretation contributes to a racial script like many institutions, immigration laws, and methods. That script calls on minoritized scholars to employ historical criticism for membership and belongingness. That is, this minoritized scholar knows that he or she must do all he or she can do to appear "white"—including using the dominant method of historical criticism—to assure acceptance into the guild, to receive a job, and to receive tenure. To this day, this continues to be the preference of some racialized masters-level students because they know if they do not use historical criticism, the chance of being accepted to a first-tier university to study the biblical text will be minimized. On the surface, schools for instance will say we are open to all methods, but the preferred method is historical critical approaches or, as today, historiographical analysis still framed around objectivity. And these historical critical approaches remain on top of the hierarchical ladder of approaches, with contextual approaches at the bottom, akin to "whites" at the top and "African Americans" at the bottom, with Native Americans, Latinos, and Asians moving up and down the ladder depending on which approaches they adopt. To be called to discipleship in John does not mean supporting hierarchies that marginalize, it means pushing to a deeper level of understanding: "Come and see," John says.

Conclusion

With this brief parallel reading of U.S. immigration history with New Testament interpretation, I would argue that it is time for scholars to seriously consider becoming cultural observers in the very act of interpretation of texts and the state of the field itself. What would that entail? It would demand a strong reading on immigration history and its policies, or climate change, or globalization, to name a few areas. It would demand more dialogue with the global international community of scholars, such as this volume is attempting to do. And it would demand we be interdisciplinary in our work and in our curriculums for New Testament studies. For instance, regarding the latter, it means that studying John is just as important as studying the construct of community in the real world. The point here is that we can no longer continue doing New Testament interpretation the same way. Otherwise, we are left out of the discourse on COVID-19, immigration, globalization, climate change, rise of populism, and indigenous rights, to name a few.

Racism and New Testament Scholarship in Latinx California

U.S. Debates on Racism and Biblical Scholarship

Kay Higuera Smith

New Testament scholarship has undergone some significant shifts in its established approaches and methodologies since the late twentieth century. As I see it, the most long-ranging shift has been a hermeneutical one. We have moved from a privileging of professedly disinterested historical-critical scholarship to widespread recognition of its limitations and a turning toward cultural-critical approaches. The social, historical, and economic assumptions of the mid-twentieth century helped launch a certain set of questions to which the guild of scholars responded. In the twenty-first century, people are finding those questions, and the answers they elicited, to be insufficient for an entirely new set of assumptions. Today, those assumptions are based on the recognition that, after roughly 400 years of the academic study of the Bible, the hopes and promises of historical-criticism have not been realized. Despite expectations, scholars have not been able to support any claims for universal validity of interpretation nor has an earlier generation of scholars been able to demonstrate that such a goal is attainable using historical- and literary-critical approaches as they have been employed. This generation of scholars is now asking questions as to how race, ethnicity, ability, gender, geography, sexuality, and economic status may be important in the interpretation of the Bible. There is a growing consensus that those claims, that to employ a proper methodology will result in a universally valid interpretation, are often based on a narrow hermeneutical lens at best or outright hubris at worst. In this essay, I will address how we have transitioned from there to here. I am positioned to do so because, in my career, I have straddled both ideological and interpretive locations and can thus attest to this change as it has developed over time.

I received my PhD in 1997 at an institution that was committed to historical critical scholarship in the tradition of mid-twentieth century German

New Testament Scholarship. My *Doktorvater*, James M. Robinson (of blessed memory), had studied with Karl Barth and Oscar Cullmann in Basel and was also influenced by Rudolf Bultmann at Marburg. His ideological commitments to historical-critical scholarship were so deep that he refused to allow his students to employ philosophical approaches that arose from many of those same German traditions to which he was beholden. These traditions had begun to question the positivist hopes of such scholarship. Robinson insisted on historical-critical or literary-critical scholarship among his students, and he had no interest in questions that were being raised by philosophers or feminist or critical theorists about how meaning is constructed. When I introduced questions of racialized hermeneutics into my own research, he would be quick to demand I remove them. For Robinson, rigorous historical-critical scholarship was the gold standard.

This was a time when the center of New Testament scholarship was shifting from its centers at Tübingen and Marburg to new centers at Princeton and Harvard in the U.S. Voices from Asia, Africa, and South America were beginning to be heard, as well as women's voices and, toward the end of the century, Queer, LGBTI, and voices discussing ability and disability as they pertain to meaning construction.

Nevertheless, at least in my case, my own professors resisted that push and insisted on a clear distinction between discussions about social location—which they dismissed as overly theological or merely a distraction—and biblical studies. Moreover, it was Jesus in his Greco-Roman context that was considered the most important avenue for a historical reconstruction of Jesus and his world, no doubt under the influence of mid-twentieth century German New Testament scholarship which, even if not overtly antisemitic, found it prudent to minimize the Jewish context of studying the historical Jesus.

Skepticism about the historicity of the majority of material about Jesus in the gospels led to a Bultmannian conviction that the most authentic Jesus was one who was demythologized from the flotsam and jetsam of later Christian stratifications. Of course, a side-effect of this approach was that the Jesus who resulted from this type of analysis was the one that looked most like Bultmann himself. It appeared that the search for an authentic Jesus was, alas, again at an impasse even though Bultmann had tried to avoid such an outcome in drawing from and reacting to Albert Schweitzer.[1]

1 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

Ironically, this historical skepticism did not mark a skepticism of the historical method. Rather, it drew from a deeply-held conviction that a rigid historicism was the only avenue worth following to gain any valid knowledge about Jesus, modest as it might be. It was the "Christ of history," not the "Christ of faith" that such scholarship rigorously pursued.[2] The problem was, however, that the only acceptable data, based on contemporary rules of historiography, yielded little material to work with. In response, scholars of the "New Quest" focused heavily on sayings traditions, which were stripped of historical details that could not be corroborated.

With the publication of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the *Nag Hammadi texts*, more opportunities arose to connect Jesus to what was becoming a much more nuanced understanding of the Hellenized Judaic systems of the Second Temple period and beyond. That is not to say that German scholarship had not addressed Jesus' Jewishness with care and rigor, using the tools of the era. Hermann L. Strack, Paul Billerbeck, and Joachim Jeremias did groundbreaking work although hampered by pre-assumptions about the nature of Second Temple Jewish thought and practice. These new documents resisted some of the constructs that had been developed within European New Testament scholarship by offering evidence for a widespread apocalypticism and providing parallels with social structures hinted at in the New Testament book of Acts, all within a matrix of a clearly identifiable Judaic system.

Nevertheless, in the vein of the entire field of academic biblical studies, going back to Ernst Renan and F. C. Baur, Jesus' ethnic otherness continued to be a problem to be superseded by a universalized, Westernized church drawing from Greek antiquity and rising above Jewish particularism and Roman legalism.[3] These philosophical assumptions were enhanced by the political events of WW II, even for those who resisted the regime of the Third Reich. In the nineteenth century, Baur had proposed a Hegelian dialectical approach, in which Christianity grew out of a synthesis of Jewish and Gentile Christianity, and Bultmann proposed an existentialist approach in which the particularistic nature of his understanding of Second Temple Judaism had to be left behind as inauthentic and superseded by a more authentic form of religious life, offered by Jesus and the later Pauline Gentile church. The tradition pursued a model in

2 To be sure, my own advisors were people of deep faith. Their purpose, as I understood it, was not to undermine faith but to put faith on more solid ground.

3 For a cogent study of the intellectual history of this assumption in the modern field of Biblical Studies, see Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

which its construction of a moribund, particularistic, and inauthentic Judaism had to have been overcome by the authentic and forward-looking Jesus tradition.

To be sure, those who used this approach produced scholarship that was both consummate and voluminous.[4] They made advances in text, form, and redaction criticism that undergird much of New Testament scholarship today. Nevertheless, their discomfort with Jesus as ethnic Other was exacerbated by the narrow demographic of those doing the work in the twentieth century. The guild consisted almost exclusively of elite European male clerics. Women were excluded from this space, and the epistemological assumptions of the guild precluded the ability to hear the voices of women and scholars outside of Europe and the U.S.[5] Marie-Theres Wacker has identified Elisabeth Moltmann's *Frauen um Jesus*, published in 1980, as "probably the first German-language monograph in feminist exegesis."[6] This is not to say that German women did not publish before this date; however, for the most part the guild required that they limit themselves to asking the same questions as did their male, clerical mentors and advisors.

My Hermeneutical Convictions

My own academic journey began as a non-Jewish woman drawn to Jewish thought and practice in the 1980s. I had begun to ponder hermeneutical questions, which arose out of my own sense of otherness. As I reflect on my own story, it is clear to me how my convictions about social location and hermeneutics shaped my intellectual journey. I have occupied a space of social liminality as long as I can remember. It is this lived experience of liminality that has helped to chart my course. I am a bicultural, White Latina, from Southern California. I do not remember any strong sense of cultural or social identity

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4 Although the list is far from exhausting, see works by Albert Schweitzer, Johannes Weiss, Adolph Deissmann, Walter Bauer, Wilhelm Bousset, William Wrede, Gerhard Kittel, Ernst Lohmeyer, Martin Dibelius, Rudolf Bultmann, Günter Bornkamm, Ernst Käsemann, Dieter Lührmann, and, in the Bultmannian school in the U.S., Robert W. Funk and James M. Robinson. German scholars working in the U.S. included Helmut Koester and Hans Dieter Betz.

5 On the issue of epistemic or testimonial justice, see Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

6 Marie-Theres Wacker, "One Hundred Years of Women and the Bible: Looking Back," in *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective,* edited by Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 7, trans. Martin and Barbara Rumscheidt, from *Feministische Exegese: Forschungserträge zur Bibel aus der Perspektive von Frauen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995).

drawn from the Smith side of my family. On the other hand, my entire sense of social identity and cultural self-awareness came from my mother's side of the family, the Yorbas and Higueras. My Californiano/a/x Yorba/Higuera family was a large, raucous, and enveloping crowd with few boundaries. We gathered several times a month at my grandparents' ranch with a large, extended family. We were faithful Catholics. We attended Mass weekly, and my sisters and I attended parochial Catholic school throughout my early years. The chapel of our church was located in the Mission San Juan Capistrano, where a 400-year-old Baroque *retablo* (altar), imported from Barcelona in the nineteenth century, reinforced the sense that I lived in an alternate time and place.

Endless hours were spent at the feet of my maternal grandfather, Albert Yorba, whom I like to call the Last Don of the Yorba dynasty. Born in 1902, Alberto Juan Yorba spun romanticized tales of rancho life, in which the *macho* caballeros worked hard, drank hard, and protected their *damas y señoritas*. My maternal grandmother, Albert's wife, Matilda Higuera, however, was always there to give another side to the story. When Albert would brag about the Spanish *dons*, Matilda would take me aside and remind me that it was all talk and bluster. Matilda was philosophical about life. She recognized that her family's wealth came at the expense of others, and when she told us about "*Gringos* stealing the land from us" during the Mexican-American War and the California gold rush, she added, "Oh well, we stole the land from the 'Indians.' Then the *Gringos* stole it from us. We had it coming."

I never considered the irony that I, a red-headed, freckle-faced girl with the last name of Smith was myself a *Gringo*. No. The *Gringos* marked the social Center and I was the Other. The *Gringos* were the ones who truly controlled society in the U.S., and we were not them. Yet as I operated in the world in my general affairs, I presented to the world as nothing other than White. Hence, while operating freely between two worlds, my primary sense of social identity was as a liminal character, shape-shifting effortlessly between alternate worlds.

This liminality seemed to move into the background in my teen years. I was swept up into the Jesus movement, which was quite active in Orange County in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[7] It was not until a decade later that I began to recognize the White, racialized, conservative nature of the movement. Once again, I was occupying liminal space. I could not resonate with these messages, but my efforts to point out the contingent nature of the ideology fell on deaf ears, and I did not have the language or the conceptual tools to articulate what

7 On the growth of White Evangelical Christianity in Southern California, see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

I was feeling. I was in but not in. Nevertheless, I suppressed those doubts for another two decades. I married and sublimated my Mexican-American identity and threw myself into my husband's world. Try as I might, however, I could not, nor really wanted to, abandon my liminality vis-à-vis this social group in which I found myself.

It should not be surprising that the marriage ended in divorce, albeit after 32 years. It was a tragically painful time for me, but at the same time, it was the watershed moment when I could truly take stock of my life. By that time, I had finished a B.A. in Jewish Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle and an M.A. and PhD in Religion at the Claremont Graduate School (now University) in Southern California. I began to teach full-time at Azusa Pacific University, which is an evangelical university in the Wesleyan tradition, where I remain today.

After my divorce, I was not as willing to continue in the vein of the scholarship in which I had been trained by my doctoral forebears. I found their questions and methodologies increasingly irrelevant to the questions I was asking. I sat back and began to take stock of what authors and themes had captivated me over the years. I had been drawn to books by Daniel Boyarin, who wrote about the boundaries between ancient Jews and Christians.[8] I had been drawn to notions of Otherness with regard to Judaism as well.[9] From there, I read Levinas, Foucault, Bhabha, Said, and Sugirtharajah.[10] I realized, however, that it was my own story that I was longing to explore and make sense of. So, I delved deeper into Dussel, Mignolo, Isasi-Díaz, Mendieta, Medina, Alcoff, Lugones, Segovia, and other Latino/a/x thinkers and scholars.[11] I had struggled to find my voice as a bicultural

8 See, for instance, Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

9 One influential book was Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn, eds., *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

10 Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Michele Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977,* edited and translated by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); and *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); and R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* 3rd Ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

11 Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012);

Latina, having lived in the U.S. for so many generations. I felt like an imposter because, while Spanish was my grandparents' first language, I could only speak it marginally and had forgotten much of the Spanish of my youth. Speaking Spanish, I reasoned, was the only way legitimately to claim to be a Latino/a. But then I read Gloria Anzaldúa, a seventh-generation Tejana, and I realized that my voice as a seventh-generation Californiana mattered also.[12] I became aware of the extent to which my own sense of liminality was precisely because I occupied a space in which the borders had crossed me rather than vice versa. I realized that, while I had not crossed a geographic border, my entire life had been involved in crossing discursive, social, and cultural borders and making sense of myself in those various liminal spaces. I could no longer, however, make sense of the centered and privileged space of White evangelicalism. While working in an evangelical institution, and affirming the major faith commitments of the classic creeds, I have maintained outsider status with respect to the unspoken codes, norms, and heavily regulated behaviors expected in such a place.

Ultimately, it became clear to me the extent to which the norms and accepted practices in the academic study of the Bible—despite its elites claiming it to be neutral—perpetuated similar forms of testimonial injustice and academic silencing of scholars from outside of the U.S., Britain, France, and Germany. Foucault's demonstration of how the power to produce, sustain, and disseminate certain knowledge claims as normative seemed self-evident to me based on my experiences.[13] I had lived this reality for decades. By extension, I had observed elite operators putting in place elaborate mechanisms to ensure that other forms of knowledge production were suppressed and ignored. Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship reinforced what seemed self-evident to me—that the guild of biblical scholars was not being forthright and honest about its own manipulation of the mechanisms of power—in this case the power to interpret the Bible and to name one's interpretations as normative.

The twentieth century brought new, contested spaces regarding the interpretation of Scripture. Modernism birthed fundamentalism, whose proponents argued that their interpretive modes aligned with the tradition in insisting

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José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Linda Martín Alcoff, *Real Knowing: New Versions of Coherence Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996); María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Fernando Segovia, *Decolonizing Bible Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

12 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* 4th Ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

13 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Reissue Edition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

on the inerrancy of Scripture. Despite not recognizing that they themselves were operating from a set of modernist, Enlightenment assumptions, unlike the pre-modern assumptions of the tradition that they asserted, they denied the validity of any effort to read the biblical text using strategies different than their own.[14] In this, proponents of the fundamentalist movement, which grew rapidly during the twentieth century, denied that they themselves observed scripture through a hermeneutical lens shaped by their own culture, history, geography, and social setting. Rather, they asserted that the "plain text," as they understood it was the only valid interpretation. Simple claims that God gives revelation through God's word continue to suffice to underwrite assertions that one has unfiltered access to God's word. William P. Olhausen, arguing for "critical realism" in interpretation, argued that Christian interpretation is authoritative in that it anchors itself in creation.[15] He argued that because of creation, God desires us to know reality without a social or cultural lens; thus, we are able to do so, adding that "humans have the capacity to be addressed by God."[16] Olhausen makes no effort to demonstrate a case of any theologian being able to reproduce a God's-eye view that cannot be assailed or that one's claim to understand God's direct speech may contradict another's claim. In essence, because he is arguing for theological interpretation, he can merely assert it without having to support it with evidence from actual interpretations.

Views like those of Olhausen, in the twenty-first century, have moved into a level of hermeneutical disconnect that causes one to fear that any shared ground for understanding has been abandoned. How does one engage in analysis with someone who asserts that their interpretation is valid because God told them so? There is no common ground for philosophical and hermeneutical analysis as to how meaning is produced.

While fundamentalists have been doubling down and making authoritative, but unsupported, assertions about their ability to perceive and interpret scripture, I was being drawn to other philosophical and theological approaches. To these I now turn.

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14 See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 2nd Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

15 William P. Olhausen, "The Role of Hermeneutics and Philosophy in Theological Interpretation," in *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation*, edited by Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas, pp. 110–130 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 118.

16 Olhausen, "The Role of Hermeneutics," 119.

Postcoloniality

The experience of colonial oppression was the crucible that birthed postcolonial biblical interpretation. In the mid-twentieth century, many colonized countries were finding their political emancipation. This led to new epistemologies that recognized the ways that colonial ways of being and perceiving reality had shaped every sort of discourse—from medical to economic to sociological to the arts. Anti-colonial or anti-imperialist writings emerged, such as those of Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire.[17]

Formerly colonized writers and thinkers began to reflect on the ways that coloniality is an epistemic space in which all forms of communication, what has been termed "discourse," are shaped by colonial assumptions. This discourse can include oral and literary communication as well as signs, symbols, regulations, codification in law and custom, and unspoken codes. The language of postcoloniality emerged as a signifier not just as a temporal category but as an epistemic category in which the assumptions of coloniality are explicitly named, called into question, and interrogated as to their epistemic value and social contribution. The list of authors is long and varied. Some that stand out, however, are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak.[18]

Through these authors I was able to articulate the epistemic disruptions that I had experienced in my own hermeneutical quest. I recognized first-hand the power of coloniality as an episteme to direct the urgent questions and concerns of peripherized or minoritized religious communities. I recognized that there were many assumptions that marked the epistemic space that I had encountered in my life, many of which I internalized, many of which I resisted. As a result of my own work in Jewish Studies, I had recognized the ways that my own field of the academic study of the Bible was filled with colonial assumptions. For instance, doing research in New Testament Studies required me to sift through

17 Albert Memmi, "The Colonizer and the Colonized," in *The Albert Memmi Reader,* edited by Jonathan Judaken and Michael Ledgman (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (1952; reprt. New York: Grove Press, 1967); Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, edited by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, translated by Clayton Eshleman (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

18 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Press, 1978); and *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1993); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson & L. Grossberg, pp. 271–313 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

the large numbers of secondary sources that assumed a Hegelian advancement of religion and culture from the particularistic Jewish world to the open and expansive Western world.[19]

As I read postcolonial thinkers, I became aware of the extent to which I, a bicultural White Western Latina, was also implicated in sustaining and advancing institutional norms that developed out of colonial epistemes. I recognized that I was both colonizer and colonized and that I was a participant in the ongoing effort to sustain colonial ways of being, knowing, and perceiving.

Most important, however, was my recognition of how thoroughly colonized my church experience had been. This had occurred both during my upbringing as a Roman Catholic and during my adult years as a Protestant. As a young Catholic, while my ancient church with its *Barcelonino retablo* reinforced in me a sense of outsider status with regard to the dominant Anglo-European populace, it also aided in the construction of a colonialized present, in which Spanish colonial acts were canonized in the aesthetics of church life through art, architecture, music, dance, and story. Of course, my educators ensured that my vision of the missions would be a romanticized caricature, reinforcing the hierarchical taxonomies of God-ordained Spanish rule over child-like Indians. It was not until my adult years that I learned of the genocide, child-rape, slavery, and torture of the local Indigenous people by the Franciscans and their soldiers and through the missions built by Junípero Serra. Monuments to Serra and to his missions continue to dot the landscape of California. In this way, the land itself is coerced to give reluctant testimony to Serra and his compatriots as they subdued the land and its people.

The Catholic Church was central in this task. In this sense it operated within the episteme of coloniality, doing so through its production of historical knowledge, monuments, shared collective memory, codification of canon law, pedagogy, ritual, liturgy, and aesthetics. To this degree, the church of my youth was a source for the production of colonial ways of being and doing and for the naturalization of coloniality as setting epistemic norms. To be sure, the Catholic Church, especially in certain areas of South America where Liberation Theology was birthed, also challenged those colonial norms during the same decades about which I write. Despite this, however, the Catholic Church played a significant role in the U.S. in reinforcing and underwriting coloniality. In this sense, my church experience was one in which the church's relevance was to reinforce hierarchical social structures that by the late 1960s were beginning to come under question in U.S. society. I walked away.

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19 See Kelley, *Racializing Jesus* (see n. 3).

A few years later, I joined a Pentecostal church in Southern California. At the outset, my experience was marked by spiritual ecstasy and an invigorating sense of community. I saw my church as challenging, rather than upholding the social status quo. It did not take long, however, for me to recognize that leaders in the movement I had joined were making global and authoritative statements about church hierarchy, gender, and social order that produced a different form of coloniality and a new status quo.

I found in Postcolonial Biblical Studies the epistemic space to do the work about which I was passionate. That work was to interrogate the ways that the field of biblical studies itself continued to internalize the logic of coloniality in its practices, assumptions, hermeneutics, and ethics. This was an approach that brought together both my academic, social-historical, and ecclesial commitments.

But I found something lacking in all that I was reading in postcolonial theory. It was rare to find any sustained discussion about ethics. Since I continued to operate in the evangelical world through my career as a Professor of Biblical Studies at an evangelical university, I published an article in 2008 arguing for evangelicals to consider postcolonial thought.[20] In retrospect, such a notion might seem quaintly naïve. But I was not at all naïve about the extent to which U.S. evangelicalism had embraced and advanced an aggressive ethos that privileged White cultural norms marked by a rigid gender and racialized hierarchy. I viewed it as a prophetic call to challenge the coloniality that had, by that time, become pervasive in U.S. evangelicalism and that was relentlessly pressuring my university in a direction with which I could potentially be at odds ethically.

Postcolonial approaches certainly have ethical implications as they address the ethics of knowing, power, and hermeneutical justice. Yet I needed to push the ethical question further. What might the ethics look like of ecclesial communities seeking to operate within a postcolonial episteme? How would it change our own internal social hierarchies? How would we organize ourselves as human beings? Postcolonial scholars were challenging the normative assumptions of both imperiality and coloniality about how power was allocated. How, then, in an ecclesial community, should one think otherwise? I wanted to find a community that was anxious to explore these questions together. Who gets power in the group and on what basis? Who has status and on what basis? These were the ethical questions toward which postcolonial biblical scholarship was

20 "From Evangelical Tolerance to Imperial Prejudice? Teaching Postcolonial Biblical Studies in a Westernized, Confessional Setting," *Christian Scholar's Review* 37 (2008): 447–464.

driving me. It was difficult to find postcolonial scholars who also were taking up these questions, however.

Things were about to change. In 2010, I was invited to participate in a gathering of evangelicals, people engaged with evangelical scholarship, and some working in evangelical institutions, who were asking similar questions. Out of that came a book project, for which I was honored to serve as editor, alongside Jayachitra Lalitha and L. Daniel Hawk.[21] The title of the book, *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, expressed our collective recognition of the importance of articulating a postcolonial ethics and praxis for churches. In this sense, we were keen to establish what in this current volume we are calling the "system relevance" of churches in our academic disciplines. We discussed at length the Enlightenment ideologies that led to a disconnect between academic biblical and theological studies and local churches and hoped to offer a way forward to reestablish the relevance of the academy for the church and vice versa.

In this book project, I finally encountered the kind of intentional efforts to challenge how power is constructed among a group of like-minded colleagues. The book project itself became an experiment in postcolonial thought, ethics, and praxis.

Decoloniality

While postcolonial thought was developing in India, the Caribbean, and Africa, in the American Global South, thinkers and writers were using the term "decoloniality" to address similar questions. In my own journey, as I explored further questions of epistemic assumptions and the importance of social location, I realized that in my embrace of postcolonial theorists, there were few among them from the American Global South.

This quest to examine coloniality from a specifically American (North, Central, and South) social location was not just a matter of intellectual voyeurism. In my search for an ecclesial community that sought to practice an ethic that resisted coloniality, I finally had found spiritual and intellectual dialogue partners. I became close friends with Oscar García-Johnson, a Honduran PhD living in the U.S. who at that time was Associate Dean for the *Centro Latino* at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. and is now Fuller's Professor of

21 Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, L. Daniel Hawk, eds., *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

Theology and Latino/a Studies and Chief of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.[22] Oscar and his wife, Karla, led a Spanish-speaking Bible study in their home in Glendale, CA, which I attended. We spent long hours discussing postcoloniality and decoloniality, and Oscar introduced me, through conversations and his writing, to the literature of decoloniality that had been coming out of South and Central America.[23] I also became friends with Robert Chao Romero, an associate professor of Chicana/o and Central American Studies at UCLA, who has argued that Latina/o church members often have been unaware of the long history of church-sponsored insurgency and resistance to oppression.[24] My new academic *confreres* provided a wonderful space to explore decolonial and postcolonial ethics in the church.

In a forthcoming essay, García-Johnson notes the possibility that the language of post- or decoloniality may be one of mere hair-splitting, but he rejects the charge. Like postcoloniality, decoloniality is described as an epistemic space that recognizes the oppressive nature of the colonial episteme and resists it intellectually and in praxis.[25] Ultimately, however, García-Johnson argues that the discourse of decoloniality, as an epistemic space that has come out of the American Global South, centers ethics and praxis to a greater extent than postcolonial discourse. He argues that the reason is the influence of Liberation Theology in the Americas. This intellectual genealogy gives space, argues

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22 Oscar García-Johnson, *The Mestizo/a Community of the Spirit: A Postmodern Latino/a Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008); García-Johnson and William A. Dyrness, *Theology without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2015); García-Johnson and Milton Acosta, *Conversaciones Teológicas del Sur Global Americano: Violencia, Desplazamiento y Fe* (Eugene, OR: Puertas Abiertas/ Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016); García-Johnson, *Spirit Outside the Gate: Decolonial Pneumatologies of the American Global South* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

23 A small sampling includes Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014); José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations, Studies in Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epstemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

24 Robert Chao Romero, *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020).

25 Oscar García-Johnson, "The Postcolonial/Decolonial Option in Theology," in *Handbook of Emerging Theologies in the Global South*, edited by Mitri Raheb and Mark Lamport (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming), np.

García-Johnson, for ecclesial ethics and praxis to be centered in the discourse of decoloniality.

Liberation Theology, itself, however, has been challenged for its own totalizing discourse with respect to the Bible. There are two critiques. The first is that its proponents often have failed to acknowledge the Bible's complicity in genocide, colonial expansion, and racial injustice. Any reading of liberation, then, must include an accompanying challenge to the obverse interpretation of that reading. To fail to do so is to be complicit in colonial operations that legitimize themselves by also employing this reading.[26]

More recently, liberation theologians are taking seriously this critique and are pointing out the shared commitment by both liberationist and decolonizing approaches to challenge global neo-imperialism, exploitative capitalism, and coloniality.[27] Nevertheless, the postcolonial critique stands. Any liberation theological approach that fails to disrupt totalizing narratives about the Bible as a book of liberation can be charged with furthering the Bible's use in underwriting coloniality and exploitative capitalism.

The second critique of liberation theology is in its supersessionism. Granted, this is a new supersessionism, but it follows a familiar pattern. In Gustavo Gutiérrez's famous phrase, "God's preferential option for the poor," Israel's story in the Hebrew scriptures is now defaced.[28] Not only does it make a totalizing claim about those who are poor, but it also denies to the poor of Israel ownership of their narrative. The Christian poor supersede Israel in their assertion to be claimants of "God's preferential option." Once again, a narrative meant to be liberative makes a totalizing claim that advances Christianity's long history of supersessionist readings of the Bible at the expense of Jewish readings.

With these caveats in place, we can indeed locate liberation theology not as the source of decolonial thinking in the American Global South, to be sure, but as converging with it for shared epistemic goals. Catherine Walsh and Walter

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26 For an example of such a "grand narrative" that underwrites coloniality, in this case, apartheid, see J. A. Loubser, "Apartheid Theology: A 'Contextual' Theology Gone Wrong?" *Journal of Church and State* Vol. 38, No. 2 (1996): 321–337.

27 See, for instance, Roberto Puggioni, "Latin American Liberation Theology and Postcolonial Studies: Overview, Assessment, and Suggestions on 'Liberation' from a Liberationist-Postcolonial Standpoint," *Religion & Theology* 25 (2018): 313–349; Justin Sands, "Transforming the Conversation: What Is Liberation and from What Is It Liberating Us? A Critical Response to 'Transforming Encounters and Critical Reflection: African Thought, Critical Theory, and Liberation Theology in Dialogue," *Religions* Vol. 9, No. 6 (2018): 1–19.

28 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973).

Mignolo argue that this region has been resisting coloniality for 500 years in one form or another and that such a history has allowed for a move "toward concrete proposals and courses of action." Walsh and Mignolo, then, argue that praxis is central to any decolonial episteme. They argue that "the emphatic *no* understood as defensive opposition—a social, cultural, and political reaction *against*—has moved in recent years toward a propositional and insurgent offensive *for* that challenges and constructs."[29] Therefore, for them, decolonial thinking in its contemporary iteration is praxis-focused.

Walsh and Mignolo argue for a praxis that couples resistance, as coloniality and capitalist exploitation continue to ravage land and people, with a (re)existence that enshrines new logics, as well as new economic, political, social, and epistemic models.[30] García-Johnson also finds in decoloniality a space for praxis. For him, it involves drawing from both decolonial thought and liberation theology's place in this canon of resistance and (re)existence to reimagine the church, biblical hermeneutics, and Christian theology from an indigenous and subaltern social location. Nevertheless, he is quick to recognize that postcoloniality is also a space from which such work is being done and that, while both traditions suffer the same potentialities for their own essentializing, dogmatizing, and commodifying, both traditions also offer fertile soil for imagining otherwise with respect to coloniality.[31]

Decolonial Pedagogies

What might this new ecclesial praxis look like? First, it might center the resistance aspects of the biblical account—the narratives from below—while also fully acknowledging the damage done by the elements in the biblical account that advance patriarchalism, biologically-determined hierarchies (e.g., the temple priesthood), and that employ categories of purity and impurity to disenfranchise and relegate to deviant status those whose bodies do not replicate the salient norms of the community.

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29 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (see n. 23), 33.

30 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 33.

31 García-Johnson, "Postcolonial/Decolonial Option" (see n. 25), np. It must be added that there are a number of theologians working to construct a "(re)existence" in Christian theology from a self-referentially postcolonial space as well. See, among many, Robert S. Heaney, *Post-Colonial Theology: Finding God and Each Other Amidst the Hate* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019); Jeorg Rieger, *Globalization and Theology,* Horizons in Theology (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010); Mayra Rivera and Stephen D. Moore, *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

A decolonial biblical hermeneutical praxis, both in the church and the academy, seeks out biblical narratives that subvert hegemonic systems which silence and disenfranchise. Its practitioners recognize that the Bible contains a wealth of narratives, written over centuries and in different geographies, some of which support a hierarchical status quo and some of which subvert it. Given Christianity's historical advancement of empire and imperial social and political norms and structures, it was a natural development for colonial hegemonic systems to carry forward those norms and to advance them as biblical, which, indeed they are. Nevertheless, the Bible often subverts those selfsame norms and structures. On one hand, it affirms patriarchal systems; on the other hand, it subverts them.

Reading the Bible in the classroom and in the church through the lens of decoloniality foregrounds not just theological questions but also social questions about how power is constructed, including social, rhetorical, and discursive power along with economic, military, and political power. It will ask questions as to how particular claims about Israel's God are employed in the text to legitimize power moves and also to destabilize them. The Bible is not a single story.[32] Yet the logic of coloniality has sought to construct it that way. A decolonial pedagogical praxis disrupts, resists, and interrogates such a construction, and it involves naming and acknowledging its discursive force in history.

Such a decolonial hermeneutical praxis, both in the church and the academy, requires reading the texts of scripture along with our history and sociology books. A decolonial hermeneutical praxis resists appropriating Israel's stories, a discursive act that inevitably involves rejecting the Jewish people's reading of those stories in favor of supersessionist readings. Alternately, within the logic of decoloniality, to the extent that Christian readers do appropriate those stories it would be to de-center the Christian narrative and take seriously and respectfully the Jewish people's narratives, especially in light of their own collective memory. A decolonial hermeneutical praxis also laments the interwoven nature of Christian missions, coloniality, and racism. Rituals and liturgies of lament, which cultivate a collective memory of these abuses, then, become a central feature of a Christian decolonial praxis.

Ideologies grow out of shared collective memories, geographies, and histories. A decolonial hermeneutical praxis, in resisting coloniality's ideology of power, hegemony, and White European normativity, cannot avoid including learning the shared, collective memories of the subaltern in the classroom along with

32 See Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg.

our study of the Bible and in the church along with our Sunday School lessons. To teach the Bible in an apparent vacuum of collective memory is to reinforce the purposeful "White Ignorance" discussed by Charles Mills, a discursive move that, in itself consciously works to erase any collective memory of White complicity in colonial or racialized state policies or shared epistemic assumptions in order to center racial exploitation in the political and economic assumptions of "how things should be" in the United States.[33] To overcome "White ignorance," a decolonial praxis, pedagogy, and liturgy will center the narratives and stories coming out of the collective memories of subaltern groups.

A decolonial praxis focuses on indigeneity. Indigeneity offers its own episteme, which nurtures interpretive spaces that deny the logic of conquest as a defining norm for the people of God. In the logic of coloniality and Mills' White Ignorance, there is an uncritical acceptance of the suffering of the vanquished as divine punishment and therefore as justified. A decolonial reading of the conquest narratives includes narratives from Palestinians, Egyptians, and indigenous peoples throughout the Global South, and incorporates liturgies of lament into their readings of such narratives.

A decolonial hermeneutical praxis resists the denial of the existence of urgent questions being asked by the interpreter of scripture and encourages minoritized people to engage in their own knowledge production. Latinx critical literary theorists have introduced the genre of *Testimonio* as a way of encouraging readers and writers to engage texts more fully.[34] I have been employing *Testimonios* and Testimonials in my undergraduate lower-division Bible classes for a few years now. The practice of *Testimonio* disrupts the logic of coloniality as it is nourished in the guild of biblical scholars because it highlights for the students the importance of positionality and collective memory in scriptural readings, and it restores the system relevance of churches in helping to cultivate and educate students in their own cultural group's stories.

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33 Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

34 See Kay Higuera Smith, "Teaching through *Testimonio*: Latinx Biblical Studies Students as Knowledge Producers," in *Race and Biblical Studies: Anti-Racism Pedagogy for the Classroom,* edited by Tat-Siong Benny Liew and Shelly Matthews (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, forthcoming), np.; Vanessa Lina Martínez, Ma. Eugenia Hernandez Sanchez, Judith Flores Carmona, and Yvonne P. El Ashmawi, "*Testimonio* Praxis in Educational Spaces: Lessons from *Mujeres* in the Field," *Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE) Journal* Vol. 11/1 (2017), 38–53; Lindsay Pérez Huber, "Testimonio as LatCrit Methodology in Education," *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*, edited by Sara Delamont and Angela Jones (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2012), 377–390; and Raúl Alberto Mora, "Testimonio," *Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue*, Center for Intercultural Dialogue, accessed at http://centerforinterculturaldialogue.org.

Conclusion

One key aspect of the logic of coloniality is its assumption of the text as a determined object which contains embedded within it material which it is the interpreter's task to discern and uncover through a carefully curated set of methodologies. Scriptural texts have never operated that way in any reading social group. Scriptures have always been a product of a text or set of texts and the people who treasure, sustain, and engage them. A scripture, then, cannot be cognized without a people group who find meaning and identity in its relationship with it. This natural ebb-and-flow between text and people is a fundamental characteristic of scriptures in all cultures.

However, in the episteme of coloniality, the notion of scriptures serves the interests of the colonial elites. In resisting this episteme, both postcolonial and decolonial thinkers are imagining new epistemic norms and working them out in new forms of praxis and pedagogy. Decoloniality, as it developed in the American Global South, has, as part of its intellectual genealogy, a well-established praxis and ethics. Nevertheless, both postcoloniality and decoloniality, as epistemes of resistance and "(re)existence," have advanced crucial gains in the ethics of biblical hermeneutics. By definition, then, the system relevance of churches is also established. It resists the colonial episteme. It de-centers the ideological elites and contributes to a (re)existence of an embodied people. A church assembly exploring decoloniality encourages its members to explore their own histories, stories, hopes, fears, and—most importantly—their own urgent questions, and then to embark, together with each other and with their scriptures, on a journey of meaning-making and identity construction that hears the voices of the subaltern in scripture and also laments with one another when the voices of the imperium are foregrounded. It is always in flux, always in motion, just as social groups are. But its potential for resistance and (re)existence allows us to re-imagine the system relevance of the academy for the church and the church for the academy.

Die Erfahrung, im brasilianischen Kontext zum Neuen Testament zu lehren und zu forschen

Marcelo da Silva Carneiro

Resumo: O Ensino da Teologia do Novo Testamento no Brasil: desafios e possibilidades Este é um texto autobiográfico que tem como foco o trabalho realizado pelo autor como professor de Novo Testamento em São Paulo, Brasil. Na sua apresentação ele faz uma descrição de sua trajetória como docente e teólogo metodista, denominação em que atuou como pastor por alguns anos, para também dedicar-se à docência, de forma exclusiva nos últimos onze anos. Essa descrição procura contextualizar sua situação social e econômica dentro do ambiente brasileiro, que é bastante diverso, com muita desigualdade social. No segundo momento do texto, o autor trata da experiência de ser docente em Novo Testamento no Brasil, esse grande país com muitos desafios, apresentando diversos aspectos da profissão que exerce, em especial a preocupação de ensinar um estudo crítico e que tenha, ao mesmo tempo, relevância para a pastoral cotidiana, pois o curso no qual trabalha tem como principal característica a formação de pastores e pastoras, em especial nesse período da pandemia pelo COVID-19. Aqui é indicada a importância dos estudos sobre Cristianismo Primitivo realizados pelo autor, e que o ajudam a contextualizar adequadamente os textos e o ensino a respeito deles. No terceiro momento, é feita uma reflexão em termos das questões atuais – em tempos de pandemia – que interpelam o estudo do Novo Testamento, em especial que envolvem perguntas éticas e morais, como as questões de gênero, diversidade sexual, e em especial, o problema do racismo em nosso mundo.

Palavras-chave: Novo Testamento – Docência – Teologia Bíblica – Cristianismo Primitivo – COVID-19

Abstract: This is an autobiographic text which focuses on the work done by the author as New Testament teacher in São Paulo, Brazil. In his presentation a description is made of his trajectory as a professor and

Methodist theologian, the denomination in which he served as pastor for a few years, to also devote himself to teaching, and this function exclusively in the last eleven years. This description seeks to contextualize its social and economic situation within the Brazilian environment, which is quite diverse, with a lot of social inequality. In the second moment of the text, the author deals with the experience of being a teacher in the New Testament in Brazil, this great country with many challenges, presenting various aspects of the profession he exercises, in particular the concern of teaching a critical study and that has, at the same time, relevance to daily pastoral care, because the course in which he works has as main characteristic the formation of pastors (male and female), particular in this period of the pandemic by the COVID-19-virus. Here is indicated the importance of studies on Early Christianity carried out by the author, and that helps him to properly contextualize the texts and teaching about them. In the third moment, a reflection is made in terms of current issues – in times of a pandemic – that pose problems for the study of the New Testament, especially involving ethical and moral issues, such as gender issues, sexual diversity, and in particular the problem of racism in our world.

Keywords: New Testament – Teaching – Biblical Theology – Early Christianity – COVID-19

Resumen: Se trata de un texto autobiográfico que se centra en el trabajo realizado por el autor como maestro del Nuevo Testamento en São Paulo, Brasil. En su presentación hace una descripción de su trayectoria como maestro y teólogo metodista, denominación en la que sirvió como pastor durante unos años, para dedicarse también a la enseñanza, y ésta exclusivamente en los últimos once años. Esta descripción busca contextualizar su situación social y económica dentro del ambiente brasileño, que es bastante diversa, con mucha desigualdad social. En el segundo momento del texto, el autor aborda la experiencia de ser maestro en el Nuevo Testamento en Brasil, este gran país con muchos desafíos, presentando diversos aspectos de la profesión que ejerce, en particular la preocupación de enseñar un estudio crítico y que tiene, al mismo tiempo, relevancia para el cuidado pastoral diario, pues el curso en el que trabaja tiene como característica principal la formación de pastores y pastoras, especialmente en este periodo de la pandemia por COVID-19. Aquí se indica la importancia de los estudios sobre el cristianismo primitivo realizados por el autor, y que le ayudan a contextualizar adecuadamente los textos y la enseñanza sobre ellos. En el tercer momento, se hace una reflexión en cuanto a los problemas actuales –

en tiempos de pandemia – que señalan problemas para el estudio del Nuevo Testamento, en particular involucrando cuestiones éticas y morales como las cuestiones de género, la diversidad sexual y, en particular, el problema del racismo en nuestro mundo.

Palabras clave: Nuevo Testamento – Enseñanza – Teología Bíblica – Cristianismo Primitivo – COVID-19

Überblick über meine akademische Laufbahn

Ich bin Marcelo da Silva Carneiro, Jahrgang 1967, seit 2020 ständiger Dozent und Forscher zum Urchristentum im Postgraduiertenprogramm für Religionswissenschaften an der Methodisten-Universität von São Paulo (*Universidade Metodista de São Paulo*, UMESP).[1] Außerdem unterrichte ich seit 2005 als Professor für Neues Testament in verschiedenen Studiengängen an mehreren Universitäten und in Bildungseinrichtungen in den Bundesstaaten Rio de Janeiro und São Paulo und habe außerdem in Fernstudiengängen gelehrt. 1998 schloss ich mein Bachelor-Studium in Theologie am Methodisten-Institut Bennett (*Instituto Metodista Bennett*) als Vorbereitung auf den Seelsorgedienst in der Methodistenkirche in Rio de Janeiro ab.

Meine Ausbildung in Bibelexegese erfolgte nach der historisch-kritischen Methode, kombiniert mit der Befreiungstheologie und immer im Hinblick auf die Realität Lateinamerikas und ihre konkreten Lebensbedingungen. Während meines Grundstudiums (1994–1998) begann ich, Bibelkurse für Laien zu geben, was meine Identifikation mit der Bibel zeigt, obwohl ich damals eher zum Studium des Alten Testaments tendierte. Ab 1998 arbeitete ich in methodistischen Gemeinden und im Seelsorgedienst, ohne meine Mitarbeit in Kursen für Laien zu unterbrechen. In der Kirche habe ich mich immer um eine Annäherung zwischen dem Textstudium und der Glaubenspraxis bemüht, indem ich das Wissen weitergab, das ich im Studium erworben hatte.

Von 2003 bis 2005 machte ich meinen Master in Theologie an der Päpstlichen Katholischen Universität von Rio de Janeiro (*Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro*, PUC-RJ) und beschloss, das Neue Testament zu studieren. Hier begannen meine Forschungsarbeiten zum Urchristentum aus den Quellen des Neuen Testaments mit einem Projekt namens: „Jesus, die Tora und die Nebîim und die vollständige Erfüllung der Gerechtigkeit in Mt 5,17–21: Eine exegetisch-theologische Analyse.“ In diesem Projekt bemühte ich mich, eine Sicht auf Jesus zu erarbeiten, die von seinem jüdischen Kontext und seiner

1 Übersetzung: Monika Ottermann (monika.ottermann@gmail.com).

jüdischen Umgebung ausgeht und eben hier auch die Gemeinde verortet, in der das Matthäusevangelium entstand. Diese Forschung stand im Kontext einer großen Bewegung in Brasilien, sich dem historischen Jesus anzunähern. Die Bücher zu diesem Thema waren bereits in den 1990er Jahren ins Portugiesische übersetzt worden. 2007 brachte die Bundesuniversität von Rio de Janeiro (*Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, UFRJ) den Forscher John Dominic Crossan nach Brasilien, der mehrere Vorträge zu diesem Thema hielt. Bei dieser Gelegenheit hielt ich selbst meinen ersten Vortrag auf einem Kongress, in dem ich einen Teil der Ergebnisse meiner Forschung vorstellte, und zwar die Analyse der Historizität von Mt 5,17–21. Von da an wurde meine Vorstellung vom Evangelium lebendiger und verband sich besser mit meinem ersten Studium.

Anschließend promovierte ich an der UMESP über die Entstehung der synoptischen Evangelien, basierend auf der Theorie des sozialen Gedächtnisses. Dazu zog ich 2012 nach São Paulo, wo ich mich bis 2014 ausschließlich der Forschung widmete. Nach der Promotion wurde ich in São Paulo an der Theologischen Fakultät der Unabhängigen Presbyterianischen Kirche (*Faculdade de Teologia da Igreja Presbiteriana Independente*), einem Zweig der Presbyterianischen Kirche, als Professor für den Graduationskurs in Theologie zugelassen. Seit 2014 gehöre ich zur Forschungsgruppe *Oracula* der UMESP. Im Mai 2020 erreichte ich im Auswahlverfahren für Dozenten der UMESP den ersten Platz und gehöre nun zum Lehrkörper des Postgraduiertenprogramms in Religionswissenschaften und gestalte den Lehrprozess nicht nur durch Handbücher und Bücher, sondern auch auf Basis meiner Forschungen und Wahrnehmungen über das Studium des Neuen Testaments im brasilianischen Kontext, was ich im Folgenden darlegen werde.

Bei der Kommentierung meiner beruflichen Laufbahn habe ich einige wichtige Elemente nicht dargestellt: Ich bin weiß, stamme von Portugiesen und Indigenen ab, bin vom Phänotyp her ein typischer „*Latino*," werde aber hier den Weißen gleichgestellt. Ich bin ein heterosexueller Mann und obwohl meine Familie aus der Unterschicht stammt, kann ich nicht sagen, dass ich einmal in extremer Armut gelebt hätte, geschweige denn, dass ich je im Leben gehungert hätte. Ich hatte immer, wenn auch nicht immer aus eigener Kraft, gute Bildungschancen, denn meine ethnisch-sexuelle Situation ermöglichte mir einen Zugang zu Umgebungen, den schwarze oder indigene Menschen nicht haben.

Das muss berücksichtigt werden, weil mein kontextbezogenes Anliegen beim Studium des Neuen Testaments weniger mit meiner Biografie als vielmehr mit einer soziohistorischen Wahrnehmung der brasilianischen Realität zu tun hat, die ich in meiner akademischen Bildung entwickelt habe. In meinen Studien war die exegetische Forschung am Text immer verbunden mit einem Blick auf die Realität hinter dem Text und ihrem Vergleich mit der mich umgebenden Realität. In Lateinamerika und Brasilien hat uns dieser Blick notwendig zu der Erkenntnis gebracht, dass die treibende Kraft des biblischen Textes Gottes Sorge für die Unterprivilegierten und Armgemachten ist, die das Ergebnis ungerechter Systeme von menschlicher Ausbeutung und Erzeugung starker Ungleichheiten sind.[2] Auch unter Wahrung der nötigen Verhältnismäßigkeit kann man sagen, dass die im Alten Testament beschriebene soziale Realität des Volkes Israel und die im Neuen Testament dargestellte der jüdischen Bauern für unsere heutige Realität viel zu sagen hat, denn die Wirtschaftssysteme haben sich zwar geändert, aber die ungerechten Strukturen sind bestehen geblieben.[3] So kann ich mit aller Überzeugung sagen, dass die konkreten Lebensbedingungen in meinem Land und überhaupt in Lateinamerika meine Lektüre und Untersuchung des Neuen Testaments stark beeinflusst haben. Wenn ich zum Beispiel die Evangelien studiere, kann ich nicht anders, als daran zu denken, dass die Menschenmengen, die Jesus folgten, aus hungernden Menschen bestanden, die vom religiösen und gesellschaftlichen System ignoriert und von bestimmten Gruppen als Sünder bezeichnet wurden (vgl. Mk 2,15–17). Brasilien ging 1988 von einem diktatorischen Regierungssystem zur Demokratie über mit sukzessiven Regierungen der politischen Mitte und wählte 2002 die erste Regierung mit einer dem Volk verpflichteten linken Partei, die einige wichtige Aspekte der sozialen Struktur veränderte. Dies bedeutete jedoch keine wirkliche Situation von Gleichheit und kein Durchbrechen der Systeme der Ungerechtigkeit. So setzten 2016 politische Proteste, von Verbänden verschiedener Wirtschaftssektoren unterstützt, die Präsidentin Dilma Rousseff ab und brachten die Regierung in eine Position der politischen Mitte bis zur Wahl des derzeitigen Präsidenten im Jahr 2018, der die Achse zu einer rechten Regierung verschob, die im Einklang mit den liberalen Regierungsprojekten vor 1988 steht. In diesem Szenario politischer und

2 Entsprechend der Positionen der Befreiungstheologie und ihrer Wahrnehmung der Realität erklärt Alessandro Rodrigues Rocha: „Die BT [Befreiungstheologie] entstand in einem geschichtlichen Kontext der Unterdrückung und Befreiung der Armen und hat als generellen Reflexionshorizont das in Jesus Christus geschehene Heil." Alessandro R. Rocha, "Teologia da Libertação," in *Dicionário Brasileiro de Teologia*, hg. v. Fernando Bortoletto Filho (São Paulo: ASTE, 2008), 962.

3 Dieser befreitungstheologische Ansatz, der die Bibel im Kontext menschengemachter Armut reflektiert, wird in Brasilien seit den 1980er Jahren praktiziert. Auf nationaler Ebene wurde die befreitungstheologische Bibelauslegung in verschiedenen Bereichen und von verschiedenen Gruppen erarbeitet und z.B. in der Zeitschrift *Estudos Biblicos* verbreitet. Die Nr. 1 dieser Zeitschrift widmete sich programmatisch dem Thema „Die Bibel als Erinnerung an die Armen" [*A Bíblia como memória dos pobres*].

sozialer Rückschritte sind die Lebensbedingungen der Menschen in Brasilien schwieriger geworden, insbesondere im Zusammenhang mit der Pandemie, und das verpflichtet uns, den biblischen Text ernsthafter zu lesen und darin die für diese Menschen notwendige Botschaft von Hoffnung und Veränderung zu suchen. Das heißt, es ist mehr denn je nötig, das Neue Testament im Lichte der Realität zu lesen, in der wir leben.

Aber was soll man lesen? Was soll man wissenschaftlich untersuchen? Der erste Impuls ist oft, sich auf kanonische Texte zu konzentrieren, insbesondere auf Bücher wie den Römerbrief, die Apostelgeschichte, das Johannesevangelium oder Matthäusevangelium, die in den Gemeinden viel gelesen werden und sehr beliebt sind. Aber wenn man das täte, bestünde eine große Gefahr, den Fokus auf die Komplexität und Pluralität zu verlieren, die hinter der Produktion der neutestamentlichen Texte stehen. Mehr noch, es würde zu einer übermäßig dogmatischen Sichtweise des biblischen Textes führen und keine breiteren kontextbezogenen Auslegungen zulassen, die im Dialog mit der aktuellen Realität stehen. Aus diesem Grund arbeite ich in meinen Vorlesungen und Untersuchungen mit einem breiteren literarischen Korpus und gehe in einigen Fällen über den geschriebenen Text hinaus, indem ich kulturelles und ikonografisches Material verwende, um das Verständnis des Kontextes des ältesten Christentums zu bereichern. Zusätzlich zu den kanonischen Quellen, die ich in meiner Lehrtätigkeit alle berücksichtige, arbeite ich auch mit jüdischem Material, also sowohl mit dem Alten Testament als auch mit sogenannten pseudepigrafischen, d.h. zwischentestamentlichen Texten und rabbinischem Material, um den gemeinsamen Diskurs von Jesus und den Rabbinern aufzuzeigen sowie Glaubensinhalte, die Christen und anderen Gruppen gemeinsam sind. Ich tue dies auch, um auf die Unterschiede hinzuweisen und die Wahrnehmung der Pluralität außerhalb der Gruppen zu fördern. Jedoch lege ich auch Wert darauf, die Unterschiede und die Pluralität innerhalb von Gruppen aufzuzeigen, sowohl unter den Gemeinden, die Jesus in Judäa nachfolgten, als auch den Christusgläubigen im Mittelmeerraum.[4]

Bezüglich der alttestamentlichen Quellen halte ich es für wichtig, mit der Septuaginta zu arbeiten, da sie die biblische Welt darstellt, wie sie von Juden in der Diaspora und folglich in den urchristlichen Gemeinschaften verwendet wurde. Bei einem Seminar an der UMESP[5] im Februar 2020 argumentierte

4 Hier folge ich Ekkehard W. Stegemann und Wolfgang Stegemann, *História social do protocristianismo. Os primórdios no judaísmo e as comunidades de Cristo no mundo mediterrâneo,* Übersetzung Nélio Schneider (São Leopoldo: Editora Sinodal, 2004).

5 Methodistische Universität von São Paulo: Institution, an der ich als ständiger Professor im Postgraduiertenprogramm für Religionswissenschaften arbeite.

Emanuel Tov, dass Neutestamentler mehr die Septuaginta studieren sollten, was meine Intuition in Bezug auf diesen Ansatz bestätigte.[6] Andererseits ist es angesichts der apokalyptischen Matrix des Neuen Testaments unmöglich, die als apokryph erklärten jüdischen Schriften zu ignorieren, insbesondere die Henoch-Materialien und die Manuskripte vom Toten Meer, die beide wichtige theologische Tendenzen in den Jahrhunderten vor Jesus und den Aposteln bezeugen, die sich sicherlich mit diesen Ideen auseinandergesetzt haben.

Hinsichtlich des Aufblühens des Christentums ab dem 2. Jahrhundert versuche ich, nicht nur die späten kanonischen Texte und ihre theologischen Veränderungen im Vergleich mit den ersten Materialien, sondern auch die verschiedenen Aspekte der Bewegung vorzustellen. Ich behandele Texte mit gnostischen Ansichten und anderen theologischen Richtungen und zitiere und lese Auszüge aus den frühchristlichen Apologeten, die im 2. Jahrhundert das zu entwickeln begannen, was später als christliche Orthodoxie bekannt wurde. Hier nutze ich die Gelegenheit, den Kanonisierungsprozess von Texten, ihre Diskussionen und Komplexität zu betrachten und zu zeigen, dass das Neue Testament nicht plötzlich oder auf übernatürliche Weise entstand, sondern das Ergebnis eines langen Prozesses von Debatten, Bewertungen und Auswahl durch Menschen war, von denen wir annehmen, dass ihre Motivation aufrichtig und authentisch aus ihrem Glauben kam, auch wenn sie sich manchmal geirrt haben mögen.

Aber ist diese ganze Bandbreite in meinem Lebenskontext (sozusagen dem heutigen Sitz im Leben) als Professor im Grundstudium wichtig? Ich meine ja, denn nur durch die Darstellung dieses komplizierten Systems von Ausdrucksweisen und Textproduktion kann ich die Komplexität des Urchristentums aufzeigen und zu lehren wagen, dass es sich um mehrere Christentümer handelte und nicht um eine einzige und einheitliche Bewegung. Das hilft der Gruppe der Studierenden, die christliche konfessionelle Pluralität besser zu verstehen und die Vorstellung zu überwinden, dass es eine richtige und eine falsche Seite gibt, und so auf die Möglichkeit eines ökumenischen Dialogs zwischen den verschiedenen Strömungen hinweisen. Gleichzeitig ist es möglich, die Grenzen dieses Dialogs im ethischen Bereich anhand der Ergebnisse aufzuzeigen, die jede Gruppe aus ihrer voruniversitären Erfahrung im Bibelstudium und bibelmissionarischer Praxis mitbringt. Gleiches gilt für das Postgraduiertenstudium, auch wenn dort die pastoral-missionarische Dimension des Bibelstudiums weniger stark betont wird.

6 *A transmissão do texto bíblico*. Vertiefungskurs von Emanuel Tov und Edson Faria Francisco am 17.–19.2.2020 an der UMESP.

In dieser Beziehung möchte ich meine Arbeit allgemeiner analysieren, um zu erkennen, welche Perspektive mich in meinen Vorlesungen bestimmt. Wie oben dargelegt, erfolgte meine Ausbildung zum Interpretieren und Lehren des biblischen Textes nach der historisch-kritischen Methode[7], aber in den letzten zwanzig Jahren habe ich begonnen, auch andere Ansätze und Perspektiven einzubeziehen. Die hermeneutische Wende, die im 20. Jahrhundert in Europa und den Vereinigten Staaten stattfand, wurde in Brasilien erst in jüngerer Zeit aufgenommen und zeigte neue Wege der Interpretation und Analyse auf wie Narratologie, semidiskursive Analyse, Analyse anhand der materiellen und ikonografischen Kultur usw.[8] Darüber hinaus habe ich in meiner Doktorarbeit die biblische und außerbiblische Intertextualität stärker betont, um auf die diskursive und textuelle Zirkularität im Umfeld des Urchristentums hinzuweisen.[9] Dadurch übernahm ich für die Redaktionskritik eine andere Perspektive mit weniger Betonung einer textlichen Abhängigkeit und mehr Analyse der Texte ausgehend von der mündlichen Überlieferung und der Interdiskursivität.[10] Darüber hinaus aber bemühe ich mich auch, die Methode nicht nur technisch in eindimensionaler Perspektive auf den auszulegenden Text, sondern auch in Verbindung mit einer historisch-sozialen, phänomenologischen und politischen Analyse anzuwenden.

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7 Ich benutze hier den Singular, beziehe mich aber auf die verschiedenen mit dieser Methode verbundenen Vorgänge, wie es Wegner vorschlägt: Uwe Wegner, *Exegese do Novo Testamento. Manual de Metodologia*, 7th ed. (São Leopoldo: Editora Sinodal, Faculdades EST, 2012), 30.

8 Die semidiskursive Analyse hat ihren Ursprung in strukturalistischen und semiotischen Methoden des Lesens von Texten, die den Text in seiner eigenen Struktur analysieren. Mit den Worten von Julio Zabatiero: „Ich verwende die greimasische semiotische Theorie in einer ihrer aktuellsten Formulierungen, ganz anders als beispielsweise in den ursprünglichen Formulierungen in den 1970er Jahren. Die hier angewandte greimasische Semiotik ist poststrukturalistischer Natur, sie versteht Bedeutung nicht nur als mentales Produkt, sondern als emotionales und körperliches Produkt; schätzt den sozialen und konfliktiven Charakter der Sinnproduktion ebenso wie das Spannungs- und Leidenschaftsmoment in der Sinnformulierung." Julio P. T. Zabatiero, *Manual de Exegese*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Garimpo Editorial 2019), 24; dieser Vorschlag wird auch vertreten von Anderson de Oliveira Lima, *Introdução à exegese. Um guia contemporâneo para a interpretação de textos bíblicos* (São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2012); Julio P. T. Zabatiero und João Leonel, *Bíblia, literatura e linguagem* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2011).

9 Ich habe die Theorie der Intertextualität übernommen. Vgl. Tiphaine Samoyault, *A intertextualidade* (São Paulo: Aderaldo & Rothschild, 2008).

10 Vgl. meinen Artikel: „Nova abordagem para a crítica da redação: a memória social como referência em lugar da dependência textual," in: *Estudos Teológicos* 59,2, Jul/Dez 2019, 340–355.

Zur Methodik kontextueller Exegese in der brasilianischen Befreiungstheologie

In der historischen Perspektive versuche ich, die Prozesse der Weitergabe von mündlichen Überlieferungen und Erinnerungen an Jesus und die Apostel zu verstehen und zu lehren. Damit nähere ich mich der historisch-sozialen Wirklichkeit an, da ich mündliche Überlieferungen nicht als etwas Starres und Dogmatisches, sondern als etwas Lebendiges und Dynamisches vorstelle, das in einem komplexeren Prozess funktioniert, in dem Anbetung, ekstatische Erfahrungen, Konflikte mit anderen Gruppen und das spezielle Weltbild der Nachfolgerinnen und Nachfolger Jesu organisch strukturiert sind. Also ein gesellschaftlicher Prozess innerhalb eines Universums, das aus den messianischen Glaubensüberzeugungen und Erwartungen dieser Gemeinden besteht. Schließlich verbinde ich diese Wahrnehmung mit der politischen Dimension, die insbesondere in der Antike nicht von der religiösen und wirtschaftlichen Dimension getrennt war. Sowohl in der jüdischen als auch in der römischen Welt bestand eine direkte Verbindung zwischen ihnen, insbesondere seit Kaiser Caligula (37–41), der schon zu Lebzeiten einen Kult zu seinen Ehren forderte.[11] Dieser so heftig diskutierte Kontext der römischen Herrschaft über das Volk in Palästina und der Erfahrungen der Diaspora-Juden im Römischen Reich ist von grundlegender Bedeutung, um die „verborgenen“ Botschaften (hidden transcripts, wie Richard Horsley es ausdrückt)[12] zu verstehen, insbesondere als Instrument, um eine dekolonisierende Lesart des biblischen Textes wiederzugewinnen. Dadurch werden die tiefergehenden Botschaften des Textes hervorgehoben und können von den Studierenden wertgeschätzt werden, wodurch der biblische Text sich noch mehr der aktuellen Realität annähert.

Es ist wichtig zu sagen, dass ich versuche, keine konfessionell geprägten Interpretationen in meine Lehre des Neuen Testaments einzubeziehen, weder eine methodistische, presbyterianische noch eine sonstige. Wenn es notwendig ist, einen damit verbundenen Aspekt anzusprechen – zum Beispiel das Verständnis der Gnade von der protestantischen Reformation her –, lege ich die Quelle der Interpretation offen, damit die Studierenden die Relevanz und Vernünftig-

11 Vgl. Helmut Koester, *Introdução ao Novo Testamento. vol. 1. História, cultura e religião do período helenístico*, Übersetzung Euclides Luis Calloni (São Paulo: Paulus, 2005), 372.

12 Vgl. Horsley, Richard (Hg.), *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistence. Applying the Work of James C. Scott in Jesus and Paul,* Semeia 84 (Leiden, Boston, MA: Brill, 2004). Das Konzept wurde in der Analyse von Zeugnissen us-amerikanischer Sklavinnen und Sklaven durch den Politikwissenschaftler James Scott entdeckt. Vgl. James C. Scott, *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistence.* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1990).

keit der konfessionellen Hermeneutik selbst analysieren können. Auf diese Weise versuche ich, in meinem theoretischen und methodischen Ansatz frei zu bleiben und mich an keine konkrete Schule zu binden, denn meiner Ansicht nach haben die verschiedenen Schulen – die europäische, nordamerikanische, lateinamerikanische usw. – alle etwas, das ein positiver Beitrag sein kann oder Kritik verdient. Auf diese Weise ermögliche ich mir und den Studierenden, einschließlich derer, deren Arbeiten ich betreue, unseren eigenen Weg zu suchen. Ich muss jedoch zugeben, dass linksgerichtete, dekolonisierende und systemkritische Theorien immer mehr als die doktrinären Dogmen im Horizont meiner Analyse stehen.

Angesichts all dessen, was ich hier dargestellt habe, ist es wohl offenkundig, dass ich in meinen akademischen Forschungsansätzen und -ideen als Parameter die sozialen Bedingungen der religiösen Phänomene des Urchristentums sowie deren Textproduktion berücksichtigte. Ich beziehe mich hier sowohl auf den marxistischen Sinn des Begriffs, in dem die Kräfte dargestellt werden, die in der Gesellschaft in Opposition und Konflikt stehen, als auch auf die kollektiven Mechanismen und Prozesse der Erzeugung von Erinnerung und Traditionen, die von Anfang an die Fundamente des Glaubens und der Geschichte der christlichen Gemeinden gewesen sind. Ich gehe von der Hypothese aus, dass das Urchristentum eine plurale Erfahrung war, in einem gewissen Maße fragmentiert, und in der Gesellschaftsstruktur seiner Zeit nicht zu den hegemonisch führenden Eliten gehörte, sondern im Gegenteil: zu marginalsierten Gruppen. Das führt mich zu dem Verständnis, dass gerade seine marginale Situation ihm eine Handlungsfreiheit gab, die die Menschen und Gruppen, die in die hegemonialen Strukturen eingebunden waren, nicht hatten, was seine rasche Verbreitung und Entwicklung mitten im Römischen Reich begünstigte. Andererseits, was die heutige Situation und Zeit der Textinterpretation betrifft, bestimmt mich die Relevanz, die ihr Studium für das heutige Verständnis des Christentums als Ergebnis dieses langen Prozesses hat. Ich bin auch sehr daran interessiert, Wege aufzuzeigen, wie ein bestimmter Text für die heutige christliche Ethik und das christliche Leben effektiv interpretiert werden kann, für eine Seelsorge, die für unsere Zeit und in den tatsächlichen Lebenskontexten relevant ist und für die die Botschaft des Evangeliums – die Gute Nachricht –, die im Zentrum kirchlicher und gemeindlicher Praxis steht. Kurz, ich versuche, den jeweiligen Text zu untersuchen, indem ich immer zugleich an damals und an heute denke – an den Moment, in dem er entstand und an den Moment, in dem er gelesen wird.

Theologie oder Religionswissenschaft?

An diesem Punkt stellt sich folgende Frage: Gelten meine Forschung und Lehre eher der theologischen oder der religionswissenschaftlichen Erforschung des Urchristentums? Ich meine, dass es in der Realität fast unmöglich ist, einen dieser Aspekte absolut zu setzen. Sie müssen im Dialog miteinander stehen, besonders aufgrund der Tatsache, dass ich in verschiedenen Kursen unterrichte, in denen die Anforderungen unterschiedlich sind: Im Grundstudium liegt der Schwerpunkt auf der Theologie, daher muss das Studium der theologischen Botschaft der Texte im Vordergrund stehen. Die Theologie kann jedoch nur ausgehend von kontextuellen und historischen Aspekten aufgezeigt werden, die mit der religionswissenschaftlichen Untersuchung des Urchristentums verbunden sind. Im Postgraduiertenkurs dagegen habe ich es mit dem Ansatz der Religionswissenschaft zu tun, daher ist Theologie ein Aspekt der Forschung, aber nicht ihr Schwerpunkt. Mit dieser doppelten Erfahrung kann ich sagen, dass ich versuche, die Ansätze und Bereiche interdisziplinär zu lesen und dabei je nach dem Kurs, in dem ich unterrichte, den einen oder den anderen Aspekt stärker zu betonen. Meiner Ansicht nach lehren viele Kollegen isoliert das eine Gebiet oder das andere, aber meine Ausbildung, meine Erfahrung und mein Handlungsfeld erlauben mir, diese Annäherung auf organische Weise zu realisieren, ohne einen Konflikt zwischen ihnen zu verursachen.

Hier ein Beispiel für diesen Prozess: Ich habe kürzlich mit den Studierenden des Theologie-Grundstudiums zum Thema Sexualität im Neuen Testament gearbeitet. Bevor ich pastorale Hinweise gab, damit sie in den örtlichen Gemeinden an diesem Thema arbeiten konnten, versuchte ich, geschichtlich-gesellschaftliche Aspekte der Sexualität aus griechisch-römischen und jüdischen Quellen zu geben.[13] Ich habe auf die Widersprüche in den Texten bezüglich des Themas hingewiesen und darauf, dass das Neue Testament dem Thema keine besondere Aufmerksamkeit schenkt, sondern immer etwas am Rande der Diskussionen seiner Zeit bleibt. Ich habe mit den Studierenden anhand des Indizienparadigmas[14] gearbeitet und Aspekte aufgezeigt, wie die Realität von gleichgeschlechtlichen Ehen und Beziehungen im damaligen Kontext ausgesehen haben muss. Am Ende habe ich einige Überlegungen angestellt, wie dieses Thema heute in den örtlichen Gemeinden angegangen werden kann,

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13 Vgl. Paul J. Samply (Hg.), *Paulo no mundo greco-romano. Um compêndio,* Übersetzung José Raimundo Vidigal (São Paulo: Paulus, 2008).

14 Hier habe ich mit dem Ansatz von Ginsburg gearbeitet: Carlo Ginsburg, *O fio e os rastros. Verdadeiro, falso, fictício,* Übersetzung Rosa Freire D'Aguiar (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2007).

indem die Richtlinien der Konfession beachtet werden, aber die Art und Weise ernst genommen wird, wie das Thema im Neuen Testament behandelt wird.

Wenn ich andererseits bestimmte Themen des Neuen Testaments mit ihnen studiere, lege ich größeren Wert auf die Theologie der Texte und unterscheide die Art und Weise, wie Paulus und die Evangelien das Thema behandeln. Ein gutes Beispiel ist das Studium des Römerbriefes, dessen Kapitel 5 bis 8 eine stark theologische Konnotation haben, die aus der Perspektive der Soteriologie und ihres Unterthemas der Hamartiologie analysiert werden sollten. Ich habe an diesen Texten jedoch aus der Perspektive der theologischen Anthropologie gearbeitet und sie mit dem Studium der Psychologie der Menschen im ersten Jahrhundert verbunden.[15] So ist klar, dass der Schwerpunkt mehr auf dem theologischen Ansatz liegt als auf den Religionswissenschaften. Bei der Behandlung desselben Themas in den Evangelien ist jedoch der Unterschied in den Ansätzen der einzelnen Autoren bemerkbar, die an mehreren Stellen zeigen, wie sehr die Praxis den Heilsprozess beeinflusst, nicht nur der Glaube.[16]

In allen Aspekten suche ich, meine Darstellung anhand renommierter Autor*innen zu untermauern, wobei ich einen übermäßig konservativen Ansatz vermeide, aber mit Ideen und Theorien aus verschiedenen Perspektiven im Dialog stehe. Bei Paulus habe ich intensiv mit den Autoren der Neuen Perspektive zu Paulus[17] gearbeitet, während ich bei den Evangelien mit Forschern arbeite, die sich Jesus aus einer historisch-theologischen Perspektive[18] und den Evangelien aus einer offeneren Perspektive[19] annähern. So ist meiner Meinung

15 Hier folge ich Klaus Berger, *Psicologia histórica do Novo Testamento* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2011).

16 Wie man in Mat 5–7 sieht, der sogenannten Bergpredigt, oder auch im Jakobusbrief, besonders in 2,14–26.

17 Vgl. Ed Parish Sanders, *Paulo, a lei o povo judeu*, Übersetzung José Raimundo Vidigal (São Paulo: Paulus, 2009); James D. G. Dunn, *A nova perspectiva sobre Paulo*, Übersetzung Monika Ottermann (Santo André: Academia Cristã, São Paulo: Paulus, 2011); Carlos Gil Arbiol, *Paulo na origem do Cristianismo,* Übersetzung Paulo F. Valério (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2018); Telmo José Amaral de Figueiredo und Fabrizio Zandonadi Catenassi (Hg.), *Paulo, contextos e leituras* (São Paulo: ABIB, Paulinas, 2018); Leif Vaage, et al., "As vozes originárias de Paulo," *RIBLA – Revista de Interpretação Bíblica Latino-Americana* 62/1 (2009).

18 Vgl. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus de Nazaré. O que ele queria? Quem ele era?,* Übersetzung Enio Paulo Giachini (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2015); Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus de Nazaré. Mensagem e História*, Übersetzung Carlos Almeida Pereira (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2000); Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus de Nazaré*, Übersetzung José dos Santos Gonçalves und Nélio Schneider (São Paulo: Editora Teológica, 2005).

19 Vgl. Warren Carter, *O Evangelho de São Mateus. Comentário sociopolítico e religioso a partir das margens*, Übersetzung Walter Lisboa (São Paulo: Paulus, 2002); Ched Myers, *O Evangelho de São Marcos* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1992); Johan Konings, *Evangelho segundo*

nach die Methode, die die beiden Ansätze annähert, bereichernder und trägt zu einem besseren Verständnis der Texte bei, als wenn man sich nur auf eine Richtung konzentriert. Außerdem betonen die für unsere Wissenschaftsbereiche zuständigen staatlichen Aufsichtsbehörden die Bedeutung einer organischen und interdisziplinären Sicht[20].

Wenn wir von diesem pluralistischeren und interdisziplinäreren Ansatz ausgehen, können wir im Dialog mit der Realität sehen, wie wichtig die neutestamentliche Forschung im Seelsorgekontext und in der Diskussion theologischer Themen ist, die kontinuierlich debattiert und verbreitet werden müssen. Ebenso hat das Neue Testament, wenn es ernsthaft studiert wird, viel zu sagen für unsere heutige Realität. Diese Aktualität, die die Forschung in den Texten aufzuzeigen hilft, kann auch bei der Lösung oder beim Entdecken von Hinweisen zur Beantwortung heutiger theologischer und sozialer Fragen beitragen. Mit anderen Worten, sie kann dafür sorgen, dass das Studium des Neuen Testaments für die heutige Welt relevant ist und sich nicht nur in einer Reihe von Studien biblischer Texte erschöpft, die über die Zeit nachdenken, in der sie geschrieben wurden, sondern eine Brücke schlägt zu relevanten pastoralen Themen in unserer Welt. Dadurch haben die Studierenden eine bessere Wahrnehmung des Textes und seiner Botschaft.

Ich möchte ein Beispiel vorstellen, das diese Frage gut aufzeigt: Die Gruppe, in der ich im Grundstudium lehre, kommt hauptsächlich aus traditionellen calvinistischen Kirchen, die mit der stark auf das gesprochene Wort und das Zuhören konzentrierte Liturgie auf sehr organisierte Weise umgehen, in Gottesdiensten, in denen weder geklatscht wird noch ekstatische Manifestationen geschehen. Es gibt jedoch in dieser Gruppe Studierende, die aus Pfingstkirchen kommen, wo die Gottesdienste pneumatische Manifestationen, körperliche Ausdrucksformen und Klatschen zulassen. Da es sich um einen Theologiekurs handelt, wird von mir erwartet, dass ich lehre, dass diese Manifestationen unangemessen sind und keine biblische Grundlage haben. Wenn ich jedoch

João. Amor e fidelidade (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, São Leopoldo: Editora Sinodal, 2000); Elliott C Maloney, *Mensagem urgente de Jesus para hoje. O Reino de Deus no Evangelho de Marcos*, Übersetzung Barbara Theoto Lambert (São Paulo: Editora Paulinas, 2008); Paulo Tarso de Oliveira Lockmann, *Jesus, o Messias Profeta (Lucas 9.51–19.48)* (São Paulo: Editeo, 2011).

20 Für die Bereiche der Religionswissenschaften und Theologie sind folgenden Regulierungsbehörden der Bundesregierung verantwortlich: CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico; Nationalrat der Wissenschaftlichen und Technologischen Entwicklung) und CAPES (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, Koordination der Vervollkommnung von Personal des Höheren Niveaus).

zur Kirche in Korinth unterrichte, präsentiere ich der Gruppe eine andere Auffassung, nämlich, dass diese Gemeinde viel pneumatische Erfahrung hatte und einer Pfingstgemeinde näherstehen würde als einer calvinistischen Kirche.[21]

Aber mehr noch: Ich weise darauf hin, dass dies nicht nur in Korinth geschah, da Paulus selbst jemand war, der in seinem geistlichen Leben Erfahrungen dieser Art gemacht hat. Er hielt sie lediglich nicht für einen Überlegenheitsfaktor. Trotzdem schreibt der Apostel in 2 Kor 12 der Gemeinde mit Stolz, eine Entrückung in den Himmel erlebt zu haben, was in diesem Zusammenhang die Bestätigung seiner apostolischen Autorität bedeutete.[22] Angesichts dieser Situation zeige ich den Studierenden, dass Paulus nicht versucht hat, irgendeine Manifestation in der Gemeinde zu verbieten, sondern ihre Praxis zu ordnen, um zu verhindern, dass der Gottesdienst zu einer konfusen und sinnentleerten Veranstaltung wird. Wir haben jedoch gelernt, dass immer, wenn ein Text eine bestimmte Praxis empfiehlt, es sehr wahrscheinlich ist, dass die dahinterstehende Realität eher gegenteilig war. In diesem Fall deutet alles darauf hin, dass die Gemeinde von Korinth bereits Probleme bei der Ordnung des Gottesdienstes hatte, weil Übertreibungen an der Tagesordnung waren. Was bedeutet das für unsere Zeit und Realität? Im Allgemeinen signalisiert es, dass die verschiedenen liturgischen und kulturellen Formen, die wir heute kennen, nicht danach gemessen werden sollten, was richtig oder falsch ist, sondern was angemessen ist oder nicht. Alle sind sinnvoll, solange sie dem Grundsatz entsprechen, ein positives Ergebnis zu erbringen (1 Kor 12,7). Daher zeige ich, dass es das Fundament des 13. Kapitels des Ersten Korintherbriefes ist, den wichtigsten Faktor im Leben der Gemeinden zu definieren, nämlich die *agápe*. Wenn man die Situation so betrachtet, werden die Unterschiede zwischen den verschiedenen Gruppen minimiert und die Möglichkeit eines versöhnlichen und ökumenischen Dialogs wird stärker und konkreter.

Das war nur ein Beispiel unter vielen, denn es gibt verschiedene Perspektiven, unter denen man solche Fragen betrachten kann. Alle zeigen, dass die neutestamentliche Forschung für unsere Zeit- und Lebenssituation systemrelevant sein

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21 Ich arbeite hier mit Bezug auf: T. Desmond Alexander, Brain S. Rosner, *Novo Dicionário de Teologia Bíblica*, Übersetzung William Lane (São Paulo: Edições Vida Nova, 2009); Guy Bonneau, *Profetismo e Instituição no Cristianismo Primitivo*, Übersetzung Bertilo Brod (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2003); Lothar Coenen und Colin Brown (Hg.), *Dicionário Internacional de Teologia do Novo Testamento*, 2. Auflage (Übersetzung Gordon Chown (São Paulo: Vida Nova, 2000); Paulo Augusto de Souza Nogueira, *Experiência religiosa e crítica social no cristianismo primitivo* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2003).

22 Laut Forschern, wie Jonas Machado, meinte Paulus mit diesem Erlebnis sich selbst: Jonas Machado, *O misticismo apocalíptico do apóstolo Paulo. Um novo olhar nas Cartas aos Coríntios na perspectiva da experiência religiosa* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2009).

kann und sein sollte. Auch wenn es theologische Fächer mit konkreteren Bezügen zur Reflexion der Theologie in der heutigen Welt gibt, wie beispielsweise die Praktische Theologie (oder Pastoraltheologie), vertrete ich, dass das Studium des Neuen Testaments nicht kalt und distanziert geschehen darf, sondern auf eine Weise, die bezüglich der anderen Fächer kooperativ und integriert ist. Der methodische Fokus ist ein anderer, aber das größere Ziel kann mit dem Ganzen harmonieren und darauf abzielen, eine gerechtere und geschwisterlichere Gesellschaft aufzubauen, die mit den Zyklen von Ungleichheit und Ungerechtigkeit bricht.

Herausforderungen der heutigen Welt für die neutestamentliche Forschung

Nach allem, was ich in diesen Überlegungen berücksichtigt habe, ist die grundlegende Frage: Wenn die neutestamentliche Forschung diese Möglichkeit des Dialogs mit der aktuellen Realität hat, gibt es dann noch andere Herausforderungen für sie? Zunächst muss analysiert werden, wie die Bibel gelesen wird, insbesondere das Neue Testament. Eine dogmatische und fundamentalistische Auslegung wird dazu neigen, der gegenwärtigen Realität einige vermeintlich eindeutige Positionen des biblischen Textes aufzuzwingen, ohne einen Dialog zwischen den beiden Seiten zu führen. Ohne einen solchen Dialog werden die heutigen Lebensbedingungen nicht berücksichtigt, da sie sich den in den Heiligen Schriften a priori festgelegten Forderungen unterwerfen müssen. Interessanterweise werden diese wörtlichen Interpretationen nur angewendet, wenn es um moralische Fragen der Einzelnen geht, insbesondere um sexuelle Themen und Geschlechterrollen. Wenn es sich jedoch um Texte handelt, die sich auf die Güterverteilung beziehen oder Hilfe für den Nächsten und Entsprechendes fordern, wie in Mt 25, werden die Texte spiritualisiert oder ignoriert. Die kontextuelle Interpretation, die auf den konkreten Lebensbedingungen basiert, geht einen anderen Weg. Das beginnt schon mit folgender Überlegung: Die Moral ist relativ in der Geschichte, denn sie hat mit gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Bedingungen zu tun. Die Ethik dagegen ist universell, da ihre Werte auf jede Gesellschaft angewendet werden können. Das ist der geeignete Ausgangspunkt für die Arbeit mit dem Neuen Testament: Die heutige Welt und den Text ausgehend von der Ethik und nicht von der Moral zu betrachten. Das ergibt einen großen Unterschied in der Analyse und Lösung von Situationen.

In Anbetracht dieser Perspektive können wir davon ausgehen, dass bestimmte Themen dringend und notwendig sind, aber die Herausforderung, sie anzugehen, noch nicht ausreichend bewältigt wurde, da sie noch nicht zur täglichen Agenda der pastoralen Arbeit in Gemeinden geworden sind. Es sind Themen, die immer noch auf die Akademie beschränkt sind oder in Kirchen nur zögernd behandelt werden oder auch neuere Themen, die noch nicht ausreichend reflektiert wurden, um ihre Implikationen und Antworten aus dem Neuen Testament theologisch und seelsorgerisch zu erläutern.

Als aktuelles und absolut unvermeidliches Thema haben wir die Situation, die durch das neue Coronavirus und die Pandemiekrise verursacht wird. Die Bewältigung dieser Situation, in der wir immer noch leben (ich schreibe im August 2021), muss angesichts der verschiedenen bestehenden ethischen und menschlichen Dilemmas mit einer verantwortungsvollen Interpretation des Neuen Testaments verbunden sein. Einerseits kann der biblische Text nicht als ein magischer Schlüssel verwendet werden, um der Situation zu begegnen, indem man gestützt auf Evangelien- oder Paulustexte sagt, dass das Böse uns nicht treffen wird, weil Jesus bei uns ist. Dieser extrem fundamentalistische Gedanke ist nicht nur unverantwortlich, sondern grenzt in einigen Fällen an ein Verbrechen. Eine ernsthafte und verantwortungsvolle Untersuchung des Neuen Testaments wird sich mit dem Thema ausgehend von den Grundsätzen der Solidarität, der kollektiven Fürsorge und der Suche nach dem Gemeinwohl befassen. Dazu ist es notwendig, die Texte unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Kollektivität, der Körperlichkeit, der Nächstenliebe und der Hingabe seiner selbst zum Wohle von anderen zu lesen – alles Themen, die in den Texten des Neuen Testaments gut vertreten sind.

Es ist auch an der Zeit, die neuen ethischen Fragen wahrzunehmen, die die Gesellschaft an Religion und Kirche stellt. In einer Welt, in der sich die gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen sehr schnell ändern, in der alte und traditionelle Modelle angesichts neuer Lebensanforderungen infrage gestellt werden, sind die üblichen Antworten aus dem Neuen Testament nicht mehr angemessen und müssen überprüft und angepasst werden.

Wir können mit einem der komplexesten und kontroversesten Themen in verschiedenen Bereichen beginnen: mit dem Ort der Homoaffektivität und den verschiedenen Möglichkeiten der heute bestehenden sexuellen Orientierung und Vielfalt der Geschlechter. Sowohl die biologischen als auch die psychologischen Wissenschaften haben gezeigt, dass es in beiden Fragen eine Vielzahl von Möglichkeiten gibt, die über die Grundwahrnehmung von maskulin/feminin und eine heteronormative Konstruktion der menschlichen Beziehungen hinausgehen. Wir haben hier nicht genug Raum, um das Thema in seiner Gesamtheit und Komplexität zu behandeln, aber es gibt zu denken, dass Menschen in aller Welt den Mut hatten zu zeigen, dass sie nicht in das Schema passen, das gesellschaftlich von einer konservativen Perspektive bestimmt wird. Und sie tun das nicht, weil sie denken, sie sollten es nicht, oder weil sie es nicht wollen, sondern weil es nicht ihre Natur ist. Sie sind mit Schwierigkeiten, Gewalt und Ausgrenzung konfrontiert, viele stehen sogar am Rande der Gesellschaft und prostituieren sich, weil sie nicht im Einklang mit dem traditionellen gesellschaftlichen Projekt stehen. Was können nun die Bibel und das Neue Testament diesen Menschen in ihrem komplexen Lebensmoment sagen, damit sie sich selbst gegenüber authentisch sind und nicht zulassen, dass gesellschaftliche Konventionen ihr wahres „Ich“ unterdrücken? Die Antwort liegt nicht in der einfachen Lösung des Wortes „Sünde,“ sondern in der Komplexität der Frage. Man muss im Neuen Testament die Ideen suchen, die die göttliche Großherzigkeit und Barmherzigkeit zeigen und auch, dass Sünde viel mehr mit der Ethik des ausnutzenden Missbrauchs eines anderen Menschen zu tun hat als mit dem Erleben der Sexualität in ihrer Fülle.[23] Den Fokus der Antwort und der Forschung zu ändern ist eine Form, im Text einen Sinn zur Beantwortung dieser Frage heute zu finden.

Selbst die weniger komplexe Frage der Geschlechterrolle ist in einigen Gruppen gleichwohl umstritten. Die Frau in der Antike und heute zu betrachten bedeutet, zwei sehr unterschiedliche Situationen zu betrachten. Es gibt jedoch immer noch einen verbohrten Ansatz, der aus dem biblischen Text die Idee konstruiert, dass die Frau eine Rolle als Dienerin des Mannes hat und daher keine Führungsposition oder Bedeutung in gesellschaftlichen Gruppen, besonders in religiösen, haben darf. Erneut haben die biologischen und sozialen Wissenschaften gezeigt, wie künstlich die Aufteilung gesellschaftlicher Rollen auf der Grundlage des biologischen Geschlechts ist, da es sich um eine gesellschaftliche Konstruktion handelt, denn, wie Simone de Beauvoir sagte: Man ist nicht als Frau geboren, man wird es (*On ne naît pas femme: on le devient*).[24]

Wichtig erscheint es, nicht nur zu zeigen, dass Frauen herausragende und vorgeordnete Plätze in Kirche und Gesellschaft[25] hatten und haben müssen, sondern auch über eine neue Männlichkeit nachzudenken, inklusive von den Rekonstruktionen der Männlichkeit Jesu.[26] Texte, die die weibliche Führungsrolle

23 Vgl. J. Harold Ellens, *Sexo na Bíblia. Novas Considerações,* Übersetzung Eliel F. Vieira (São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2011).

24 Simone de Beauvoir, *O segundo sexo*, Übersetzung Sérgio Milliet (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, ^{2}2009).

25 Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Exegese Feminista. Resultados de pesquisas bíblicas a partir da perspectiva de mulheres*, Übersetzung Monika Ottermann (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, CEBI, São Paulo: ASTE, 2008).

26 Vgl. Francisco Reyes Archila, “Ao clarear da manhã. Uma leitura do Evangelho de Marcos na perspectiva da masculinidade,” in *RIBLA – Revista de Interpretação Bíblica*

eindeutig verbieten oder hemmen, müssen von Fall zu Fall problematisiert und analysiert werden, nicht als universelle Verordnungen, sondern als spezifische Bestimmungen, deren Motivation nicht immer rekonstruierbar ist. Schließlich werden die Präsenz und Führung von Frauen in vielen Momenten des Neuen Testaments hervorgehoben.[27] Die Abwesenheit von Frauen in Führungspositionen aus biblischen Texten zu untermauern, bedeutet, eine extremistische Sichtweise zu unterstützen, die nicht mit der gegenwärtigen Welt in Dialog steht und die Kirche für die Gesellschaft irrelevant macht und auch das Studium des Neuen Testamentes selbst, wenn man bedenkt, wie sehr die verschiedenen feministischen Bewegungen sich bemüht haben, das Problem der Gewalt gegen Frauen und den Mangel an Chancen und Gleichheit in der Gesellschaft herauszustellen und ihm entgegenzutreten.

Wir müssen auch über die große Herausforderung nachdenken, die der Rassismus für die Bibelinterpretation mit sich bringt. Hier können wir den Rassismus auf drei Ebenen oder aus drei Perspektiven betrachten: (1) als Rassismus gegen die schwarze Bevölkerung, der das Ergebnis eines langen Prozesses von Abwertung und Unterdrückung der afrikanischen Bevölkerung durch Sklaverei und Gewalt gegen sie ist, (2) als Rassismus gegen ethnisch verschiedene Ausländer, Einwanderer oder Menschen aus Minderheiten, die irgendwie mit Argwohn betrachtet werden, und (3) als Rassismus gegenüber den Indigenen, also den Ureinwohnern. In Bezug auf schwarze Menschen herrschen Vorurteile gegen die Hautfarbe vor, was dazu führt, dass Menschen afrikanischer Herkunft, aber mit heller Haut und feiner geschnitteneren Gesichtszügen „akzeptiert“ werden in einer verschleierten stillschweigenden Übereinkunft, ihre ethnische Herkunft zu ignorieren. Selbst in Ländern wie Brasilien und den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, die von ihrer Rassismusgeschichte geprägt sind, kann man einen strukturellen Rassismus aufzeigen, der entsprechende Fragen unsichtbar macht und den Anschein erweckt, dass dieses Problem nur in der Mentalität schwarzer Aktivisten besteht, die eine Spaltung der Gesellschaft provozieren wollen. Mit anderen Worten, es handelt sich um eine offenkundig ideologische Maskierung der Situation, um Debatten über Maßnahmen zur Teilhabe und Wiedergutmachung der gegen diese Völker

Latino-Americana, Übersetzung Marcelo Carneiro. N. 64/3 (São Bernardo do Campo: SP, Nhanduti Editora, 2009), 57–72.

27 Vgl. Luise Schottroff, *Mulheres no Novo Testamento. Exegese numa perspectiva feminista* (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1995); Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Vida de Mulheres na Sociedade e na Igreja. Uma exegese feminista de Atos dos Apóstolos* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1995).

begangenen geschichtlichen Verbrechen zu vermeiden.[28] Im zweiten Aspekt geht es um die Schwierigkeiten von Menschen, deren ethnische Herkunft sich von der Mehrheitsgesellschaft unterscheidet, die in einer Migrationssituation leben und daher von Einheimischen als Bedrohung für die lokale wirtschaftliche, soziale und politische Situation angesehen werden. Technisch wird das als Fremdenfeindlichkeit (Xenophobie) bezeichnet, aber wir erwähnen es hier als eine Spielart von Rassismus, da im Grunde die Idee dahintersteht, dass meine „Rasse" von dieser anderen „Rasse" bedroht wird. Es ist ein Problem, das wir in Europa sehen, aber auch in Brasilien, und zwar bei Einwanderern aus Ländern in Krise wie Bolivien oder Venezuela, da die Migranten immer aus den untersten und bedürftigsten Schichten stammen und das die Suche nach Arbeit, Unterstützung und Wohnraum mit sich bringt. Der dritte Typ von Rassismus, der sich gegen die indigene Bevölkerung richtet, ist in der brasilianischen Vorstellungswelt etwas versteckter, aber er zeigt sich unter anderem in der Idee, die selbst in Schulen gelehrt wurde, dass die Versklavung von Indigenen nicht funktioniert hat, weil sie ein armseliges und faules Volk sind. Diese Vorstellung ist in der brasilianischen allgemeinen Meinung weit verbreitet und deshalb wird jede Politik zum Schutz indigener Territorien oder der Wiedergutmachung von Aggressionen und Invasionen als unnötig betrachtet, weil diese Menschen ja nicht einmal das Land bearbeiten würden, auf dem sie leben.[29] Angesichts all dessen erlebte Brasilien den Fall eines seiner liebsten Mythen, den der Rassendemokratie, also einer egalitären Gesellschaft, die keine Differenzierung von Menschengruppen und ‚Rassen' kennt, sowie der Vorstellung, dass die Brasilianer ein herzliches und freundschaftliches Volk sind.[30] Was kann die neutestamentliche Forschung also angesichts dieser großen Frage des Rassismus sagen? Zunächst ist es auch hier notwendig, die Perspektive der Textinterpretation zu ändern, indem die dekoloniale (oder postkoloniale) Theorie als Methode zur Analyse der Texte übernommen wird und die Hermeneutik des Verdachts zum Ausgangspunkt für diese Interpretation wird. Dadurch erlaubt die dekoloniale Interpretation, die Ironien und Subtexte in den Texten wahrzunehmen, die die ausschließenden Machtstrukturen jener Gesellschaft hinterfragten. Sie erlaubt die Analyse der Lehren und Handlungen Jesu

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28 Vgl. Emanuel Fonseca Lima u.a. (Hg.), *Ensaios sobre o racismo. Pensamento de fronteira* (São José do Rio Preto, SP: Balão Editorial, 2019).

29 Vgl. Benedito Prezia, Beatriz Catarina Maestri und Luciana Galante (Hg.), *Povos Indígenas. Terra, culturas e lutas* (São Paulo: Outras Expressões, 2019).

30 Vgl. Cleuza Regina Balan Taborda, "O mito da democracia racial," in *Recanto das Letras* Online unter: O MITO DA DEMOCRACIA RACIAL (recantodasletras.com.br), aufgerufen am 16.12.2020.

in einer noch radikaleren Perspektive, nämlich der Suche nach Gleichheit, dem Brechen mit Konventionen, der Offenheit für „Anderes“ und der Überwindung ethnischer Grenzen.[31] Dadurch gewinnt die neutestamentliche Forschung Farbe und Interesse am Leben der Menschen und nicht nur Interesse am Text.

Eine dritte derzeit sehr relevante ethische Frage betrifft die Rolle von Christen in der Politik. In Brasilien, einem überwiegend katholischen Land, hat es vor einigen Jahren einen effektiven Aufstieg von Protestanten und Evangelikalen zur Macht gegeben. Selbst hohe Regierende erklären sich heute zu Sympathisanten oder Mitgliedern solcher Kirchen. Das Ergebnis war jedoch eine zweischneidige Beziehung zwischen Staat und Kirche, die in der Staatsstruktur dieselben Probleme wiederholt, die während der jahrhundertelangen katholischen Macht bestanden. Zum Beispiel bildeten zahlreiche evangelische/evangelikale Abgeordnete die sogenannte „*Bancada Evangélica*“, eine überparteiliche Gruppe mit gemeinsamen Prinzipien, die im Allgemeinen von einer rechten, konservativen und anti-wissenschaftlichen Sichtweise geprägt sind. Als wichtigste biblische Grundlage für diese Beziehung verwenden sie den Text von Römer 13 in einer oberflächlichen Interpretation, um die Unterordnung unter die Staatsmacht zu fordern. Hier kann dieselbe dekoloniale Interpretation des Neuen Testaments, die beim Problem des Rassismus herangezogen werden kann, die Grundlagen für ein angemessenes Verhältnis zwischen Christen und Staat analysieren. Das daraus gewonnene Verständnis ist eine Haltung des Misstrauens und der verborgenen Kritik gegenüber dem Staat, sei es von Jesus oder von Paulus, angesichts ihrer damaligen Lebenssituation, das ebenso von einem Szenario der Unterdrückung und unbestreitbaren Vorherrschaft Roms über die eroberten Völker geprägt war.[32] Die Reflexion über den Staat heute zeigt eine andere Realität. Vergleichbar ist aber die Durchdringung von religiöser und politischer Sprache und Motivation in der Durchführung persönlicher oder gruppenbezogener Projekte, die im Effekt zum Nachteil des öffentlichen Interesses gereichen. Kirche und christlicher Glauben werden hier sozusagen funktionalisiert. Zugleich liegt das Ergebnis völlig außerhalb dessen, was im

31 Vgl. José Luiz Izidoro, *Identidades e fronteiras étnicas no Cristianismo da Galácia* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2013); Flávio Martinez Oliveira, “Abordagem pós-colonial e decolonial em Paulo,” in *REBIBLICA – Revista Brasileira de Interpretação Bíblica.* 1,2, Porto Alegre, Jul.–Dez. 2018, 214–229.

32 Vgl. Davina C. Lopez, *Paulo para os conquistados. Reimaginando a missão de Paulo*, Übersetzung Luiz Alexandre Solano Rossi (São Paulo: Paulus, 2011).

Rahmen der öffentlichen Tätigkeit der Kirche erwartet[33] wird oder geschehen sollte.

In allen oben angesprochenen Aspekten sehen wir also einen gemeinsamen Punkt: Die Art und Weise, wie man die Themen von der neutestamentlichen Forschung her behandelt, wird definitiv die Antworten beeinflussen, die man vorstellen wird. Im Grunde geht es also um eine Debatte über die Zunahme des fundamentalistischen Denkens und den damit verbundenen Negationismus[34]. Man sieht, dass besonders in Ländern der amerikanischen Kontinente eine Bewegung im Gange ist, die eine stark konservative Tendenz und im religiösen Bereich eine fundamentalistische Matrix hat. Denker dieser Strömung erklären öffentlich ihre Position und überschwemmen die sozialen Netzwerke (ein anderer zu berücksichtigender Punkt, der jedoch weiter untersucht werden muss), um bestimmte Meinungen zu verbreiten und die gemeinsame Mentalität der Christen und Christinnen in Brasilien zu stärken, die im Allgemeinen recht konservativ und fundamentalistisch ist. Progressive Christen werden hier mit dem Verdacht betrachtet, sie hätten keinen Glauben und wollten die Fundamente zerstören, auf denen die Kirche, insbesondere die Familie, in ihrem Kernmodell von Vater, Mutter, Söhnen und Töchtern errichtet wurde. Sie verstärken eine oft vorurteilsbeladene und abgekapselte Bibelauslegung, indem sie, wie oben ausgeführt, den Text auf unmittelbare Weise als Direktive für das Leben verstehen. Die neutestamentliche Forschung mit einem kritischen Ansatz kann zusammen mit der Lehre im Grundstudium, die diese Elemente berücksichtigt, eine Wende der Ethik und Haltung der Kirche erreichen, die auf einer besser kontextualisierten Textinterpretation beruht und Haltungen erzeugt, die offen, geschwisterlich und wahrhaft evangelisch sind.

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33 Hier arbeiten wir nach dem Konzept der „Public Theology“ in der die Kirche als wichtiger sozialer Akteur betrachtet wird, der sich für das Gemeinwohl einsetzen muss, um die für fundamentalistische Bewegungen typische Idee des religiösen Proselytismus oder Angriffs auf die Kultur der Gesellschaft zu überwinden. Siehe: Julio Zabaiero, *Teologia Pública*, 3. Auflage (São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2018).

34 „Negationismus“ („Verleugnung“) bezieht sich hier auf ein Phänomen, das während der Pandemie sowohl in Brasilien als auch in anderen Ländern wie in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika aufgetreten ist, bei dem Menschen und sogar Regierungsvertreter wissenschaftliche Informationen leugnen und die Mittel zum Schutz vor dem COVID-19-Virus in Frage stellen. Sie sind gegen den Impfstoff, die Verwendung von Gesundheitsprotokollen wie Masken und soziale Distanzierung und denken, dass alles Teil einer weltweiten Verschwörung ist. Zum Thema, siehe: Luciana Rathsam, *Negacionismo na pandemia: a virulência da ignorância, Unicamp. Cultura e Sociedade* em: https://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/noticias/2021/04/14/negacionismo-na-pandemia-virulencia-da-ignorancia (23.8.2021).

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Researching and Teaching OtherWise

Ronald Charles

I was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I became interested in the Bible simply out of my Christian upbringing. We did not have many books at home, only a Bible and a Christian hymnal. I was always fascinated by the Bible, even by its texture and strangeness. When I finished high school, I wanted to study theology for only two years before I could go to the United States and be with my dad who was working there. I also wanted to study something else at the University level. So I did the impossible, that is, I went to study in a Bible school in the morning from 8–12 noon, and I studied Linguistics at the State University (Faculté de Linguistique Appliquée) from 3:30–7:00 p.m. All at once. On top of that, I still maintained my commitment to my violin practice. I knew I did not want to become a pastor, but I also felt the need to study the Bible to help my Christian communities.

I enjoyed the fact that I was studying Linguistics, which gave me very important tools, such as the ability to pay attention to language and to its nuances. This is when I got interested in combining the two fields, hence my undergraduate thesis on Traductions Bibliques Créoles et Préjugés Linguistiques. However, the whole political turmoil in Haiti prevented me from graduating in Linguistics. I did manage to graduate from the Bible school with a Diploma in theology after four years. And instead of going to the States, my father came back home to die of a brain tumor at 49 years of age. It was for me an intense period of reflection, of reading, and of developing as a human being and as a thinker. I was reading voraciously (novels, mostly of Russian and Haitian authors, philosophy, history, theology), and thinking a lot about the political situation in Haiti and my own place in the world. I had a diploma in Theology, but I was not a pastor. I studied Linguistics, but I had no paper to prove it.

I received a scholarship to go to study for a Master of Divinity at Toronto Baptist Seminary in Toronto, Canada, in 1997. After three years in Toronto, I went back to Haiti to teach in a Bible College and a Christian run University. However, after three and a half years teaching and living in Haiti, I decided to move back to Toronto, especially due to political turmoil in my beloved native land.

Back in Toronto, I worked as a high school teacher and a counselor for high school kids in vulnerable neighborhoods. I also maintained my passion for the violin and played with various musical ensembles throughout Toronto, performing and traveling worldwide, mostly with a Christian choir and orchestra named Jubilance Singers and Orchestra. After about five years of these activities in Toronto, I went back to school to do a Master in Theological Studies and continued to pursue a Ph.D. in Religious Studies in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. I finished my Ph.D. in 2014 and started teaching in the Religious Studies Department (cross-appointed with the Sociology Department) at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada, that same year.

Researching

My research interests and scholarship cover a variety of academic disciplines such as Method and Theory in the Academy Study of Religion, Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies, Linguistics, Early Christianity, and (early) Judaism. Fortress Press published my revised doctoral dissertation in 2014: *Paul and the Politics of Diaspora*. Drawing on insights and categories from the burgeoning field of diaspora studies, the monograph shows the necessity of studying Paul's diaspora politics—that is, the organization and messiness of social relationships—within the complexities of first century Diaspora Judaism. The diasporic space Paul occupies is very important to consider in order to understand the ways in which the emissary to the nations navigated between theological ideals and negotiating social realities with different social actors of the early Jesus movement. In this work, I demonstrate the lack of sustained and informed attention in previous scholarship to Paul's diasporic framework in his literary production. A major objective of the project was to move away from a symbolic or heroic view of Paul toward a more mundane view, a Paul engaged in the intricacies of diasporic life and politics, where the material aspect of the framework is brought to bear, time and again, on the discursive. As a diasporic subject, therefore, Paul comes across as a flesh-and-blood figure enmeshed in the highly complex and contested, ever-in-flux, and crisscrossing ways of the diaspora.

I wanted to explore Paul from a diasporic perspective for two reasons. First, I was living in the most diasporic city in the world, with more than fifty percent of Torontonians having born outside of Canada. Second, I wanted to understand who I was in such a social experiment as living in the diaspora as well. Paul was a convenient figure to study as one who tried to negotiate his worlds (Jewish, Greek, and Roman). Paul was an apostle to the conquered peoples of Rome and as such he needed to understand them, speak their language, and not upset the Roman establishment, at least not overtly. When I finished my dissertation and successfully defended it, I felt frustrated because I did not see how I was contributing anything to my own land after writing a doctoral dissertation on Paul. I was also annoyed by what I was seeing in the field, that is, a disinterest on the part of many New Testament scholars to recognize how this text has been used in contemporary contexts, particularly the place of this text in the so-called "*mission civilisatrice*" context. In the context I grew up, Paul's writings were used to subjugate and to Otherize. It was a writing full of dogmas, of rigid formulas, of ready-made answers. From what I was discovering in my own readings and research, Paul was not a dogmatic thinker but one who was actively theologizing in specific contexts. In the final paragraph of the Epilogue of my revised dissertation and published monograph, I wrote:

> Frankly, where is "Paul"—both the constructed rhetorical persona and the stable Christian construct—in the struggles for survival of various children, women, and men in a place like Haiti today? Having lived under dictatorships, economic embargos, and having tried to express my faith in the God professed by Paul in the stricken-poor, complex Haiti, with the remarkable, resilient people of my tortured land, I have witnessed how Pauline texts can both affect and determine the space of real bodies in systems of male domination and political struggles. (p. 263)

My frustration was not so much with Paul, although in some degrees it was, but how Paul's writings have been weaponized to keep Christians in the Haitian context to accept all kinds of status quo. But, to enlarge the conversation and include other texts beyond Paul, the Bible has been and remains problematic in the context of Haiti. The Bible has also been the source of positive inspiration to many Haitians in Haiti. Many uneducated Haitians have been very creative in how they interpret the Biblical texts to have hope in the midst of the most hopeless situations. The Bible, in Haiti, has encouraged many to undertake literacy programs and efforts. The Bible is, at least it has been for about a century now, part of the Haitian cultural landscape. It is better to study it seriously, not dogmatically, and try to find ways to interpret it in meaningful/liberative ways than simply stating that it is simply an instrument of domination in the Haitian context.[1]

1 See my "Interpreting the Book of Revelation in the Haitian context," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 9.2 (2011): 177–98.

In 2015, I published in French a revised version of my Undergraduate thesis with the French press L'Harmattan (*Traductions Bibliques Créoles et Préjugés Linguistiques*) to explore the politics of translation and linguistic prejudices in translating the Bible in the Creole language. In that book, I articulated a threefold objective: (1) to identify the factors that have influenced the (Haitian) translators; (2) to identify the theories and philosophy of translation that have influenced different versions of the Bible in Haitian Creole; and (3) to initiate a study which could serve as a critical reflection for future translations of the Bible in Haitian Creole. Without my intimate familiarity with both the language of my homeland and Biblical Hebrew, I should not have been able to conduct such research. One point I start the book with is this beautiful Italian expression, *Traddutore, traditore*. Translators are traitors. Translation is important, but it is not easy. One may know the two languages extremely well and still have serious difficulties in translating some terms, expressions, or nuances of a given language. That does not mean it is impossible to translate, it simply means that it can be extremely difficult to do so some time. In the context of the Haitian Bible I did my work on I looked at various translated words from, I assumed (rightly or wrongly), French to Haitian Creole. Take, for example, the theologically loaded term, "Justification by faith"/Justification par la foi. Already in the usual translations in the modern European language the lexical entry δικαιοσύνη is problematic. It is not the time to enter into this debate here, but the point here is how do you render this expression in a way that makes sense in Haitian Creole and is theologically sound. It is important we take the time to study the ancient languages and the modern ones and, in humility and rigor, try our best in our works of translation. Also, I have mentioned that doing (incarnational) theology means understanding the reality of the divine in the particular cultural context(s) of a people. Thus, the necessity to understand the important place of Haitian Creole in Haitian self-definition and culture.[2]

In the introduction of the book, I mentioned my hope that my study will foster a theological vision that will contribute to an "authentically Christian church" and "authentically Haitian church" that should eliminate the barbarian/civilized

2 I echo Musa W. Dube's sentiment when she bemoans the lack of training in translation for biblical or religious studies scholars: "I still cannot explain why academic departments of the Bible and religion do not have full-fledged programmes on translation." See Dube, "The Bible in the Bush: The First 'Literate' Batswana Bible Readers," in *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell (London: T & T Clark, 2018), 181. She argues that many students from the Two-Thirds World would benefit from such training and would advance scholarship and decolonial resistance within their own communities.

binary and correspondingly, I wished to address the faithful Haitian Christians in the language of all (Creole) in a way clear and accessible to all (p. 8). The Haitian church has suffered from colonialism, imperialism, classism, and … demagogy. There have been few voices of reason stemming from various ecclesial denominations, but the general picture is disastrous. It seems to me that the situation today has never been so dire with so many charlatans exploiting others. We need serious thinkers with a deep love for our people. Not those looking to elevate themselves, but be willing to be with everyone, learn from everyone, and share with everyone. This seems a dream that is very far from the current reality in Haiti. Of course, we need an indigenous church, equipped with its own theological language embedded in the local context. What I mean by authentically Haitian Christianity is one that takes the time to reflect on God within the context of poverty, cholera, COVID-19, exploitation, prostitution, politics, unemployment, etc. My study of the ancient world has confirmed a haunch I had early on in my studies that the variegated elements of life are linked and that one cannot pretend to preach the blessings of heaven by ignoring the "wretched of the earth" (to use Frantz Fanon's English title) in their mess. Life is messy and our scholarly work, as well as those engaged in theological thinking/preaching need to embrace or to wrestle with this messiness.

In 2019, I published a major book entitled *The Silencing of Slaves in early Jewish and Christian Writings,* with Routledge. In this seminal study on the practice of slavery in the ancient world, I offered a critical analysis on and an energetic exegesis of a number of texts found in both Early Judaism and Christian documents that discuss the institution of slavery in their own cultural milieu and historical framework. This study explores the silenced voices and experiences of slaves, focusing on specific slaves as textualized characters in the so-called pseudepigraphic materials and in some early Christian writings. I analyzed a large corpus of texts in order to understand how their authors—who had no intrinsic interest in slaves—used, abused, and silenced enslaved characters to articulate their own social, political, and theological visions. My aim was to explore the discursive use of slaves in these texts in order to consider an alternative historiography of earliest Christ-groups. The focus is on reading specific texts "from below" or "against the grain" in order to *notice* the slaves and in so doing to problematize and (re)imagine these narratives. Noticing the slaves as characters means paying attention to the broader theological, ideological, and rhetorical aims of the texts within which they are constructed. I have used the famous historian/anthropologist (Michel-Rolph Trouillot) as a guide, especially from his seminal work *Silencing the Past.*

My work has shown that many early Christian thinkers/intellectuals were interested in portraying the social movement associated with Jesus as a non-threatening movement to the historical and political realities of the ancient Roman World. In other words, the tendency was to portray Jesus as an affable teacher and philosopher. As H. B. Timothy states, "In order to survive in the first two centuries of our era Christianity had, in a manner of speaking, to present its credentials at the bar of Greek philosophy."[3] Thus, such characterization seemed to have been necessary for the early Christian intellectuals to situate the early Jesus movement within a more palatable way for the wider Greek and Roman audiences they were addressing.

In the chapter on the slaves in the gospels, for example, I was not interested in parabolic slaves, or in slaves talked about. I wanted to see slaves in the messiness of the social worlds depicted in the gospels and uncover the potential significance of marginal characters represented in these narratives. I wanted to highlight their voices, however faintly echoed, in order to understand some of the stories in a new light. In a sense, I wanted to re-imagine the slaves in the gospels, but it turns out few slaves are present and few actually speak in these narratives. In this chapter, I have proposed to read various presentations of slaves in the high priest's courtyard as the morphing of one female slave into different figures (male, female, and not declared, as far as gender is concerned), speaking with different voices and modes (declarative, interrogative). This way of proceeding has allowed me to see that this bifurcation of the slave is a reading and interpretative strategy exercised by the authors/editors of the gospels to control that slave and to (re)habilitate the image of an important male disciple. The female slave becomes the mechanism for excusing Peter's lack of restraint. The voice of that particular slave, however, remains accusatory. That slave saw the act of violence perpetrated by one close to Jesus on a related fellow slave. That slave's voice is the only clear voice of slaves in all the gospels. Could that be a prophetic voice? Could the message articulated by that slave be that violence against slave bodies should not be pursued? In what way could slaves in the first and early second century in Judea and in surrounding areas in the Mediterranean under the Roman empire become friends to those following Jesus and hear in any meaningful way what he had to say to his disciples: "I no longer call you slaves, for the slave does not know what the master does; but I have called you friends, for all things I have heard from the father I have made known to you" (John 15:15)? What would that mean for the disciples who

3 *The Early Christian Apologists and Greek Philosophy: Exemplified by Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria*, Wijsgerige Teksten en Studies 21 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), 84.

bickered frequently among themselves about who was the greatest, to really embrace Jesus' call and admonition that "whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave" (Matthew 20:27)? How would others who are free within the group treat a slave operating within a Christ-group? How would the male preachers and followers of Christ treat an exploited slave, who is not part of a Christ-group but announcing the gospel? So the verdict is that both on Jesus and Paul's response to ancient slavery, at least as these figures are depicted in these texts, is a mitigated one at best. They are not portrayed as abolitionists, nor are they portrayed as embracing easily institutional slavery.

Studying ancient slavery one may see few similarities between the ancient world and the modern, especially in its production in the modern world. However, caution is important. There is no, or almost none, racial component (a modern category) in who became a slave in the ancient world. Also, a slave could be quite rich as opposed to a poor and free person. It all depended on whose slave one was. But being the mere property of an owner and being susceptible to (severe) beatings remains a constant, both in the ancient and modern (in the Americas, in particular) representation of slavery.

These books show my interest in interdisciplinary readings and interpretations of texts beyond canonical boundaries, and they also reveal my commitment to engage in reflexive scholarship and pedagogy.[4] In this way, the conditions of knowledge are explored by interrogating data presented as evidence of certain theories, and by questioning the categories of thought, methods, and instruments of analysis that enter into practice in the analysis of a given problem. I try to broaden the investigation of diaspora, race and ethnicity as complex social factors, both in antiquity and in the modern world. I am interested in the relationship between place and belonging, and between territory and memory. I see my research as the labor of a cultural translator who is engaged in making connections between traditions and history. In my scholarship and in my teaching, I have always tried to present alternatives/counter hegemonic ways of looking at texts. As a minoritized scholar,[5] I want to un-camouflage ideological and epistemological heuristics by asking unfamiliar and disturbing

4 See Lynda Harling Stalker and Jason Pridmore, "Reflexive Pedagogy and the Sociological Imagination," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 7 (3/2009): 27–36.

5 Having a minority identity is certainly context dependent and means different things in different settings. My own Haitian background makes me sensitive to the plight of my people and makes me acutely aware of the responsibility I have, alongside my own privileges, as one situated in the diaspora and academic landscape of North America, to engage in advocacy, through various means, for my impoverished homeland and my too often exploited people.

questions, listening to the voices of those coming from the margins, and reading their texts and stories alongside the texts of mainstream scholarship.

Why teach at all?

I am interested in the messiness of social agents and my academic interest lies in the sheer and bewildering diversity of interpretations, disagreements, conflicts and contests, and perspectives held by Jesus' early followers. My readings are not confined to the sanctioned canonical texts either. While I agree it is important to teach content (for example, the different contexts in which the early Christ-followers lived, key figures such as Paul, Eusebius and Ignatius), and to show the importance of other books not included in the biblical canon (such as the *Didache*), I believed I need to provide students with the opportunity to explore a subject of enquiry on their own. My aim in teaching Early Christian Studies is to explore several early Christian groups, their multiple disputes, arguments, positions, theologies, understandings. In my classes, there are no heretics or heresies, whether the social agents or subjects discussed related to the early Jesus movement, or in the opinions and understandings expressed by students in the class. I teach the way I teach because, I think, it is the right way to teach, especially in a Religious Studies program in a publicly-funded institution. I teach the way I teach to engage all my students, Christians, agnostics, atheists, seekers, in the specific context of my work. My job is to show my students the complexity of the subject but to also present them with the sheer beauty and relevance (yes, relevance!) of what I study.

The study of religion in this specific socio-political location means subjecting the different subjects I teach to the academic rigours of inquiry, of studying the agenda, theological or otherwise, of various texts, of questioning and of testing different ideological claims. In the context of a publicly-funded university, I take it as my job to encourage students to read, analyze, evaluate evidence and arguments, and question different conclusions and assumptions by allowing the students to participate in testing the different assertions in the materials we study. As one who is engaged in the broader aim of liberal education, it is important to me to help the students to become more critical readers and thinkers by providing a set of discursive rules that will allow them to engage in rational inquiry.

The study of religion touches all fields and vice versa—religion as a human phenomenon being part of the fabric of history, culture, business and art, science and music. Teaching students about Christianity at a publicly-funded university is useful and necessary because it helps the students understand the interconnections between different academic fields. A Business major in one of my classes wrote a research paper on Christianity and Capitalism (Max Weber becomes handy here). Another student, who enrolled in my class because of her evangelical background, wrote her research paper on John Wycliffe and the rise of the Protestant reformation in Europe. I could give other examples to show the importance of offering an Introduction to Christianity class in a publicly-funded university where the students can learn about a religious tradition that has had, and will continue to have, an influence on us in the world (at least more so in the western world). In class, we talked about the Crusades, the Great Schism, and the cross-cultural influence of Martin Luther on J.S. Bach, S. Kierkegaard, and D. Bonhoeffer. I always try to keep it real by connecting issues of the past to those of today, demonstrating that understanding the past can help us to be better citizens today, to show how the study of the past can prepare us somewhat for an uncertain future. The university is one of the few places where the leaders of tomorrow can learn how to go through a mountain of facts, ideas and arguments and learn how to assess all that knowledge appropriately.

The university can be a liberating place where students can learn about Christianity without having to be a Christian. Learning about Christianity in a public university can give the student who professes to be Christian the freedom to learn about the light and dark aspects of the Bible and to question Christianity's legacies (good and bad). It is important that this is done in a non-dogmatic, non-threatening, unapologetic manner. As free thinkers, we must be free to enquire and learn from the variegated records. I teach from a rigorous academic and religiously neutral perspective using tools approved by publicly-funded institutions (close study of texts, historical analysis, etc.) in order to study the texts and contexts related to the early Jesus movement, and the development of what has become in time Christianity, as a cultural studies critic.

I find that the general decline in biblical literacy has impeded many students from understanding the subtle—and not so subtle—usages of biblical themes, tropes, and imagery in the many films that have been made with biblical themes. It was important that those students taking the class have a relatively thorough understanding of the major themes and figures of the Bible for them to be able to place the films we studied in constructive dialogue with biblical texts.

In my classes, I look at the Bible as a cultural artefact, and how the Bible is used as a socially-powerful object and as an ideological tool, how it is re-used, constructed and deconstructed. In this way, by asking difficult questions pertaining to the Bible as a cultural icon in our world today, both the Bible and the other materials we study are seen through new eyes. In this sense, we are able to study the materials in their socio-political and cultural contexts, and we try to understand them critically.

Teaching

Teaching matters and it is important that one reflects seriously about the need for critically engaged scholarship in the classroom. The specific questions I would like to explore further with regard to teaching are: How does one go about teaching as a biblical scholar in a Religious Studies Department? Why teach at all? What do we do as teachers? Answering these questions will give me, and hopefully the reader, a way to ponder more closely on the very material, political and administrative conditions of our work as struggling human beings negotiating our different positions in and outside our institutional walls.

A biblical scholar teaching in a Religious Studies Department in a publicly-funded institution of higher education is the reality of few academics. In such a setting, the scholar is expected to teach his or her area of expertise and other necessary courses to cover the curriculum of a Religious Studies Department. The scholar needs to be engaged in comparative exercises or conversations along various religious traditions. Many, if not most, of the students may not have any particular religious backgrounds, or they may be taking a religious studies class to simply fulfil an elective requirement. The scholar usually has the academic freedom to explore any area of scholarship within his or her particular area of expertise, without any suspicion of discipline or reprimand based on religious/denominational dogmas.[6] Most of these departments, at least of what I am aware of in North America, do not have graduate students. The scholar is limited some time to have access to a good research library, and may regret not having stimulating and challenging students, who are mostly not in the least interested in the materials. The temptation for a religious studies scholar to be in a more religiously confessional context is understandable, especially considering the heightened interest in the materials from students there and many professional masters and doctoral programs in these settings. In my own context, I do not have the privilege of being at

6 I am not so naive to believe that the publicly-funded university context does not have its own agendas (political/social/economic benefits), and that intellectuals who dissent and challenge/expose power are welcome with open arms in such settings. I am not so unsophisticated either to say that every confessional school is operating from similar understandings as to what free enquiry/free speech is. A Religious Studies department may consider having a theologian as part of its faculty, and a theological school may want to have scholars who study religion from a non-sectarian position as part of its team.

home in one discipline. Not having that privilege allows me to understand the bewildering complexities of what interdisciplinary thinking entails. Not having the privilege of devoting myself solely to one discipline pushes me to be a better interdisciplinary scholar of the Humanities. But, other scholars are well disciplined within their particular field. Our own subfield of Biblical Studies, especially Pauline Studies, contains a number of such scholars. There is a lack of sustained exploration of Paul's texts as ideological tools; there is almost a total absence of studying Paul's texts within the confinements of Religious Studies, that is from a comparative standpoint and by using the tools of other disciplines such as comparative religion, sociology, historiography, anthropology, cultural studies, or other disciplines; there is a lack of theory, or theoretical sophistication that would inform the field; there is a lack of reflexive historiography related to Pauline studies. In this way, the conditions of knowledge would be explored by interrogating data shown as evidence of certain theories, and by exploring the categories of thought, methods, and instruments of analysis that enter into practice in the analysis of a given problem. I am here of course influenced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.[7]

What do we do as teachers?

This is a pertinent question that all teachers need to ask. The question is not simply to reveal the mechanics of what we do (prepping, teaching, grading countless papers, meeting with students), but also to reveal the purpose of what we do. It is vital that we consider how we teach, how we evaluate, and what in

7 See Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University Press, 1992). Bourdieu's "reflexive" scholarship, or "epistemic reflexivity", is an attempt to elucidate the "conditions of knowledge" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 36–46). In this way, the conditions of knowledge are explored by interrogating data shown as evidence of certain theories, and by exploring the categories of thought, methods, and instruments of analysis that enter into practice in the analysis of a given problem. In other words, the researcher is necessarily engaged in a type of reflexive mode by moving between theory and evidence, by reflecting on his/her social positioning in doing certain work and by exploring critically and reflexively what one's assumptions are in asking (and not asking) certain scholarly questions. For Bourdieu and Wacquant, "The most intimate truth of what we are, the most unthinkable unthoughts (*l'impensé le plus impensable*), is also inscribed in the objectivity and in the history of the social positions that we have held in the past and that we presently occupy. … The history of sociology, understood as an exploration of the *scientific unconscious of the sociologist* through the explication of the genesis of problems, categories of thought, and instruments of analysis, constitutes an absolute prerequisite for scientific practice" (ibid., 213f; emphasis original).

the world it is that we think we are doing. In the context of a Religious Studies Department, it is not just vital to ask questions about the overall importance of what we do in our academic and cultural contexts, but it is also important that we reflect on what we do so that we may clarify to others our roles as critics and not as caretakers.[8] I see my role as a teacher and as a critical rhetor; someone who pursues scholarship passionately, as a calling. In my case, I study the early Jesus movement in all its aspects and intricacies and entanglements. On a grand scale I believe that the work I do helps to shape the lives of free citizens. I do what I do because of love for this body of knowledge in my discipline. Not only do I gain great personal pleasure from this study, but I do what I do because I think it is important. And though it may be naive of me, I do what I do in a Religious Studies department, in a publicly-funded university because I believe in the importance of critical scholarship, of free enquiry, of the concept and practice of democracy, and in free speech (not self-censorship for the sake of achieving permanent employment), asking some difficult questions, challenging some common beliefs.

We are, like our students, a work in process. We evaluate them; they evaluate us; we learn from one another; we know we cannot possibly be right at all times and that there is much we do not know. Having said that, it is clear that the classroom is not a community of equals. As teachers we do hold power in the classroom. However, that power is a responsibility we need to carry with vigilance and a power we should not use to abuse our students in any way possible. My philosophy of education stems from the fact that truths can be discovered and, with the gentle guidance of a teacher, students can be engaged in discovery in order to find truths for themselves. The best way to teach is to show a serious passion in the subject that one is teaching, and to have a love for the students because teaching should be, ultimately, an act of love and mercy.[9] One

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8 See Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

9 On teaching as an act of love, bell hooks is worth quoted at length: “Sometimes professors are fearful of engaging students with love because they worry about being engulfed. They worry they will become too enmeshed in a student’s dilemmas. This fear is keenly felt by anyone who is unable to establish appropriate boundaries. Most of us, teachers and students, have been raised with a misguided understanding of love. We have been taught that love makes us crazy, makes us blind and foolish, that it renders us unable to set healthy boundaries. Actually, when we teach with love we are far more likely to have an enhanced understanding of our students’ capabilities and their limitations and this knowledge ensures appropriate boundaries will be present in the classroom. It also helps to promote an atmosphere of safety wherein mistakes can be made, wherein students can learn to take full responsibility for gauging their learning

should be teaching with the hope that the students will not be mere consumers of knowledge, regurgitating the information back to the teacher, but free citizens exercising critical judgment in the discovery of principles, of truths, that help both the teacher and student grow in knowledge, in wisdom. My hope as an educator in the humanities is to instill a thirst for knowledge and excellence of achievement in my students, not so much so that they can become powerful shakers and movers of the world, but, maybe, so that they may become more virtuous and fully realized people, finding their place as free citizens in a world seeking freedom and justice.

Teaching alongside others

Teaching Early Christian Studies or the New Testament in a Religious Studies Department also implies that I teach comparatively, that is, with no apriorism and by looking at the texts and the world of antiquity as human products. I also try to learn and to be, at least a bit, curious about what my colleagues work on in terms of the different religious traditions, sets of texts, research focuses and agendas. Besides the expected good and respectful collegiality between colleagues working in a Religious Studies Department (in any department really), this particular setting affords one the opportunity to reflect a bit more on one's place, and one's particular contributions to the broader context of inquiry within the discipline. It is important that we celebrate one another's achievements, and that we respect one another's perspectives and commitments. We should validate one another's efforts, and support each other. We may even go the extra mile by visiting their place of worship to participate in their religious celebration(s), if a colleague is a member of a religious community and/or religious tradition. I see this as part of being a genuine and caring/respectful human being. However, being a good colleague does not necessitate refraining from questioning the assumptions, conclusions, and even practices of others. It is a necessary part of collegiality, although it should be carried out in a very sensitive and respectful way. Being a good colleague does not prevent one from asking critical questions about a colleague's area(s) of research. One may, even naively, inquire about why some questions are not asked in a particular tradition, why some (saintly) figures are not questioned, and why some practices are legitimized or not legitimized. This, to me, is part of a healthy university atmosphere where we

skills so that they are not teacher-dependent" (bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 161).

can learn, observe, and question, without threat of repercussions. Should we not continually re-examine our dearly held positions/views?

The work we do is highly political,[10] from the texts we choose to study, cite and teach, to the (ancient) sites we choose to do archaeological diggings; from questions we deem worthy of pursuing to narratives we construct or stories/histories we do not refer to; from the silencing of certain voices in texts or outside the texts to communities that are marginalized in the very specialized works we do; from the archives we uncover to those we leave buried; from what we say in the classes we teach to what we do not say; from the theories and methods we adopt in our analysis to the positions we vilify; all choices we make are political. We are embroiled in minefields we cannot escape; we cannot pretend to be neutral, apolitical, or impartial, or to exist outside of different ideologies and constructions of power. We choose which ideologies to highlight and which to discard; we may study ancient texts or ancient civilizations, but we cannot detach ourselves from our own situatedness nor from the choices we make here in the present. However, once we become career scholars we lose a profound dimension of our roles as intellectuals and critics; once our primary goal becomes to obtain tenure—more and more considered the process by which one is being trusted by one's peers to maintain the status quo of the system—and to play it safe before or even after being admitted as a good member of the club, then it becomes difficult to separate being a thinker from being a cog in the wheel. Collegiality, at least in my understanding, does not equate with passively accepting the positions of a senior colleague because of the power dynamics at play. As we teach our students to think seriously about serious issues related to our distinctive corners of interests/specialties, we also need to think seriously about how we relate to our colleagues. We can learn from one another. We can share with one another how we can be more disciplined with our time, how we can be a fairer evaluator, how we can use pedagogy to decolonize the minds of our students, as well as our own, and how we can strive to implement pedagogies that decolonise our own academic disciplines so that we can continue to educate for freedom and challenge/destabilize systemic oppression and domination. Teaching and learning can only take place in a community; teaching depends on community; teaching can contribute to the process of establishing a feeling of togetherness and within that community we can learn how to support each other. Teaching should not be a competitive sport. I cannot conceive of teaching alongside others in competition for better student

10 Political is used here in the sense of participation within social phenomena and being part of what transpires by what we choose to do or not do.

evaluations, or more articles or books published. We are all in it together. In a world with particular challenges, we are looked upon by many as a group that has some expertise that may help in understanding some of the bewildering social realities we exist in. We teachers should learn from each other. Then we may be in a better position to critically engage with one another and situate our own projects in larger frameworks of thought.

Questioning

There is a kind of luxury of interpreting Paul in a theoretical and sociopolitical vacuum, which may decipher traces of one's ideological agendas, although this type of reading interpretation is often presented as objective scholarship. For the sake of space, I will focus on one recent book that illustrates that: Douglas Campbell, *Paul: An Apostle's Journey* (Eerdmans, 2018).

Campbell's book starts with a grand pronouncement: "The apostle Paul is the most influential political philosopher in the USA today, and … in the rest of the world as well, and this surely makes him one of the most important figures in human history." Really? Like, in North Korea? Or "We badly need to recover the real Paul?" Why? What's the urgency? Consider this ludicrous statement: "So Paul came from Tarsus but had a Roman ID card in his back pocket, something that would come in handy" (18). The book is understandably a popular presentation. But why does it need to border on the ridiculous? From the narrative in Acts about Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus, the author is able to draw these theological conclusions: Jesus is God, God reveals God, God is both three and one. It is astounding how one can decipher these 4th century creedal understandings from that particular narrative. A nod to Rick Warren's popular book is made in the subheading "A Purpose-driven life" (24). In chapter 2, the author states, without any evidence, that "Paul was irritating Jews in another way. Not only was he proclaiming a complicated if not blasphemous God who was absurdly involved in his creation. Paul was proclaiming that Pagans could become followers of this God and thereby inherit a place in the Age to come. What?!" (27). The author knows well from Jewish Scriptures that the Jewish God is described as ever present in Creation and in the life of his covenantal people. Campbell also knows that there were various strands of Judaism(s) during the Second Temple period and that some groups advocated for something similar to what Paul is doing. Campbell's book is clear and relatively well-written, but do educators or scholars render a service to the public in dumbing them down? Although the text is a popular contribution, there is a lack of nuances and complexities in the ways in which some, if not most, of the material is presented.

Does the scholar not have a responsibility, even in addressing a general audience, to be fair, nuanced, clear, and respectful to the intelligence of the readers? Even when Campbell alludes to the complexity of identities, he shows clearly a lack of understanding of the topic. He states, for example, "People shaped by modern culture tend to think about entities as occupying discrete and mutually exclusive space" (37). He uses the concept of "hybridity" (63) without defining it or unpacking it. Readers occupying different sites, always negotiating identities in flux, never belonging, and readers being in/from different worlds, not willing to, or just being in the impossibility of taking one side over the other, of being both in and out, speaking different languages, and being at ease in different cultures may question that narrow understanding Campbell is presenting.

The author mentions Network Theory, as developed by the sociologist Rodney Stark in *The Rise of Christianity* (1996). This is the only place in the whole book where he alludes to a sociological theory. Rodney Stark's 1996 work, however, is problematic on several levels and Stark is not the sole sociologist, let alone the best representative, of this theory. There is no indication Campbell is interested to move beyond a very superficial understanding of this theory and how it might help us in understanding better the early Christ-groups.

Campbell mentions the pernicious relationship that existed between European missionaries of the 19th century and white values. This is a good gesture. But he needed to articulate the point more clearly. Katharine Gerbner's well-researched book (*Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, March 2018)) argues that the origins of the modern terms "white" or "white supremacy" can be found in Protestant missionary ideologies of the early 17th-century Protestant (Caribbean) milieu, which aimed to control the bodies and souls of African slaves. In the early colonial period, Protestant slave owners in the English, Dutch, and Danish colonies did not want their slaves to convert to Christianity because they believed that their religion was for free people only. As slaves converted and were baptized into the Christian religion, slave owners developed ways to integrate race into their colonial discourse in order to justify the bondage of non-Europeans brought to the colonies to work as slaves.

In chapter 8, Navigating Sex and gender, Campbell states, "I have used 'sex' up until now to denote the sex drive and sexual activity associated with that, although spelling at times into the analysis of what scholars call 'gender' or 'gender construction' (94). In fact, he does not do any of that kind of analysis.

In his chapter on The Christian City (chapter 9), Campbell asserts that "A great deal of modern society is premised on a false sense of scarcity. The wealthiest society in human history—the USA—is obsessed with how much it still needs" (102). There are several problems with that quote, of course, but it clearly shows how the author's social location clouds his understanding of the dynamics of the world. At the end of the book, the author presents his final words: "The Pauline gospels that we see emerging from these haphazard communiqués to various struggling Christians in the first century CE is a marvelous thing. It journeys into unnoticed corners of the world to meet and to make friends. It plants and builds the Christian city against its religious assailants, whether those come from without or within. May we be brave enough to follow Paul's example and to set out on this journey ourselves" (150). Campbell approaches the study of Paul, at least in this book, from a particular theological agenda and from the geographical and social standpoint of one who is located in North America as a white man with privileges, seemingly oblivious to the manners in which other readers might find his readings and presentations of Paul's Christian city against which Others are presented as religious assailants, difficult to accept. Presenting this image of a Christian city under assault and calling his readers to be brave in the context of a rampant white supremacy in the US, cannot, at least to me, but point to a kind of mythic City on a Hill, perceived to be under assault by (religious) Others. This call to arms seems to echo the American national Anthem:

> Then conquer we must, when our cause is just, / And this be our motto: "In God is our trust"; /And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave / O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Studying Paul from our location must include a deeper awareness of where we stand in relation to others who come from quite different standpoints.

Conclusion

I remember how eager I was in the first year of my doctoral program at the University of Toronto. Fresh from the Toronto School of Theology with a Master in Theological Studies I really wanted to do my work with the Department for the Study of Religion so that I could study religion from a broader perspective and read the key texts of other religious traditions. I was surprised then to realize in a seminar titled "Method and Theory in the Study of Religion"—a class that had as its purpose the broadening of our horizons by introducing us to different theories and various texts from a variety of fields and traditions—that many of my classmates were not at all interested in such a project. They wanted to delve right away and solely into their own areas of interest. They did not want to waste valuable research time reading what must have seemed for them to be countless theorists (Freud, Foucault, Marx, Weber, Levi-Straus, Bourdieu, Mauss, Derrida, J.Z. Smith, Said, Butler, Asad), and texts that were outside of their specialties. I was one of the few who delighted in learning about all kinds of theories and who tried to read and learn as much as I could. I was impressed and humbled by my peers' knowledge, so I was motivated to fill some serious gaps in my own knowledge. This has allowed me to understand so much more. There is great value in theory and in exploring the world outside one's specific area of interest. Engaging with the works of great minds and trying to understand the sometimes-overwhelming theoretical approaches, variegated traditions, and puzzling worldviews, helped me not to take myself, or the materials I was studying, too seriously. I was able to look at my Christian traditions and interests in a new light, in relation to other traditions in the vast world.

It is unfortunate that many biblical scholars do not seem to care to broaden their horizons and readings so that their work could be more theoretically grounded.[11] The research languages are certainly important, but so is a critical understanding of ideological constructions. History is important, but one should also see how historical perspectives (which and whose past) are critically central to our analysis.

Teaching is important. We teach with the hope we will make a difference in the lives of our students as they grow as critical thinkers and citizens. However, it can be difficult for someone in a precarious academic position to push some of the ideological structures that inform the culture of a particular academic setting. Academic freedom in this sense is or can be jeopardized. One may have to self-censor in order to survive and be offered another contract position. The social, political, and cultural atmosphere of a given place may push one to either pretend not to notice the disconnect between the beautiful discourses of those in power regarding social justice and the value of a liberal education while embracing a corporate mentality in seeing the students as consumers and pushing those who teach to strive to have more "bumps on seats," or one may choose instead to insist that the university is critical or it is not.[12]

The courage it requires one to do research and to teach to transgress, especially as a junior professor, is one that may leave one bruised at the end of

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11 Theorists and sociological readings, such as: Comparative approaches, Constructions of ethnicity, Cultural criticism, Deconstruction, Disability studies, Global perspectives, Ideological Criticism, Imperial-critical, Intersectional analysis, Islander criticism, Literary criticism, Marxist criticism, Minoritized criticism, Orality studies, Performance criticism, Postcolonial criticism, Postmodern or Poststructuralism, Psychoanalytic criticism, Ritual studies, Reception History, Rhetorical criticism.

12 See Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

the day. But, it is an important and necessary task in order to push and to do scholarship and to teach OtherWise.

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Reflections on a Lifetime of New Testament Teaching and Research in Australasia

William Loader

I grew up in Auckland, New Zealand. My first engagement with the New Testament came as I attended Sunday School at the Sandringham Methodist Church. Sunday School was the name given to classes given to children, where they were taught Bible stories and nurtured in the Christian faith. Perhaps the earliest memories are of Old Testament stories, such as the heroics of David, but there were also stories of Jesus, such as his welcoming children, and, of course, the Christmas stories which surrounded the summer holiday period, as it was in the southern hemisphere. More earnest young teachers at the Bible Institute, put on placement at our church, introduced me as a teenager to the challenges of evangelism and "decision"-making. Their approach to the Bible was fundamentalist, the infallible Word of God, and by thirteen I was set upon a path taking my faith, that version of it, very seriously.

By the time I reached 15, I, too, was teaching in Sunday School, and was the youngest "Counsellor" in the Billy Graham Crusade which conducted a mission in Auckland in 1959. Not long after, I became involved with Youth for Christ and became a teenage evangelist with the movement. During my mid-teenage years my minister, not in the fundamentalist mould, tasked me with creating the church library with donated and newly purchased books. Through his hands and that task I came into touch with a broader stream of Christian concern. He promoted especially the relevance of popular psychology both for understanding human relations and for understanding the Bible.

He encouraged me to feel free to keep any donated books which took my interest. Thus, came into my hands an 18th century edition of John Wesley's sermons. Wesley's sermon of salvation by grace attracted me and I began underlining its main points, a practice I used to follow in reading the Bible. I kept to a discipline of reading five chapters a day, which helped me get through the Bible many times. I had no idea how valuable this 18th century edition of Wesley was. Fortunately my underlining was applied only to the first sermon.

What I learned from Wesley was a certain perspective, namely of putting love at the heart of the gospel.

I was becoming very Bible-literate, even more so than the student teachers from the Bible Institute. It won me Youth for Christ quizzes, but also provided a firm foundation for biblical studies. I learned much off by heart, including using the plans of the Navigators (an international, interdenominational Christian ministry). It was plain to see that the key texts were on sin and death/hell from Paul and salvation from John. It struck me then that the other gospels were not really so suitable. They were not as "evangelical".

My father had always encouraged me as a child, never to be afraid to ask questions, and my earnest faith also gave me the assurance that God was the same, never disapproving of asking questions. I had the enthusiasm not only to engage in evangelism and preach, which I began at aged 13, but also to want to reform the church. Ours was a congregation on the margins of the Methodist Church, seeing itself in part as a bastion of true faith over against the wider liberal church. I was equipping myself for change.

In secondary school I had five years of Latin. In my final year I began to teach myself New Testament Greek. I spent my first year after high school spending four months as a builder's labourer accompanying a supermarket from its foundations to its opening and then worked three days in a grocery warehouse in order to be free to run youth and children's missions through the church.

During that year I sensed my next move (my call) was to enter the Methodist ministry. I informed the Principal of Trinity Methodist Theological College in Auckland, that God did not want me to go to university. After all, I knew my Bible much better than most, including many in ministry. He gently suggested that this wasn't God; it was me. I could see the wisdom, so the next year at age 19 I went to Auckland University to complete a BA in Classics, so to Latin came Greek, Hebrew and German. There I would link with Evangelical Union, listen to visiting scholars like F. F. Bruce, who encouraged us to enter the world of the New Testament. It started me moving. It was as though the 18th century was happening for me: engagement with the classics led to a more differentiated understanding of the Bible.

There was absolutely nothing to fear in exploring and asking questions as long as my faith was firm and I believed God was with me. So the core insights of the evangelical faith I found articulated in Wesley never left me. In my second year at university I commenced my ordinand course in Trinity College. I was taking on a heavy load and also climbing some steep hills. Of course, my first essays were to prove Moses wrote the Pentateuch and that Paul wrote the

Pastorals, but my faith told me that it was never wrong to listen to all the arguments and have an open mind. What a gift! John Ziesler, who wrote on Righteousness in Paul, was my lecturer in New Testament, and John J. Lewis, in Old, also with a strong interest in intertestamental literature.

My Bible knowledge and my languages helped me enter deeply into the issues. Like the scholars of the 18th and 19th century, so I began to see the Bible no longer in two but in three dimensions, the Old being different from the New, the diversity among the gospels, the distinctiveness of Paul, the development of admiring pseudepigraphy about Paul and more. In those "not evangelical enough" gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, I began to see much more than the polished gospel according to John provided and I began the journey through source criticism to form criticism and redaction criticism and beyond to synchronic as well as diachronic perspectives. I was catching up through the 19th century to the 20th.

So, what was going on in the New Zealand church during my ministry studies? Within the Methodist Church in New Zealand there was a well-established tradition of taking biblical scholarship seriously. Lecturers had Cambridge PhDs, and their predecessor was the great scholar Dr Harry Ranston, a specialist in wisdom literature. There had been angry days of hurt when some former fundamentalists took delight in destroying naïve fundamentalist faith. There had been pacifist protests during the war and now there were protests against apartheid in South Africa and what it should mean for New Zealand rugby. The term "social gospel" typified much that went on. In addition, the popular psychology movement with its British forms associated with Leslie Weatherhead and its American forms associated with Carl Rogers and Seward Hiltner, gave congregations and ministers something to be "evangelical" about instead of preaching Billy Graham's gospel of saving people from hell.

Our principal, David Williams, promoted such psychological insights and these also helped my understanding of Paul. Many churches developed counselling services as outreach into the community. Ministry meant helping people be aware of what it could mean to be caring communities. I can remember seeing all this as positive but also harbouring the concern that spirituality, facilitating people's relationship with God, in that sense, the evangelical, not go by the wayside.

My teachers encouraged me to pursue advanced study. No one in my family background had ever been to university, let alone done advanced study. Assured that my doubts were out of place, I took that encouragement and began to explore options. Germany seemed an obvious place to go because, as I saw it, they were the best at pursuing rigorous academic research. It was only after

I reached that conclusion that I met my German wife—the butt of jokes that I deliberately sought her out—but this was not true! But significantly, some of what I learned first at university level, she had been taught already in high school.

First, having completed my BA and my ordinand course in 1966, I needed to do a BD, which would cover the same ground as Trinity College but in more depth. Options for a BD were Otago, Melbourne College of Divinity or London. I chose Otago University where the Presbyterian faculty of Knox College ran the courses and provided a limited external option which consisted of little more than a course outline, bibliography and exam dates. I worked on the first half in 1967 on my own. Mostly, it worked. I learned to study in isolation. I completed it over the next two years when a Probationer Minister in full time parish ministry. Already then, I would write informative theological discourses for lay people for each Sunday's newsletter – lay theological education had begun.

I was on my own. There was an occasional Friday evening gathering of scholars held by Bob Thompson at the Baptist Theological College with someone presenting a paper, but apart from that there was little. The assumption appears to have been that ministers who obtained a PhD were to teach, not to engage in research, or at least I saw little sign of it. This was true as far as I could see across the churches. There was no theology at Auckland University and even in Dunedin, it was done by a seminary, but awarded by Otago University. That is where the academic strength was. The focus of theological education was preparing people for church ministry. That dictated what was taught and how it was taught. This was not university education.

I wanted to go to Germany because I wanted to become a competent researcher and teacher. People from New Zealand – and the same applied to Australia – mostly went to the UK or the USA. Much in Australasia derived from the UK and the USA, perhaps with a stronger influence in New Zealand from the UK. If you wanted to advance, you looked elsewhere. It was only just starting that people began to recognise that there were strengths locally. It is almost a comedy that gardeners began to realise that instead of importing European flora into their gardens, where especially in Australia's dryness they would struggle to survive, they should cultivate native indigenous species which had over millions of years adapted to the soils and climate and are very beautiful.

We were not there yet in theology, although it was beginning in the areas of Practical Theology. The rules of social engagement in the USA and the UK are not the same as in Australasia. Especially in Australia in its pioneering days the need for generations to find solidarity with one another in encountering the challenges of frontier conditions subverted the pretensions of the class systems of England, despite attempts by the Anglican church to be its purveyor, and the apparent easy first level of engagement characteristic of America did not match the sometimes reserved responses of the people down under. You could not simply take the latest insight into congregational mission and development from either and plant it in Australasia. Its countries were coming of age, developing their own cultures.

In addition, their engagement both with their impressive indigenous cultures and with the large influx of settlers in the post World War 2 period heightened awareness of cultural distinctiveness. They were no longer to see themselves as outposts of the UK and USA. Enhanced sensitivity to diversity of cultures also had an impact on biblical studies, because they, too, are a form of cross-cultural encounter. This helped the shift, even in conservative circles, from fundamentalism to a sense of distance and proximity in dealing with scripture, so that people were realising that to engage the scriptures one needed to learn not only their languages but also their culture.

I had personal experience in cross-cultural engagement in having married a German wife. Looking to postgraduate study in Germany I was learning German, had done a year at university in my BA, and had my own personal tutor, though that was more frustrating than productive because Gisela found no great joy in being asked for alternative German expressions let alone grammatical explanations. Here, too, I had to do it mostly on my own.

Where to go? I greatly valued Ernst Käsemann's works in translation, mediated through SCM Press. A postcard response from him suggested I might look at Lukanischer Moralismus. Then the connection went rather silent, until Eduard Schweizer did a lecture tour down under and suggested I rather approach Ferdinand Hahn of Mainz: "er ist sehr gut mit Ausländern". Contact made, I was away. I had already taken an interest in the development of christology and, of course, his work, Christologische Hoheitstitel, was seminal. Painfully slow at first, I worked my way through it. Not waiting for a suggested theme, I proposed doing a tradition-historical study of the letter to the Hebrews. I think my initiative partly caught him by surprise, but he welcomed the suggestion. I was raring to go.

So, for three years, I entered the German academic world, arriving in Mainz in April 1970, and completing my dissertation by June, 1972. I was fortunate to have the back-up of Gisela's family, at that time living in Erbach, south of Ulm, and of Gisela, herself, who gained employment at IBM. But again, I was on my own, with relatively infrequent meetings with my Doktorvater. My spinning head after listening to my first German lecture adapted and I soon resolved that, since most of my conversations were in German, I should write the dissertation in

German: Sohn und Hoherpriester. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes. Some coursework was required, so I enjoyed doing Tractate Joma with Otto Böcher, Faith with Herbert Braun, and New Testament Theology with Ferdinand Hahn, which all came back to me as familiar when he finally published his Theologie des Neuen Testaments many years later.

My contribution to the Doktorandenseminar was to suggest that instead of sitting for hours afternoons in a smoke filled room, we should meet in the evening with tea and coffee, which morphed in the imagination of Ferdinand and Willie Pesch to meeting over a glass of wine! I engaged as best I could and with the freedom which it seemed to me should belong to good scholarship, including challenging the view of my Doktovater, who remarked one evening afterwards that it was unusual for a doctorand to question his Doktorvater, but found himself acknowledging that it was not wrong. I had suggested he was guilty of Paulinismus.

These were turbulent times in Mainz, the flow on effect of the student revolts of the 1960s, which upended the openness of Josef Ratzinger and bothered many more. What? No academic regalia? The faculty was split between the Otto-Braun-Metzgerei, allegedly Marxist and formerly including Luise Schottroff and the others on the right wing, where it seemed that Ferdinand belonged. On my first day I saw "Lenin lebt" painted across the statue of Johannes Gutenberg after whom the university was named and learned later that this Auferstehungsparole was the work of Protestant theology students. I identified with neither wing because I could see value on each side. It struck me, coming from ordinand training enriched by insights of psychology, how backward many of the interactions were – much catching up to be done there, better integration of theology and praxis urgently needed. In that respect they were backward compared with Australasia, an interesting realisation. We, too, therefore had something to offer. The appointment of Dietrich Ritschl to the faculty brought better perspectives in that regard, but the hope that he would succeed to calming the tension was unrealistic.

Back to New Zealand with a six month old daughter and placed in full time ministry in the Remuera parish, I faced a new beginning. Who would understand and appreciate what I had done? Few. How should they? Was I now going to treat my doctorate as a qualification and cease researching? Definitely not! How would I cope in full time ministry while sustaining research? I was fortunate to be asked to teach at St John's Anglican Theological College, with which Trinity College had merged. Often I taught a de facto half time load. My strategy to stay alive at research level was to take copious notes from journals—I still have heaps of odd scraps of paper from that—but also to form the New Testament Research Group to gather the few New Testament specialists and listen to papers and have the occasional visiting professor. That was my strategy for the following 25 years until university administration overwhelmed me.

I also took every opportunity to give occasional lectures both to clergy and to lay groups. These were the days of the revival of ecumenism. We did as many things together as were best done together. My involvement went far beyond New Testament teaching and writing for educators, to running listening skills workshops, organising ecumenical studies and workshops, a national program on understanding violence, and one to one counselling. I even got to the point of wondering: should I specialise in pastoral theology? No. The church at home and the World Council of Churches and the German church had invested in me as New Testament specialist and there were very few with my qualifications and competence. But I was on my own. Very few knew what research meant or valued it.

Late 1977 Robert Maddox, whom I met during his sabbatical year in Mainz in 1970, lecturer at Leigh College, Sydney, and who had written on Luke-Acts, informed me of a new full time position as New Testament Lecturer in the Perth Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia which had come into being the previous year bringing together the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. The Principal, Michael Owen, had also studied in Germany and the year before me had completed a doctorate in Heidelberg in Systematic Theology. At last someone who knew and appreciated what I had done! As in New Zealand the Presbyterians had a stronger academic tradition. I was enthused. The Hall also had good study leave provisions, which enabled us to spend eight months in Munich 1982–83, to which Ferdinand had moved.

Already in New Zealand I had embarked on a traditio-historical study of the fourth gospel. I pursued it in Munich. The fruit was "The Central Structure of Johannine Christology," *NTS* 30 (1984) 188–216. Already in 1978 I produced articles for *NTS* and *JBL* on christology and again in 1982 in *CBQ*. It took till 1989 before my monograph, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* appeared. Reflecting in part the renewed focus on synchronic analysis I focused on the received text. The work had been a long time in gestation. My dissertation, Sohn und Hoherpriester, appeared in 1981, delayed for reasons which lay with Ferdinand beyond my control.

With regard to method I was eclectic. I rejected what I sometime saw as missionary obsession with the final text and suspected that at times this was conservatism in disguise. It was safe to talk about literary structures as it was safe to talk about archaeology or language, because one didn't have to face up to theology and history with its fallibilities. I never saw any need to embrace extreme scepticism. Pursuit of the historical issues surrounding Jesus was to be engaged in the risks of historicity and for me making that dogmatically unrespectable made little sense. I kept believing that asking questions was never inappropriate. My faith does not need protection from the ambiguities of history.

In the mid 1980s we in Perth began explorations which would bring theology finally into the secular university system. The ecumenical mood had brought separate faculties together already before the Uniting Church was formed. That included the Anglicans at Wollaston College. There had been some attempts to make a link with the University of Western Australia. In Perth we had four main faculties of theology: Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Uniting. We used to meet in the local chapter of the Australia and Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS), an Australasian network of theological providers. In 1984, partly inspired by a conversation between the Anglican Archbishop Peter Carnley and the Vice-Chancellor, we began explorations about a partnership with Murdoch University, a new university founded in the mid 1960s seeking to provide an alternative, open, flexible form of tertiary study.

The initiative was not alone. Already the Adelaide College of Divinity, the umbrella organisation of ANZATS in Adelaide, had developed an affiliation with Flinders University, similar in age and style to Murdoch. Brisbane had similar the Brisbane College of Theology which developed an affiliation with Griffith University and the Sydney College of Divinity eventually formed an affiliation with Charles Sturt University, but some of its members had earlier taught biblical courses for Sydney university. Melbourne had the longstanding Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD) which integrated its schools and also reached out to other areas, such as Perth. Before 1986 we taught courses for degrees and diplomas offered by MCD. In 1983 we formed accordingly the Perth College of Divinity to negotiate with Murdoch University. On the other side of the Tasman Sea in Auckland there was a similar consortium formed to link up with Auckland university.

Thus, in all these cities there were initiatives to shift theology from being something done in a church seminary shaped by its needs, to have theology taught at universities, as it had been for years in Germany and elsewhere. The processes of negotiation were complex and needed to ensure two main things: that units would be offered for university awarded degrees which had academic integrity and could take their stand alongside other disciplines in terms of academic rigour; and that the specific needs of the churches would also be met. Mostly the latter were met outside the university degree program, sometimes, all units of practical theology, sometimes, just some, as, for instance, at Murdoch where uniquely both practical theology units and pastoral placements were integrated within the degrees. The Murdoch people argued: we do it for school placements in education degrees. Why not for theology?

The transition to teaching on campus occasioned some interesting exchanges. We probably began with such sensitivity to the academic that we set the bar too high in assessments. Administrative staff at the university end needed to understand these new units. An examination supervisor for the unit Pauline Epistles, for instance, when asked by a late student whether Pauline Epistles was there, consulted her list, thinking it was the name of a student, and declared: no, she wasn't there. The university's education skills department approached us in the first year with the suggestion that, since students were often very deeply involved in what they were studying, we should perhaps run a tutorial group where they could freely discuss their issues. After all, that worked in Women's Studies. Some academic staff imagined that lectures would be sermons and tutorials, prayer meetings and that we were not to be taken seriously at an academic level. Collocation in the same building, however, meant lots of conversations which quickly allayed such fears. Quality research publications and international recognition put such fears to rest for most. There were no opening prayers or religious rites in lectures. At the same time the university encouraged us, as they encouraged the sociologists and gender studies disciplines, to engage with contemporary issues, as long as it was done openly and with critical discipline.

All but the Perth-Murdoch partnership, however, still had theology taught outside the university campus in church seminaries. Murdoch had all teaching on campus, a huge benefit for staff and students, who could be enriched by the interchange with other staff and students from other disciplines. Only the Baptists in Perth stayed on their campus. Murdoch's model was progressive and soon had the university successfully persuading the federal government that it should fund theology like any other discipline. There developed a joint funding model. Staff had fractional contracts with the university, funded on the basis of student numbers and independent fractional contracts with their church institutions, making it possible to have a larger faculty with people in the five main areas.

When numbers dropped at the Baptist College and they came under pressure to teach on the university campus, they withdrew. The Catholics, enthusiastic at the beginning, were overtaken by the foundation of Notre Dame University in Perth. Their authorities took their staff across to be its faculty. Sadly, pressures in the Uniting Church, especially from those who prioritised lay education and in the light of falling student numbers, led to their withdrawal from the partnership in 2018, leaving only the Anglicans in the partnership and in 2020 the university resolved that low numbers have made theology unviable.

Unfortunately, this collapse had its parallels in Brisbane and Auckland and Adelaide's arrangement with Flinders is limited largely to the Uniting Church. Sydney continues its relationship with Charles Sturt, which now has associated schools in Brisbane and Adelaide. Melbourne College of Divinity received the rights to become the University of Divinity, a single discipline university. State law blocked incorporation of theology into Melbourne University. Alongside these are other networks of non-university linked theological colleges, such as the Australian College of Theology and the Australian Catholic University with main campuses in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

The collapse of so many affiliations with universities is regrettable. Partly it reflects the increasing commercialisation of the university sector and the squeeze on their funding and partly trends among churches and church leadership which increasingly, it seems, deem theological study, beyond the minimum needed for ministry, a luxury they cannot afford. For some, it seems, the priority is training skilled community builders who will help the church grow or at least survive. This is happening at a time when lay people and many clergy are eager to develop a more informed faith. I am one of a number now quite extensively involved in responding to this need, but few of us have the competence to go beyond basic information and skills training.

I found I had to work hard to continue as an active researcher. Few in the church understood what that entailed, but at least in Perth I had colleagues who did and the university was of enormous assistance in affirming rigorous academic scholarship. Perth's unique arrangement of having theology integrated within the university on its campus was a huge advantage both educationally and academically. Interchange with other disciplines was enriching and so good for students. Many students took theology units into their non theology degrees, some out of faith interest, some out of general interest. This, too, took us out of the safe closet of teaching only Christian students. We thrived. At one point Murdoch theology was ranked top theology faculty for research alongside Australian Catholic University, the only two given the high level 4 ranking.

Inevitably the university connection brought with it university responsibilities and for me, having been appointed in 1994 to the most senior position among the theology staff, as Associate Professor, and then as full Professor from 2000, that meant academic leadership. I was initially Chair of the discipline and then in 1998 appointed Head of the School of Social Inquiry, to which Sociology, History, Community Development, and Tourism belonged alongside Theology. In 1996 I was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and am one of only four New Testament colleagues in the Fellowship and at that stage one of only three Fellows in the Humanities in the university. Those connections, too, enriched my perspective and brought responsibilities. I served the Academy as Chair for three years of the Classics Section and similarly of the Religion Section.

I had to work hard to maintain my activity as a New Testament researcher. I kept the local NT Research going up until the mid 1990s. Perth is the most isolated city of one million or more inhabitants in the world, the nearest next city of that size being 2 hours flying time away. My strategies for survival were to purchase books, both English and German, and to arrange to attend the conferences of the Society for New Testament Studies (SNTS) as often as possible, to which I was elected in 1996. I was able to draw on university funds to travel to those conferences, usually taking place early in second semester, so that my units had a late start. Going nearly every year, usually to Europe or the USA, helped me develop connections with international scholars.

My next major piece of research after my book on John's christology, recently extensively revised and expanded as Jesus in John's Gospel, was Jesus' Attitude towards the Law. A Study of the Gospels (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). This was a shift from christology to Law and ethics. It also brought me into closer engagement with Jewish literature. Already in my doctoral studies in 1970–72 I had engaged with 11QMelch and I continued interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls. A stay at the École Biblique in 1988 in Jerusalem enhanced my awareness of the world of Judaism of the time, with visits to Galilee with Annette Steudel and to Qumran with Hartmut Stegemann. The work on the Law was a major undertaking, entailing engagement with all the gospels, including Thomas. The focus was how those texts portrayed Jesus' attitude, but it also provided a platform for engagement with historical Jesus research.

My visits to Europe usually meant a stay with my wife's people in Esslingen near Stuttgart and not far from Tübingen. I transitioned over the years from borrowing texts to photocopying them and then photographing them. During the 1980s I transitioned from the manual to electric and the golf ball typewriter and making corrections with paper and paste to computers, completing my book on John in 1989 on a Commodore 128 dot matrix printer, and then to more sophisticated proportional font printers and finally into the world of the internet and interlibrary loans. I even remember my amusement to find that my university secured a book on inter-library loan for me from as far away as Tübingen university. The open shelf library of its Theologicum was such a boon in the pre-internet days and also beyond, although I found I needed it less once the interlibrary loan system came into full swing.

As churches began to struggle with issues of sexuality and gender, I was struck by what I saw as the inadequacy of available resources for understanding attitudes toward sexuality in Early Judaism and the New Testament. Some were beginning to appear on homosexuality, but on sexual issues in the broader sense there was little. Having researched attitudes towards Torah I was ideally placed to do the research that would meet that need. It was, therefore, in response to the need rather than any particular interest that set me on course to sexuality research. I had already worked with the Jewish literature to some degree and when Wolfgang Kraus suggested we co-chair a seminar on the LXX and the NT for SNTS, this brought me to publish my first book in the field, The Septuagint, Sexuality and the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) an expansion of what began as a seminar paper.

Having completed my term as Head of School in 2003 I could turn my attention to such research. I resolved to apply to the Australian Research Council for a full time five year Professorial Fellowship to investigate attitudes toward sexuality in Jewish and Christian literature in the Hellenistic Greco-Roman period up to the end of the first century CE. I had learned how to apply for grants partly from personal experience but also from assessing other people's applications as chair of the School Research Committee. Again, this was a world away from what churches could offer.

It was not difficult to make the case that such research was highly relevant for the wider Australian community where people, especially in church groups, were grappling with issues of sexuality and gender. This would and did have an impact and remains relevant and highly sought after information. Thus, my final five years before retirement, mid 2005 – mid 2010, were spent employed full time by the university as a Professorial Fellow. I worked largely at home. The university interlibrary loan system was outstanding in securing resources for me. International visits especially to Europe supplemented my resources. My engagement with the Enoch Seminar and participation in the IOQS and LXX Deutsch enhanced my awareness and contacts.

The enrichment of spending probably four of the five years' worth engaging with Jewish texts was enormous and produced detailed studies in four major monographs covering Enoch literature, Aramaic Levi, Jubilees, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, and the diverse so-called pseudepigraphical and apocryphal literature. The fifth volume dealt with New Testament literature. Most of it had little to do with issues of same-sex relations, though as I moved to diaspora literature like Philo it came more to the fore. I had committed myself not only to do the research but also to mediate it to a wider readership. I have always seen this as a responsibility and inevitably I have been asked to do this on numerous occasions, in face-to-face presentations and in writings for a wider readership.

In the process of both the research and its dissemination I have been struck with the hazards or contaminations I have encountered. I have found that many people approach sexual issues with strong agendas which I think frequently distort what they write. For some, it is because sexuality is very personal or tied up with moral issues and "sin". For many it is because of the authority they attribute to scripture either as the "infallible Word of God" or as some more theologically distant attachment nevertheless to its authority. I see no reason to treat the writings the Bible contains as anything other than human, as they reflect a faith that I, too, at times can share. They carry for me no monopoly on truth, but this is not the stance I kept encountering. This meant that unlike when studying Plato or the Dead Sea Scrolls there was another factor in the mix at both ends of the theological spectrum, right and left. Just as much, I needed of course to be alert to any distortions or blind spots I brought, the reason why I am committed to working within a scholarly community to see things in a broader perspective.

Some at the more conservative end see no problems in imposing the moral views of biblical writers upon their contemporaries, but many conservatives do see problems, especially as they have had to acknowledge that there really are LGBTIQ people, sometimes even within their own families. I observe their stress with sympathy, but I have needed to call out when in order to reconcile what they realise with what the biblical writers, especially Paul, say, they try to argue that Paul was concerned only with acts or intent to act or only with excessive passion, contrary to what the text says. Similarly I read works of so-called progressives urging that Paul was just playing a rhetorical game in Romans 1, not really meaning it, or that he was concerned only with pederasty or same-sex relations in cultic contexts, none of which does justice to the texts. Reading Paul with the background of having researched contemporary Jewish literature made it impossible for me to see it as anything other than the application of the broad assumption that there are no homosexual people because God made only male and female and all orientation, passion, and action otherwise is perversion. I am happy to acknowledge that this was Paul's view and respectfully disagree. Why not?

Effectively I retired at the end of 2005, and officially in 2010, but continued in writing and research. In 2013 we hosted the SNTS meeting in Perth and from 2014 I was appointed Assistant Secretary for International Initiatives. This brought me into contact above all with the non-traditional regions for New Testament teaching and research beyond North America and Europe and the closely associated countries like Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, and South Africa. There have been important developments in Eastern Europe, including engagement with scholars from the Orthodox tradition, most recently with Russia. In Africa there are subregions around Kenya in the east and Nigeria in the west as well as Francophone Africa. Latin America and the Caribbean includes Spanish and Portuguese speakers, and in the Asia Pacific region India is a major player alongside a range of others, including the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong, also with links to wider mainland China and some other areas hardly touched.

Just as the recovery of women's perspectives which often brought a broader vision and deeper understanding to the field, so scholars from outside the traditional regions have brought new perspectives despite most of them having developed their research competence through completing PhDs in the standard western countries. The greater cultural diversity has the potential to enhance the sense that in NT scholarship we are engaged in cross-cultural encounter. The importance of the complex issues of culture seen in our own day sensitises us to the importance of the cultures in which writers of the New Testament and those they describe were active. That can be international, but it can also be local.

I was greatly enriched by having the opportunity to teach over a number of years at Nungalinya Aboriginal and Islander Theological College in Darwin, a full week each year, both sitting in class and lying out on the lawn at night with the families. I once partnered with one of our Aboriginal ministers in taking students and their families along with an equal number of indigenous families away for a weekend of sharing the listening. Listening cross culturally is what we do as New Testament scholars with the text and what we can also promote in our communities.

Across the range of theological perspectives, from conservative to progressive, with hermeneutical preferences, determined ideologically or otherwise, there is a commonality in recognition that these writings must be understood within their cultural and religious context. They are not timeless chapters in a timeless book quarantined from the real world. The usually naïve fundamentalism which perpetuates such notions finds it hard to survive once people learn to read the texts seriously in their context. This has made it possible for SNTS to embrace a diversity of scholars from a confessional or ideological perspective because they know they have so much in common in the disciplines of literary, historical, and cultural research.

Most New Testament researchers are engaged in helping resource ministers and pastors and increasingly lay people who seek an informed faith. Gone are the days when being a minister or priest guaranteed some standing or authority in our wider very secular society, in part reflecting the public shame which some have brought upon the church and in part because one of the characteristics of Australian society is suspicion of people who claim authority for themselves. This reflects the origins of settlement where the class system was mostly unsustainable in the face of the harsh challenges of the environment. The Church, let alone its scholars, cannot, therefore, pretend to have some special authority with regard to the COVID crisis or climate change or poverty. It and they will be listened to only if they make sense.

Increasingly those who bear the Christian tradition recognise that they have no monopoly on care and compassion, but need to see themselves as partners with many in the wider community who, sometimes without Christian or religious labels, offer a model of informed love which reminds us of Jesus. I have been very aware that as a New Testament scholar and theologian I have a twofold role. One is to try to undo the damage done by the tradition I bear. That means in part helping church folk catch up with the Jesus models in the wider community. The second is to share information which will enable people to have a thoughtful and informed faith rather than be trapped in the fundamentalisms of the past. I know that many are hungry for that and often feel betrayed by the deceit of clergy who hide information, sometimes unwittingly, from their congregations, leaving what they learned in their education of the tradition's complexities and ambiguities, let alone its harmful aspects, unaddressed, thus offering false hope. In effect, they lie. The challenge to scholars and the church is not to pose as authorities, but to get their own house in order.

The best practice is where preachers make connections between the tensions in the world of Jesus and the tensions in contemporary society and help people engage a spirituality in which they see their calling and the calling of the church to be "good news for the poor". Many have lived within narrow systems of understanding where good news is about securing a place in heaven rather than hell and avoiding anything that would jeopardise their individual reward beyond this life. Increasingly and partly through good historical scholarship and exposition people are seeing that the good news is about much more.

In our setting that means embracing the very multicultural nature of society, listening to the wisdom but also the pain of indigenous people, countering the xenophobia that ignores the needs of asylum seekers, challenging the greed that exploits and that has a vested interest in protecting fossil fuels, constantly revisiting discrimination and violence against women, helping people understand that LGBTIQ people are not perverts. New Testament scholars should not pretend to have some superior expertise for dealing with such matters.

We do however have some distinctive responsibilities. One is to expose where the Christian tradition has been responsible for some of what has gone wrong. That is an important negative task with a hermeneutical dimension. The positive task is to help people develop motivation through an informed spirituality that will energise positive engagement in all these areas through focussing on what gives life. I recall a conversation with Ernst Käsemann some 40 years ago in which he shared the reflection, that if he were beginning again, he would do just that: focus on those texts which are transformative and which help people to be transformative.

Reading the New Testament in Aotearoa New Zealand

Paul Trebilco

1. Introduction

I greatly welcome the opportunity to reflect on the contexts and conditions under which I have conducted New Testament research and to reflect on reading the New Testament here in Aotearoa New Zealand.[1] Since this book relates to the contexts in which New Testament research is carried out, I will begin by giving some details about myself.

I was born in Aotearoa New Zealand and completed a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Chemistry at the University of Canterbury and a Bachelor of Divinity at the University of Otago, both in Aotearoa New Zealand. I then completed my PhD at Durham University in the United Kingdom under the supervision of Professor James Dunn. As I was completing my doctorate, a position came up at the Theological Hall, Knox College in Dunedin, to which I was appointed in 1988. This was a College connected to the University of Otago where I had studied for my Bachelor of Divinity degree.

The Theological Hall, Knox College was the training college of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, but the staff at the Theological Hall, together with staff at a local Catholic College, were also Honorary Lecturers in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Otago, which awarded the degrees in Theology. Accordingly, I was part of a Church Theological College which was involved in both the academic study of Theology and ministerial formation, as well as a teacher in the Faculty of Theology at a State University.

In 1997, the way Theology was taught at the University of Otago was restructured, with the University deciding to establish its own Theology programme, with staff employed in the same way as those in any other academic discipline at the University. Hence, the University advertised new positions for University-appointed Theology teachers. Those of us who had been employed by Church Colleges were free to apply to become University staff, and I was

1 “Aotearoa” is the Māori name for this country.

fortunate to be appointed to one of the five new University positions. Religious Studies had been taught at the University of Otago since 1966, and the University decided to link together Theology and Religious Studies and so created a Department of Theology and Religious Studies.[2]

Accordingly, since 1997, I have been employed by the University of Otago, where I have taught Theology within the Division of Humanities, alongside colleagues in a range of disciplines, such as Classics, History, Philosophy and Politics.[3] We are the only University Programme in Theology in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our Theology Programme is also unusual when compared with the situation in Australia, where most Theology is undertaken in State-accredited Church Colleges, or if there are connections with a University, the arrangement for Theology is rather different from those for any other subject.

Since 1997, Theology at Otago has maintained strong connections with churches in Aotearoa New Zealand. The churches are the main employers of our graduates, and so it has been important for us to maintain strong links with the many churches in the country. In addition, in University terms, it is important that a University Department is in dialogue with the key "stakeholders" of a particular academic discipline or area of study in the wider community, and so the Law Faculty maintains strong links with the Legal profession, the College of Education with the Teaching profession, and so on. For us then, as a University Theology Programme, it has been important to maintain strong relationships with churches, and to seek to gain their confidence and support. Over the years, our Theology teachers have also all had a personal faith commitment and so have wanted to work in conjunction with the Christian church.

2. My Research

What has shaped my disciplinary interests in particular ways? How have the cultural, political, social and religious conditions of the environment in which I live affected my New Testament research?

2 The history of the Theological Hall, and the changes that occurred in 1997, are recounted in S. Rae, *Challenge and Change: An Account of Theological Education and Ministry Training at Knox College, Dunedin, 1976–2010* (Dunedin: Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, 2011).

3 In 2019, the Department of Theology and Religion was restructured at the University of Otago. Theology teachers became part of the Theology Programme which was incorporated into a new School of Arts, and the Religion Programme was incorporated into a new School of Social Sciences. However, this has been an internal organisational change, and has not significantly impacted our research.

I began my doctoral research in 1983, at a time when E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977)[4] was continuing to impact New Testament Studies, as it would continue to do for many years. I was greatly impressed by Sanders' work, but noted that he had not discussed the relationship between Paul and Diaspora Judaism. I considered that since virtually all of Paul's mission work was undertaken in the Diaspora, a study along similar lines to Sanders' but focussing on Paul and Diaspora Judaism would be worthwhile. As I began my doctoral work on this, it quickly became apparent that such a study was a huge undertaking, and so I focussed on Paul and Judaism in Asia Minor. This too proved too large, and so my thesis finally focussed solely on Judaism in Asia Minor, which was just manageable as a topic, and one that had been comparatively overlooked. It was published as *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS 66; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). This area of research was thus chosen solely for its academic interest and for academic reasons relating to developments in the discipline area, rather than because of any other factors.

I began my second major research project in 1993, and this project was to take me just over a decade and result in the book *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (WUNT 166; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004). Why was I interested in Ephesus and its Christian communities? Having become familiar with Jewish life in Asia Minor, it seemed worthwhile to continue to work on that geographical region, but to look at earliest Christianity, particularly since I was teaching solely New Testament courses by this time (rather than any courses on Judaism). Further, the life of the early Christians in Ephesus had been comparatively ignored; while there were a number of studies of the early Christians in Rome and Antioch,[5] I discovered when I began working on Ephesus that no one had really studied the life of the Christians in the city in depth.[6]

4 E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1977).

5 Notable at the time in 1993, on Rome was P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten. Untersuchungen zur Sozialgeschichte* (WUNT 2.18; Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987) and on Antioch and Rome, R. E. Brown and J. P. Meier*, Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

6 By the time I finished the book in mid-2002, other work had come out on Ephesus, notably M. Günther, *Die Frühgeschichte des Christentums in Ephesus* (Arbeiten zur Religion und Geschichte des Urchristentums 1; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995); H. Koester, ed., *Ephesus, Metropolis of Asia. An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (Valley Forge, PA: TPI, 1995); R. Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (BZNW 80; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996); W. Thiessen, *Christen in Ephesus. Die historische und theologische Situation in vorpaulinischer und paulinischer Zeit und zur Zeit der Apostelgeschichte und der Pastoralbriefe* (Texte und Arbeiten zum

Against the background of my work on Jewish communities in Asia Minor, this lacuna in New Testament research attracted me.

This brings me to a feature of my religious context here in Aotearoa New Zealand which also meant that I was interested in this area of study. I am an ordained Methodist minister, although for a variety of reasons I have been an active Presbyterian in Dunedin for many years. Generally, in the past, both churches have been very broad churches theologically. I would regard myself as an evangelical, and I have been particularly influenced by British evangelicalism, although I have learnt a great deal from a whole range of theological positions, as well as from people writing without clear theological presuppositions. Historically, the evangelical theological position has been one option among a range of others in New Zealand Christianity, and this is true for both the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches here, as well as for some other denominations.

This ecclesiastical context has led me to be very interested in the issue of unity and diversity in contemporary Christianity. What theological factors might unify the contemporary church? While diversity was evident, significant and important in New Zealand Christianity, were there limits to diversity, and if so what were they? These were important issues in New Zealand Christianity when I first began studying theology in 1980, and they continue to be important today. It was these issues that led me to want to undertake my PhD under Professor James Dunn. As an undergraduate I had read his *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*,[7] and found it to be exceedingly helpful. It was also clear that Christology was foundational in the New Testament debate about unity and diversity, and in this regard I found Dunn's *Christology in the Making*,[8] both stimulating and challenging.

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neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 12; Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1995). However, I was fortunate that none of these other books sought to do quite what I had attempted. Other works on Ephesus were to follow, notably, T. Georges, ed., *Ephesos* (Civitatum Orbis Mediterranei Studia 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); J. R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn, eds., *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series, 9; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2018); D. Schowalter, S. Ladstätter, S. J. Friesen, C. Thomas, eds., *Religion in Ephesos Reconsidered: Archaeology of Spaces, Structures, and Objects* (NovTSupp 177; Leiden: Brill, 2019); M. Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus. A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (WUNT 242; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); S. Witetschek, *Ephesische Enthüllungen 1: Frühe Christen in einer antiken Grosstadt Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage nach den Kontexten der Johannesapokalypse* (Biblical Tools and Studies 6. Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

7 J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1977; 3rd ed., 2006).

8 J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM Press, 1980; 2nd ed., 1989).

Accordingly, I was very interested in the debate in New Testament Studies about unity and diversity among early Christ-believers. Although I did not realise it when I began working on *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, as work progressed on that project it became apparent to me that the evidence relating to early Christian life in Ephesus was very significant in this regard. Ephesus was a city where there was more than one strand of early Christian life.[9] The earliest community in the city was a Pauline community and evidence for this community in the generation after Paul was provided by the Pastoral Epistles. These epistles also gave evidence for the presence in Ephesus of a group of teachers whom the author of the Pastorals regarded as false teachers. Good arguments could also be mounted that John's Gospel was written in Ephesus, and the Johannine Letters gave evidence for both the Johannine community and a group of Johannine secessionists who had broken away from that community. The Book of Revelation provided evidence for the Nicolaitans, whom John of Revelation regarded as false teachers. In Ephesus, then, there was evidence for a number of different Christ-believing groups.

I became very interested in the issue of how these different groups related to each other? Did they have contact with one another, and if so, what sort of interactions occurred? Further, Ephesus turned out to be a city where we could see the early Christians exploring what they regarded as correct or authentic belief and the limits of correct belief. This involved the construction of boundaries in relation to faith: when did differences in belief, or diversity of faith, spill over into incorrect belief or unacceptable diversity? I found this construction of group boundaries to be extremely relevant to my own context, where that testing of beliefs, the discussion of core beliefs and of the limits of diversity, was something that interested me and concerned me. I did not know when I began the project on *The Early Christians in Ephesus* that this was an area I would investigate, but as it turned out it was of considerable relevance to my context and I think to contemporary Christian faith in Aotearoa New Zealand, but also around the world. This certainly kept me engaged in what became a long project.

One other feature of that study also particularly interested me because of my context here in Aotearoa New Zealand. In chapter 8 of *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, I considered the dimensions of contextualization of Christian faith and life in Ephesus. To what extent was the language or conceptual world of the city of Ephesus drawn upon in order to express the message that the early Christians in the city wanted to express? To what extent did the early Christians in Ephesus

9 See my *The Early Christians in Ephesus* for the points that follow.

belong in that city, and use the idioms of the city in their communication? This is an area we can explore, partly because we have such rich inscriptional and archaeological evidence for the city of Ephesus itself. In studying the early Christians in Ephesus against the background of our knowledge of the city, it became apparent that contextualization was an important and significant topic. I found that the most beneficial way in which to address this matter of contextualization was through considering the significance of acculturation, assimilation, and accommodation, which were analytical tools that had been developed and used by John Barclay in his work, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE).*[10] Further, it became apparent that different strands of early Christianity in Ephesus were quite different from each other when we considered their acculturation, assimilation, and accommodation.

This was of great interest to me because in the late 1980s and the 1990s in New Zealand (and continuing through into the present), there had been significant discussion about the contextualisation of Christian faith. This was a new area to me at the time, and I was not very sure how to respond to these developments. But as I studied the Pastorals, the Johannine Letters and Revelation in particular, I came to realise that there was a good deal of interesting evidence in this regard.

In the Pastorals, we find a very significant amount of evidence for the use of local language and concepts as a vehicle to express the Christian faith. This became for me a Scriptural warrant and a Scriptural model for contextualisation. Epiphany Christology in the Pastorals was a particularly interesting instance of this. Here was an example of using the concept of epiphany, which was being used in Ephesus in relation to both the Artemis cult and the Imperial cult, as a way of expressing the same ideas about Christ as had been expressed in different language in earlier Pauline texts such as Phil 2:6–11 and Col 1:15–20. Hence, the language of epiphany was being used to express fundamentally the same Christology of the pre-existent Christ becoming human which was found in earlier texts, but it was now expressed in new language that I think resonated with wider "pagan" culture in Ephesus (and elsewhere). A key goal of this acculturation was to build bridges with the wider society, in order to foster mission. However, in some areas, particularly relating to worship and to wealth, acculturation was used in an oppositional way, with the Pastor maintaining a polemical or counter-cultural edge with regard to the wider society. Hence,

10 See J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), particularly 82–102. My interest was also later sparked by D. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005).

there was a significant oppositional dimension to accommodation, and so we should not see accommodation as indiscriminate.[11]

By contrast, in the Johannine Letters, there was little evidence of acculturation or contextualisation. Rather, in-house language seemed to prevail, with little use of concepts or language from the wider environment. Revelation was different again, for here it was evident that some of the language and concepts from the wider society were being used to critique that wider society. Acculturation was being used to build not bridges but walls.[12]

It thus became clear that there was a variety of approaches to this whole issue of contextualisation within Scripture itself, which in some ways mirrored the variety of approaches I encountered on this matter within contemporary Christianity. Here was a part of my research that became increasingly interesting to me precisely because of conversations that were going on around me in theology and in the church.

The relation between Christ and culture in general was part of this topic too. One key issue in my ecclesial context was (and in many ways continues to be) this relationship of Gospel and culture. As communities that are seeking to be authentically Christian today, when can we "go along" with culture and when should we critique or oppose culture? I saw precisely these issues in the Pastoral Epistles and in Revelation. The Pastorals could be seen as reasonably culture-affirming, while still maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian faith, while John in Revelation opposed and critiqued empire and imperial culture. By contrast, the Johannine letters seemed more isolationists, taken up with internal debates.

My third major research project resulted in the book *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). This grew out of chapter 12 in *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, where I considered self-designations in the Pastorals, the Johannine Letters, and Revelation. This discussion was part of the wider argument that the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters were written to different communities in Ephesus, and that Revelation was written to both communities in the city.

My interest in this topic of self-designations was stimulated by this question: "If a Christ-believer from the Pauline community met a Christ-believer from the

11 For detailed discussion on this, see Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 354–384.

12 For detailed discussion on this, see Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 384–402. I developed these ideas further in P. R. Trebilco, "Engaging – or Not Engaging – the City: Reading 1–2 Timothy and the Johannine Letters in the City of Ephesus," in *The Urban World and the First Christians*, S. Walton, P. R. Trebilco and D. W. J. Gill, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2017), 160–186.

Johannine community in Ephesus, would they come to realise that they were part of the same wider movement?" Almost certainly they would not have said "Are you a Christian?", since the label "Christianoi" only seems to have become more prevalent in the early second century.[13] So what "labels" would they have used for themselves?

I found this a helpful way to think about identity issues in general. It opened up a window onto the question of what was at the heart of belonging to a particular Christ-believing community? What was absolutely fundamental to their sense of identity? Since how we refer to ourselves, or label ourselves, reveals a great deal about what we regard as important, this was another way of looking at the issue of unity and diversity in earliest Christianity. Did different early Christians and different early Christian groups affirm similar things when it came to what was fundamental to their sense of identity, as this was expressed by their self-designations? And did they sometimes say the same or similar things, but express this in different words, thus demonstrating quite a degree of diversity? These questions were certainly of intrinsic interest in their own right, but they were also of interest to me in my Christian context in Aotearoa New Zealand, where Christian diversity was very obvious, but Christian unity more difficult to discern. Further, in the post-Christian society of Aotearoa New Zealand, it was becoming increasingly important to think about what is at the heart of Christian faith. What really matters?

This led into my fourth major research project which resulted in the book *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament: Early Christian Communities and the Formation of Group Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). This was a companion volume to *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*. One issue for a group is what we call ourselves; the reverse side of this question is what we call "the other," or outsiders. One dimension of understanding who "we" are, is understanding "them," or "the other." A key issue then is that of the designations used for these "outsiders." This was an issue that had generally been overlooked in contemporary New Testament studies, and so was of intrinsic interest to me and it related strongly to my on-going interest in identity construction in earliest Christianity. But it was also a very significant issue in wider society in Aotearoa New Zealand, where even though we often consider ourselves to be a harmonious society, there is a significant undercurrent in society of discontent against minorities. Even more, it hardly needs to be said that racism, xenophobia,

13 See Trebilco, *Self-designations and Group Identity*, 272–297.

and other social justice issues which at their heart involve the "othering of the other" continue to be huge issues in our global world.

In studying this issue I was struck by two points in particular that impacted on me in my current environment. One was the radical inclusiveness of Jesus.[14] Through his practise of table fellowship, Jesus accepted into his movement those labelled as "sinners" by others. Through such inclusion and acceptance, the salience of the label "sinners" as a term for outsiders was undermined by Jesus; sinners could become insiders and were not permanently outsiders. In accepting "sinners," Jesus was "unothering the other"—those who were regarded as permanently "outsiders" by the vast majority. However, Jesus probably did continue to use the term "sinners" of those who rejected him and although Jesus did not classify all as sinners, he called all to repent. In doing so, he was "othering the un-othered," in the sense that he was requiring repentance of all. This dialectic between inclusiveness and the call for repentance and transformation is an enduring dialectic which I think remains with us today.

The other point of great interest for me which emerged from this study was the interplay between group distinctiveness on the one hand and relations across group boundaries on the other.[15] The early Christian groups clearly had a strong sense of identity which led to the use of terms to designate themselves and outsiders, and to clear boundary lines which strongly demarcated early Christians from outsiders. Yet most Christ-believing groups had a sense that their message was for those beyond the group and so they had a range of interactions across their group boundaries. There is generally no sense of social withdrawal or isolation by these New Testament groups. I suggest this is a creative tension in our New Testament documents. The dialectic between demarcation of ourselves *from* outsiders and yet remaining open *to* outsiders joining "us" is an important and creative tension across much of the New Testament.

Both these areas were of particular interest for me because I think they remain of great pertinence for Christians and churches today. How do Christian groups practice the radical inclusiveness of Jesus, whilst also calling for repentance, transformation and justice? How do Christian groups today maintain their on-going identity so that they are authentically and distinctively "Christian," while also being open to and engaged with the wider context in which we live? I think these are highly relevant matters in today's world.

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14 See further Trebilco, *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament*, 118–132.

15 See further Trebilco, *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament*, 286.

My current research project is tentatively entitled *Early Christianity in Ephesus, Smyrna and Adjacent Cities of Ionia from Paul to 500 CE*.[16] This is part of the series entitled *Early Christianity in Asia Minor*, being published by Brill as a sub-series in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity. Each volume in this series "stands in the tradition of the work of Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Leipzig, [4]1924."[17] The volumes focus on the rise and expansion of Christianity in a particular region of Asia Minor. I was happy to accept the invitation to write the volume on Ephesus, Smyrna and the rest of Ionia for a number of reasons. Firstly, it enabled me to build on my earlier work on the early Christians in Ephesus. Extending this from around 110 CE, where the earlier volume had concluded, to the end of the fifth century is a fascinating and challenging prospect. Secondly, I appreciated the breadth of evidence and the range of sources that I considered in earlier work on Jewish communities in Asia Minor, and then in looking at Christians in Ephesus: archaeological and epigraphical evidence, Classical authors, Jewish texts, and Christian texts (canonical, non-canonical, patristic and conciliar texts). This breadth of evidence certainly adds to the challenge of the current work, since I am interacting with a whole range of specialisms, but I think it also adds to the richness and potential of the volume. Thirdly, it has given me another way of looking at the issue of unity and diversity in early Christianity, on this occasion over a considerable time period and in relation to a number of cities. What can be discerned as unifying factors for Christian communities over this long period? What dimensions of continuity over time can be discerned? What diversity can be seen in one city, and in different cities, and why? These are questions I hope to address in this current volume.[18]

I have also begun work on a commentary on the Johannine Epistles for the New International Greek Commentary Series published by Eerdmans. Since I

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16 Professor Jim Harrison is writing the chapter in this book on epigraphy.

17 See U. Huttner, *Early Christianity in the Lycus Valley* (AJEC 85; ECAM 1; Leiden: Brill, 2013), ii. The other volume which is out to date is C. Breytenbach and C. Zimmermann, *Early Christianity in Lycaonia and Adjacent Areas: From Paul to Amphilochius of Iconium* (AJEC 101; ECAM 2; Leiden: Brill, 2018).

18 I have completed some studies in relation to this work to date; see P. R. Trebilco, "The Acts of John and Christian Communities in Ephesus in the Mid-Second Century CE," in C. Breytenbach and J. Ogereau, eds., *Authority and Identity in Emerging Christianities in Asia Minor and Greece* (AJEC 103; Leiden: Brill, 2018), 33–61; "The Jewish Community in Ephesus and its Interaction with Christ-believers in the First Century CE and Beyond," in J. R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn, eds., *The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series 9; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2018), 93–126; and a forthcoming essay entitled "The reception of Paul in Ephesus from the second to the fifth century CE."

think 1–3 John were written in or near Ephesus,[19] this closely relates to my former work on Christian communities in the city of Ephesus. I hope to be able to interpret these three letters in the context of what we know about early Christianity in the city of Ephesus, as well as in the light of the life of early Christian communities in the wider area of Western Asia Minor, at the end of the first or beginning of the second century CE when I think these letters were written. In addition, I will seek to utilise the richness of our knowledge of the social, political and cultural life of the cities of Western Asia Minor in the interpretative task. But I also hope to be able to include a strong dimension of theological interpretation of these New Testament texts. As I will discuss more in the next section, for me the interpretation of the New Testament involves a strong attention to Theology, alongside all the other disciplines and specialisms on which we draw. I hope then that in this commentary, I will be able to integrate a range of approaches and disciplinary areas.[20]

3. The Study of the New Testament in Relation to the Study of Religion and to Theology

As will be obvious by this point, I see great value in the study of the New Testament in relation to the study of its world and the contemporary religions of its world, drawing on the full range of evidence we have available from a whole spectrum of sources. Much of my own work has included consideration of the religious dimensions of that wider world, such as the religious traditions of the city of Ephesus, or the imperial cult in Asia Minor, or the life of Diaspora Jewish communities.

But for me it is also vital for the New Testament to be studied theologically. In my view, the New Testament is essentially about the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, which is clearly a theological matter. When I began my studies in 1980, Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology were quite separate disciplines, and they grew further apart in subsequent years. In my view, the

19 See Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 241–271.

20 I have completed some studies in relation to this work to date; see P. R. Trebilco, "The Holy Spirit in 1 John," in J. T. K. Lim, ed., *The Holy Spirit: Unfinished Agenda* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2014), 71–74; "Salvation and Gift in 1 John: Unconditioned, but not Unconditional," in D. S. du Toit, C. Gerber, C. Zimmermann, eds., *Sōtēria: Salvation in Early Christianity and Antiquity: Festschrift in Honour of Cilliers Breytenbach on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (NovTSupp 175; Leiden: Brill, 2019), 498–516; "Intertextual Echoes in Ephesus: 'From the Beginning' in the City of Ephesus and the Letters of John," in M. J. Lee and B. J. Oropeza, eds., *Practicing Intertextuality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021), 267–288.

growth of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement is greatly to be welcomed.[21] If I had my career over again, I would have liked to have been much more theologically engaged in my interpretative endeavours. But as noted above, I also hope to do more theological work in the future, particularly as part of the commentary on the Johannine Epistles that I will turn to when my current research project is complete.

Related to all of this is the issue of how we prepare our own students for their future research. My hope is that we will prepare them so that they are highly competent in both New Testament Studies and Theology, even if this is a very challenging task. Of course, not everyone wishes to undertake New Testament Studies alongside Theology, but in my view, such bi-focal study is an important dimension of New Testament Studies and is a vital area for future development.

This emphasis on Biblical Studies in partnership with Theology also reflects my own context. Interest in New Testament Studies outside the churches is minimal in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are a strongly post-Christian nation, and Christian faith receives no special treatment in society. Without the churches, New Testament Studies would probably not be included as a discipline within a state University here. But New Testament Studies is (hopefully!) of great interest to the churches, whose members are also deeply interested (or should be!) in Theology. But this emphasis also reflects my own personal faith. I am very interested in theological questions, and in the development of personal faith.

4. Reading the New Testament in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Māori and Pacific Context

A particular challenge facing me relates to teaching and researching the New Testament here in the land of Aotearoa New Zealand. The Māori people are our indigenous people and they have suffered from a long history of colonisation and huge deprivation. Settlers since the early-19th century have predominantly been of British background, but we have also had many Pacific immigrants since the mid-20th century, and in recent decades many Asian people have come to live here.

21 See for example, the *Journal of Theological Interpretation* and the Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplement Series. Two works that I have found particularly helpful are J. B. Green and M. Turner, *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) and M. A. Rae, *History and Hermeneutics* (London: T & T Clark, 2005).

My own heritage is British, with my surname being Cornish. I have been formed and have worked in predominantly "White European"[22] contexts. Within Biblical Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand, a number of Māori and Pacific people, and some from other backgrounds too, have sought to develop readings of the text that arise from and speak to this context, rather than being "imported" from elsewhere.[23] Of course, we are all connected in some way to the scholarly traditions developed elsewhere and to which we are indebted, not least the philological and lexical scholarship that enables us to read a Greek text. But the questions I ask, the concerns I bring to the text and the ways I read, could be much more located here in this land, rather than elsewhere. This is a journey I want to go on, but which for me has only begun. In this I am greatly aided by many who have gone before, and by my colleagues and students.

What does it mean to read the New Testament through Māori or Pacific eyes in Aotearoa New Zealand? It means very different things to different people and to different scholars. But one thing that regularly strikes me is that some facets of Māori and Pacific cultures are much closer to, and resonate more strongly with, the world of the New Testament than is the case with my world or worldview.

Two example will demonstrate what I mean. As a product of western education, my "default" worldview is inherently individualistic, and I firstly see myself as an individual before I see myself as part of a wider group or community. However, the worldview of my Māori and Pacific friends is much more communal or communitarian. They will speak of "Our people," or of "us," and their commitment to family and community is very strong. The Māori and Pacific worldview in this regard is much more in harmony with the Biblical worldview then, and their thought and practice is much more inherently consonant with being part of "the body of Christ" and belonging "in Christ" than is mine.

Secondly, the Māori and Pacific sense of land, of place, and of creation is much more in keeping with a Biblical worldview than is my instinctive or default view on these matters. I tend to view places and the land in a very instrumental sense—how can it serve me, or aid my interests? The sense of the inherent importance of land to identity and to who we are, and of the sacredness of creation, is much more a part of the Māori and Pacific worldview than it is of my

22 These terms are of course difficult to define. But there is no doubt that the dominant voices in society in Aotearoa New Zealand over our history have been both "white" and "European," as those terms are regularly used.

23 One recent notable example is by my colleague, Rev Dr Wayne M. R. Te Kaawa, "Re-visioning Christology through a Māori lens" (PhD Thesis, Theology Programme, University of Otago, 2020). His work contains discussion of much earlier work.

worldview. One clear example of this relates to mountains. Clearly mountains play a very important part in many Biblical stories. Similarly, mountains are very important in Māori culture, and Māori people relate their identity to a particular mountain, as well as to a river or lake, a canoe, a founding ancestor and a tribe.

In the future, one strand of doing New Testament Studies here in Aotearoa New Zealand needs to involve a strong facet of reading the text *here*, in our context, and in this land. This can be undertaken by Māori and Pacific readers, but it is also something that others of us can be involved in as part of a careful and respectful dialogue, and something that we will be greatly enriched by. Our Theology programme is seeking to enable more Māori and Pacific readers to become leaders in these conversations, which are academic conversations, but they are also conversations which involve the churches and wider communities in deep ways. Māori and Pacific readers need to set the agenda, and to be pioneers in developing methodologies. Contextual hermeneutics has thus become more and more important here. Of course, historical and linguistic study of the New Testament remains important, along with the plethora of different reading tools and strategies developed in the global academy. But ways of reading *here* need to be developed too, with different questions, different angles of perception and different answers being developed as well.

Māori and Pacific peoples also have a rich and long heritage of Biblical interpretation in their own languages, and their cultures have been impacted by Scripture in many deep and significant ways. Their cultures have also maintained a deep respect for spirituality, whilst the predominant "European" culture in Aotearoa New Zealand has often denied the spiritual dimension of life and the strongly post-Christendom majority has firmly located Christian faith, along with all dimensions of the "spiritual," firmly on the margins of public life, if not beyond the margins. Hence, there is much of deep value for all of us in regaining an understanding of the importance of the spiritual dimension of personal and corporate life, and of learning from the long heritage of Māori and Pacific Biblical interpretation.

There is of course a tension here. How does one participate *both* in a "global" conversation about New Testament research, as well as in the "local" priorities of developing specific, contextual research conversations here in this land? Perhaps we could do both these things in a more communal way, leaving behind the tradition where all (or the vast majority of) our work is single-authored; rather we could draw more on partnerships and ongoing collaborations of authors and communities. In addition, the "global" conversations can include more local dimensions; that is, we could talk in those global discussions about the very local issues of our context and the meaning and interpretation of New Testament texts locally. Talking of our local issues to each other in the global academy would be very enriching I think.

5. Conclusions

It has been a great privilege to be a teacher and researcher of the New Testament in Aotearoa New Zealand. To be able to do so in a State University has been a great honour. It is in the nature of research that it is open-ended and so in many ways the trajectory of my research has gone in directions that I have not been able to predict. But it has always been captivating and rewarding. At times, my research interests have arisen from within the discipline of New Testament Studies itself, and I have pursued matters for their own intrinsic fascination. At other times, my research has also been of particular interest to me because of my ecclesial, religious, social and cultural context here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

As we look forward, it is important for scholars in this part of the world to be part of global conversations about the New Testament. This means that we need to continue to work across the range of areas and using the range of methodologies that are part of global New Testament Studies. But perhaps the greatest challenge facing Biblical Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand is also to further develop ways of reading that are both faithful to the Christian faith, but that belong here, and arise from the context of this land and its peoples.

Reflections on Reading and Translating the New Testament in Contemporary Russia

Alexey B. Somov

Academic Career[1]

I was born in 1971 in Moscow. I successfully completed the State Academy of Oil and Gas in Moscow in 1993 with a degree in electrical engineering. In 1997–2004, I studied theology at St. Philaret's Orthodox Christian Theological Institute in Moscow (Bachelor of Theology, Master of Theology programs) and then I was enrolled in the program of Master of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, USA (2007–2008). After that I had a very productive time (2009–2014) working on my PhD at VU University Amsterdam under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Bert Jan Lietaert-Peerbolte. The subject of my doctoral dissertation was "Representations of the Afterlife in Luke-Acts."

As I completed my studies at St. Philaret's Orthodox Christian Institute in 2004, I started working professionally in the field of Biblical studies. I joined the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) as an exegetical advisor in several translation projects. At the same time I became a lecturer in Biblical Studies at St. Philaret's Orthodox Christian Institute.

After completing my doctorate in 2014 I became a translation consultant with the Institute for Bible Translation and a senior lecturer and then an associated professor at St. Philaret's. I have also been teaching the New Testament and Early Judaism classes at St. Thomas Jesuit Institute in Moscow and working as a senior research fellow at the Laboratory of Oriental Studies and Comparative Historical Linguistics at the School of Contemporary Humanities Research of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

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1 The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 21-011-44157. Alexey B. Somov PhD, Institute for Bible Translation, Moscow, St. Philaret's Orthodox Christian Theological Institute, Moscow.

Research Interests

Beginning with my studies at St. Philaret's, I have focused my research on Biblical studies, Christian origins, and Bible translation. More recently, I have added early Jewish and Christian Apocryphal literature to my field of scholarly interests, as well as cognitive linguistic approaches to biblical interpretation. In my teaching practice I concentrate on the New Testament, biblical languages, and early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. In addition to this, I work with IBT as a consultant in several Bible translation projects into non-Slavic languages of the former Soviet Union. I mentor and train the members of translation teams in matters of translation, exegesis, the cultural-religious context of the ancient eastern Mediterranean world, linguistics, and Bible translation software.

In my studies and teaching I pay close attention to Greco-Roman literature, early Jewish sources, archeological findings, and the Old Testament, New Testament, and Qumran manuscripts. Dealing with Greco-Roman sources, I often use the original texts and their translation into English, German, French, and Russian. Also productive for me is the use of patristic sources, which are important not from an ideological point of view (for many Orthodox people the authority of the Church Fathers is automatically higher than any scholarly studies) but in my research context. More details are given below.

Factors and People Who Directed My Path in Academic Research

In the Soviet Union, where I spent my childhood and early youth, a good theological education was hardly possible. It was officially available only at Moscow Theological Seminary, basically only for those who were going to join the Russian Orthodox clergy. An academic degree in theology was not recognized by the state. Religious studies were available only in the framework of the atheistic Soviet approach. However, there were some opportunities to study ancient languages, including Hebrew and Greek, as well as ancient Near Eastern literature, at Russian universities. The situation changed rapidly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when theological studies became much more available. However, it was still hardly possible to obtain a systematic education in Biblical studies. My views and approaches of that period were formed mostly by my excellent teachers at the Biblical studies department of St. Philaret's Institute, Dr. Ilya Grits and Larisa Musina, then by Prof. Dr. Sergey Averintsev, who was one of the greatest Russian scholars and translators of that period. In addition to this, my education was shaped by whatever scholarly literature I could find in Russian translation and sometimes in English and German, for instance, *The Proclamation of Jesus* by Joachim Jeremias,[2] *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* by James D.G. Dunn,[3] Bruce M. Metzger's *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*,[4] and *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, And Restoration*.[5] There were also some scholarly overviews of Western biblical scholarship produced by Russian researchers, e.g., Fr. Alexander Men. My philosophical views have been formed by Personalist philosophy in the works of Nikolai Berdyaev, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Mounier, and Paul Ricœur.

As my further scholarly education was obtained in the Western context, my research views and approaches have been influenced by such prominent scholars as Martin de Boer, James H. Charlesworth, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, Outi Lehtipuu, Bert Jan Lietaert-Peerbolte, Lee McDonald, Tobias Nicklas, Ross Wagner, and Arie Zwiep, in person and/or through reading their works.

My Research Approaches

At the first stage of my academic career, my view on New Testament studies and teaching was more confessional, i.e., oriented towards Eastern Orthodoxy. However, after my studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, my approach changed and became much more non-confessional and related to historical-critical methods. Sometimes I combine a historical-critical approach with theological interpretation, defining the latter in terms stated by Joel B. Green:

> identified by its self-consciously ecclesial situation … theological interpretation concerns the role of Scripture in the faith and formation of persons and ecclesial communities. Theological interpretation emphasizes the potentially mutual influence of Scripture in the self-understanding of the church and its critical reflection on the church's practices.[6]

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2 Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology. Part One, The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1971).

3 James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1977).

4 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).

5 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, And Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981).

6 Joel B. Green, *Luke as Narrative Theologian* (WUNT 446; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 27.

Therefore, I aim to discover the traditional material that can help us to explain how certain historical events and artifacts were represented in the ancient texts using tradition, form, source, and redaction forms of criticism. I prefer not to impose on the Scriptures those ideas that come from later stages of Church history. On the other hand, it is always helpful to demonstrate how a particular detail of the New Testament narrative shows the life of the ancient church or affects its later development in practice of theology.

In addition, there are some specific exegetical challenges which can be avoided in academic research but which are unavoidable for exegetes and translators in Bible translation work. Take, for example, significant multiple lexico-semantic structural differences between languages, such as the Greek lexemes for siblings, ἀδελφός and ἀδελφή. While these kin terms can be used for both close and distant relatives, they do not specify their age. European languages like English or German do not require any further specifications either. However, in other languages, for instance, in some Turkic languages, the terms for siblings are necessarily differentiated by the sibling's age, as either younger or older siblings. This fact makes the problem unavoidable. Therefore, translators into such a language must make difficult exegetical decisions whenever they encounter these Greek kin terms. Thus, are Jesus' brothers in John 7:3 and his brothers and sisters in Mark 6:3 older or younger than he? The Greek text does not specify this, but a translation decision must be made each time. Different Christian confessions are divided about this. This issue cannot be resolved in a single way, and is greatly influenced by the confessional situation in each translation project. Sometimes translators make their decision in the main text but put another option in a footnote.[7]

When writing my PhD thesis and dealing with Luke's views on the afterlife in the context of early Jewish and Greco-Roman ideas, I realized that some questions, such as a seeming discrepancy in Luke's afterlife ideas, which is expressed in several terms in Luke-Acts, cannot be resolved and interpreted by means of historical-critical methods only. From that time on, I have included cognitive linguistic approaches in my methodology, first of all, Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Cognitive Blending Theory (CBT), which can both be very helpful as additional tools in interpreting ancient texts. My use of these theories has been influenced by the works of George Lakoff and Mark

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7 These examples are from Vitaly Voinov, "Minority languages and Bible translation: A recipe for theological enrichment," *Rodnoy Jazyk*, 1 (2013). See also David J. Clark, "Olders and youngers," *The Bible Translator* 46.2 (1995): 201–207.

Johnson,[8] as well as Mark Turner, Gilles Fauconnier,[9] and Zoltán Kövecses.[10] The foundational principle of this method is that the language which is used for dealing with any religious system is predominantly metaphorical because it tries to express divine and supernatural concepts by means of finite expressions from our everyday experience. Using human concepts, we metaphorically refer to a divine or supernatural reality. In the case of my PhD research on Luke's views on the afterlife, the most important cognitive metaphor was the metaphor of resurrection as waking up and rising from sleep. CMT helps to explain how the concept of resurrection is represented in the New Testament and other early Christian texts. In the ancient Mediterranean milieu to which the New Testament belongs, it was normal to think about death metaphorically in terms of sleep. The concept of the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament is already often expressed as related to awakening and getting up from gloomy sleep in Sheol (cf. Dan 12:2). The New Testament, taking resurrection as a cornerstone belief, uses the same metaphors and represents death as sleep and resurrection as waking up and getting up after sleeping.

The cognitive approach has also become important in my Bible translation consulting work[11] and for my studies of Apocalyptic and otherworld imagery, as well as Jesus' parables and the exegesis of the Old Testament passages and images in Hebrews.[12] To give a brief example, it is taken for granted by those

8 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (London/Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987); George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

9 Gilles Fauconnier, *Mappings in Thought and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

10 Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

11 Fortunately, I am not the only scholar in Russia who works with cognitive metaphor theories in the field of the New Testament. I would like, for instance, to point to the productive and developing research of Fr. Peter Shitikov at Tobolsk Theological Seminary. His exegetical work includes an approach which relates to the Metaphor Laboratory in Amsterdam (Metaphor Lab Amsterdam) and Prof. G. Steen's studies, and he has written several works on metaphors in John.

12 See, Frederick S. Tappenden, *Resurrection in Paul: Cognition, Metaphor, and Transformation* (Early Christianity and Its Literature 19; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2016); Alexey Somov, *Representations of the Afterlife in Luke-Acts* (International Studies on Christian Origins; London: Bloomsbury / T & T Clark, 2017); Alexey Somov & Vitaly Voinov, "Translating 'Abraham's Bosom' (Luke 16:22–23) as a Key Metaphor in the Overall Composition of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," CBQ 79.4 (2017): 615–633; Alexey Somov, "Jesus' Banquet Etiquette (Luke 14:7–14) and the Heavenly Banquet," in *History and*

cultures whose worldview is based on or influenced by the Bible that death and resurrection are talked about using the metaphors described above. However, such an approach does not work when translating this concept for people with a very different worldview and other beliefs about the afterlife, for instance, for Buddhists. In the Buddhist context, many metaphors from the Bible do not work. We need either to find a new metaphor that would be natural or not to use a metaphor at all. For Buddhists the concept of resurrection from the dead does not exist and the biblical metaphors of awakening and getting up from sleep do not work. Therefore, IBT projects for Buddhist people living in Russia had to find other ways of representing this concept. It was safer to use terms that have the more general meaning of revival or returning to life or to find words for "restoration" that come from the pre-Buddhist period in these languages, before their cultures became acquainted with the doctrine of reincarnation.

Challenges and Prospects of New Testament Research in Russia

Reading the New Testament through the lens of Orthodox dogmatics is still a widespread approach in most Russian Orthodox theological seminaries. The New Testament is often taught not as the text in its integrity but as a list of proof-tests that confirm Orthodox theological ideas, with no link to the original context of these quotations. This kind of medieval apologetics tries to defend the Orthodox faith from any influence from the outside. There are some historical reasons for such an obsolete approach. As Fr. Alexander Schmemann correctly puts it:

> For several reasons Biblical studies represent the weakest area in modern Russian theology. Before the Russian Revolution, free discussion of problems arising from a critical and historical approach to the Bible was heavily censored, if not completely forbidden, in official academic theology. Gifted biblical scholars were not lacking, to be sure … After 1917 all research became impossible in the USSR, and unfortunately very few of the theologians who left their country were specialists in biblical disciplines. This, however, is not the only explanation of the deficiency in specifically scriptural areas. On a deeper level, one can say that Orthodox theology has never felt 'at home' in modern biblical scholarship and has not accepted as its own the biblical problem as formulated within the western theological development. Unchallenged by the Reformation with its emphasis on *sola scriptura*, Orthodox theology implicitly rather than explicitly rejects the isolation of Scripture in a closed and self-sufficient

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Theology in the Gospels (ed. Tobias Nicklas, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Mikhail Seleznev; WUNT 447; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 359–371.

> field of study, yet firmly maintains the scriptural roots and ‘dimensions’ of every theological discipline: dogma, ecclesiology, moral theology. This of course does not mean that a revival and a deepening of biblical scholarship is impossible or undesirable in the future; but one can predict that such a revival will consist, first of all, of a deep reassessment and reevaluation – within Orthodox theological categories – of the very presuppositions of western biblicism.[13]

The task of reassessment and reevaluation in Eastern Orthodox Biblical studies is a part of a larger need as seen in Fr. Georges Florovsky’s call to “return to the Fathers,” i.e., a departure of Orthodox theology from the influence of Western theology in terms of its language, presuppositions, and way of thinking.[14] At first, this challenge was speedily adopted by many Orthodox theologians in the Russian diaspora, as well as by scholars from other Orthodox countries.[15] This “return” was first seen as an exciting task: a departure from the academic scholasticism and pietism of the late 19th century, which dominated the Russian theological system, and as the program of renovation in a “neo-patristic synthesis.” It should be noted that, despite such a program, Florovsky himself was in constant dialogue with western theology. Eventually this synthesis became a kind of refuge in the past which is not a creative way to be “together with Fathers” or “ahead with the Fathers,” as Florovosky declared, but rather a means for Orthodox people to be satisfied with the Orthodox tradition without answering the challenges of the modern world. It rather became “the continual return to its sources and roots, or the repetition and ‘translation’ into modern parlance of the writings of the Fathers of the Church.”[16] One of the major consequences of the Orthodox fixation on the Church’s past is “the neglect and devaluation of biblical studies.”[17] In essence, the Protestant authority of *sola scriptura* was virtually replaced in Orthodoxy with the *consensus patrum.* Even more, as Pantelis Kalaitzidis states, “in practice, the authority and the study of the patristic texts ... has acquired greater importance and gravitas than the biblical text itself,” forgetting that “all the great Fathers were major

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13 Alexander Schmemann, “Russian Theology: 1920–1972. An Introductory Survey,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 16.4 (1972): 176–177.

14 Georges Florovsky, “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Vol. 4: Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 157–182.

15 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “From the ‘Return to the Fathers’ to the Need For a Modern Orthodox Theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54.1 (2010): 6–7.

16 Kalaitzidis, “From the ‘Return to the Fathers,’” 9.

17 Kalaitzidis, “From the ‘Return to the Fathers,’” 15.

interpreters of the Scriptures."[18] Moreover, the practical and creative use of the *consensus patrum* in practical exegesis is often problematic among seminarians.[19] This issue has to be overcome by the contemporary generation of Orthodox theologians and biblical scholars. The Bible and Orthodox theology have to undividedly go together, just as Scripture and Tradition are inseparable from each other in the Orthodox worldview. We need a new theological and scholarly language and new approaches. The old-fashioned "apologetic" approach to the Scriptures, which is fixed on the past, is not only obsolete but also often fights against "western critical approaches" that are really no longer prevalent in Western biblical scholarship, for instance, Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutical theology and his approach to demythologization. Such Orthodox scholarship sometimes looks like Cervantes' "fight against windmills." In my opinion, it would be much more productive to first deal with the historical-critical methods honestly, thoroughly, and impartially. Second, since for historical and theological reasons Eastern Orthodox biblical scholarship has been free from those Western battles and debates on critical methods, we could take and use what is the accepted scholarly norm now and also add post-critical methods, which neither deny form- and redactional criticism nor put them at the forefront: e.g., canonical, narrative, or reader's response approaches.

Further, patristic exegesis is relevant when it works alongside modern historical critical approaches. For instance, it is always stimulating to analyze how the Church Fathers interpret certain words and expressions. As a brief example, when John Chrysostom quotes Matt 8:11, he easily combines Matthew and Luke: "Many will come from the east and west and recline in the bosoms of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob"; In Matthaeum Horn. 26 (PG 57:335.26–29). "In the bosoms" (εἰς τοὺς κόλπους) in this quotation is borrowed from Luke 16:23 (ἐν τοῖς κόλποις αὐτου). This is significant evidence that the Greek word κόλπος was still understood in Chrysostom's time as appropriate in the context of meal and table fellowship, since it refers to reclining at the banquet. This is helpful to know when discussing Abraham's bosom in Luke 16:22–23 in the context of ancient table fellowship.[20] Similarly, it is sometimes useful to check with the patristic exegetical literature how certain expressions and episodes were regarded in the Byzantine times in terms of intertextuality. For instance,

18 Kalaitzidis, "From the 'Return to the Fathers,'" 15–16.

19 I am grateful to Fr. Ivan Kazantsev, who lectures on Biblical history, the New Testament, ancient Greek, and Latin at Tobolsk Theological Seminary, for sharing his teaching experience.

20 See more details in Somov & Voinov, "Translating 'Abraham's Bosom'" (see n. 12), 627.

was καὶ πρωῒ ἔννυχα λίαν ἀναστὰς (Mark 1:35) typologically used as a reference to Jesus' resurrection (cf. Ἀναστὰς δὲ πρωῒ in Mark 16:9)?

In addition, patristic, liturgical, and hagiographical sources are an indispensable tool for studying Christian Apocrypha and exegetical interpretations based on extracanonical traditions. Indeed, Orthodox liturgical texts have preserved some extracanonical legends, for instance, those regarding certain feasts, topics or stories (e.g., the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary based on the *Protoevangelium of James*). These sources, first of all, the Eastern Orthodox Synaxaria, martyrdoms preserved in patristic and liturgical sources, and the Palaea literature, are also useful in the study of the so-called "rewritten Bible." As my research demonstrates, some interesting apocryphal traditions continued to exist in Orthodox Christianity, which was not entirely closed to literary and mythological interpretations of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha even in such normative texts as the liturgical literature.[21]

The need for reassessment and reevaluation is also relevant for Bible translation in Russia. While it is quite normal to produce new translations into the non-Slavic languages, the Russian Orthodox Church has not yet initiated a new Russian Bible project that could be comparable to the 19th century Synodal project, which was started by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and was approved by Tsar Alexander II in 1856. The textual basis for the Old Testament had been a subject of long debates in this project. This is due to the fact that the Eastern Churches are divided between using the Hebrew text and the Greek text of the Septuagint. The Septuagint is often believed to be the true Christian Orthodox Old Testament in contrast to the Hebrew Bible, which is sometimes regarded as a corrupted text. However, such a view is ideological and came from outside of Biblical studies.[22] In case of the Synodal translation, this issue had been resolved as a compromise: the Old Testament translation follows mainly the Hebrew text, but in the passages that are important in establishing certain theological ideas it follows the Septuagint readings. After 60 years of polemics, debates, and intrigues this project was successfully completed in 1876 with the publication of the first complete Russian Bible. Although

21 E.g., Alexey Somov, "The Martyrdom of Daniel and the Three Youths. The Legend about Their Death and Resurrection in Eastern Church Hagiography," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 30.4 (2021): 198–227; Alexey Somov, "Abraham as a Model of Hospitality in the Palaea and Cognate Literature," in *Abraham as Ritual Model in Judaic, Christian, and Islamic Contexts* (ed. Thomas R. Blanton IV and Claudia D. Bergmann; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

22 See a good review of this problem in Alexandru Mihăilă, "The Septuagint and the Masoretic Text in the Orthodox Church(es)," *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 10.1 (2018): 30–60.

it has never been considered to be the single and invariable translation into Russian and has less authority in the Russian Orthodox Church than the Church Slavonic Bible, the Synodal Bible became the main authoritative Russian Bible for Russian Protestant communities (Baptists, Pentecostals, etc). However, the Synodal version uses obsolete "pre-Pushkin" language and has many textual, stylistic, genre, and syntactic problems, as well as tremendous inconsistency in rendering names, as well as other mistakes. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a new authoritative Russian Bible translation. The Biblical-Theological committee of the Russian Orthodox Church has already made some important decisions regarding a new translation and admitted that modern translation theories have to be taken into account in the new translation together with the modern Biblical scholarship, archeology, textual studies, and Semitic studies. Unfortunately, most of these decisions have not been implemented so far. After all, contemporary Russian society is much more pluralistic than it was in the 19th century. In my opinion, a new Bible translation still may be initiated by the Russian Orthodox Church as the main church body in Russia. However, is there really a necessity for a single translation that could comply with different and sometimes mutually exclusive needs? We may in fact need several new authoritative translations: a more conservative one for liturgical purposes; a more literary one for a broader audience; a more "scholarly" translation for exegetical and research purposes.

Turning back to Biblical studies in the Russian education system, it is much more plausible now to teach the New Testament in those institutions which are closer to the academy than to theology. For these reasons, I've been working for the past two decades as a lecturer with St. Philaret's Orthodox Christian Institute, which is a private educational and academic institution. It is connected to the Russian Orthodox Church but officially independent from it.[23] Being independent from both the official Church structures and the state educational system[24] gives St. Philaret's opportunities to be more flexible not only in dealing with official censorship but also with ideological requirements by the state. The latter issue applies to certain politically and ideologically motivated requirements that the Russian state imposes on scholars who carry out their research with state funding. St. Philaret's study program is more open to academic studies and gives more opportunities to combine Western critical methods with Eastern Orthodox perspectives. On the other hand, all professors and lecturers in the Biblical Studies department share a common vision about

23 I am very grateful to my colleague Larisa Musina for discussing these issues with me.
24 In spite of this, St. Philaret's is a state-recognized and accredited institute as its educational standard meets the state's requirements.

using every available critical method and approach as far as it can help us and our students to interpret the Bible and understand it as the Scriptures of the Church. In other words, we must not teach against the Church or oppose Scripture and Tradition. Such an approach is still confessional but more open to other denominations and to academic research.

This approach is important for this institute because it deals with people who are Christians (most of them are Orthodox), and regard the Bible as Holy Scripture. Moreover, one of the mandatory requirements for admission is that a student must have read the entire Bible before starting his/her studies. This contrasts with most seminaries (not only in Russia),[25] which do not require that applicants have to be familiar with every biblical book. From my personal experience, it is much easier to teach the New Testament for people who have already read it and who also have a good knowledge of the Old Testament. This is in stark contrast to some other small private theological educational institutions in which I occasionally teach and which accept students with no preliminary knowledge of the Bible and with scanty understanding of Christianity in particular and religion in general.

In spite of all that, there is a certain price to pay for being independent from the Church. First of all, St. Philaret's Institute is private and this makes it more financially vulnerable than a large, Church-sponsored theological seminary. This affects the quantity of modern research literature available in the library, access to financial grants for research and study abroad for advanced students, and relations with universities abroad.

There are a few other independent theological institutions in Russia similar to St. Philaret's. I could mention St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute in Moscow, which has positioned itself as an independent and even secular institution. They used to offer interesting educational programs and for some time had state accreditation. Unfortunately, St. Andrew's lost this accreditation and now offers only a few theological classes. Nevertheless, this institute is still a very good publishing house, which prints and distributes high quality modern research literature translated into Russian.

Another university that should be mentioned is St. Petersburg Christian University.[26] This university is also officially independent from both the state

25 I was also really surprised when studying at Princeton Theological Seminary, which is one of the largest theological schools in the world, of course, to encounter significant classes on particular biblical books which do not require any preliminary acquaintance with these texts on the student's part.

26 I am thankful to Dr. Valery Alikin, the president of St. Petersburg Christian University, for sharing this information with me.

and the church but at the same time offers a theological education. Its students are mostly from a Protestant Evangelical background. They have a great interest in Biblical studies and especially in the New Testament, which is the focal point at this school. Moreover, most of this university's faculty members have been trained in the New Testament and do their research in this field. Although their exegetical work embraces Western Protestant and sometimes Evangelical commitments, they also engage in many academic approaches in their exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological studies. Practically, they mostly utilize historical-critical and exegetical studies and are interested more in historical issues rather than in theological ones. In addition, this university pays close attention to the Greco-Roman context, as well as to the study of archeology, inscriptions, and papyri. Moreover, some faculty members regularly participate in archaeological excavations. Although most of the students at this university are Protestants, they recognize that the Russian Orthodox Church is the main Church and religious body in Russia. Therefore, they study Orthodox traditions and especially patristic sources, so as to be included in the majority religious context in Russia. One more important feature of this university is that many lecturers working there have graduated from Western European universities. Some advanced students have an opportunity to defend their theses and received an additional degree from these universities.

New Testament Research for Dealing with Theological Questions and System Relevance in Russia

Although resolving exegetical issues related to church ministries is quite in demand in the modern Russian context, social and theological tasks are in general still rarely tackled together in Russia. This is the consequence of seventy years of Soviet atheism and secularization. For this reason, the Russian church, which is used to being isolated from society, still reacts very slowly and poorly to the social challenges of our time. Most social projects in Russia are secular and are not directly related to the Church. Moreover, as has been shown above, the theological language of the Russian Orthodox Church is sometimes obsolete and too difficult for Russian civil society. In the present situation of social and medical crisis due to COVID-19, the Russian church similarly to churches in some Western countries also often remains speechless and is not able to translate its message into a language intelligible to modern society. Its theological language needs updating and reformulating in the modern context. At the same time, the language and spirit of Scripture is still in demand, because, in spite of the ongoing secularization of Russian society, even secular Russian people remain interested in reading the Bible. On the practical level it means that many people are not ready to go to church but they are interested in studying the Scriptures to seek answers to the challenges they face in their everyday life, e.g., those concerning the pandemic. This makes New Testament research and teaching vivid and highly valuable even in the highly secular context.

Another issue that challenges the system relevance of churches in Russia is the lack of cooperation and interaction between different church communities and moreover between academic and church educational institutions. Such a cooperation and interaction should be intensified. This applies not only to joint conferences, training new Biblical scholars, and the exchange of relevant scholarly literature, which is still lacking in Russia, but also to broader projects concerning the development of a common theological language, new methods of researching the New Testament, and the application of the results of such cooperation in a church and social context. As a positive model of a very productive cooperation between Christian denominations, other religions, and some secular organizations, not only in Russia but also in the global context, I can give the unique example of the Institute for Bible Translation. First, its partners are respected translation organizations, such as the United Bible Societies and SIL International. In addition to this, we cooperate with the local churches in Russia: with the Russian Orthodox Church and with several Russian Protestant denominations. There are no ecumenical translation projects in IBT per se, but there are many projects in which people from different confessions and denominations work together on the same team. Moreover, some of our projects used to be Protestant ones and then became Orthodox, while others are interconfessional. Thus, in the Kalmyk translation team the translators are local Buddhists, the exegetical checker is Pentecostal, and the consultant is Russian Orthodox. In the Dargi translation project (Dagestan), the translators are scholars from a Muslim background, the exegetical checker is a Protestant, while the consultant is Russian Orthodox. Another example of interconfessional cooperation in IBT is the Tuvan translation project (Tuvan is a language spoken in south-central Siberia by more than a quarter of a million speakers), where the full Bible was completed in 2011. Local Tuvan Protestants were not against the participation of Orthodox people in the translation team. The Orthodox bishop gave his blessing and wrote a foreword to the revised Children's Bible. There were some exegetical decisions which were changed according to the request of the Orthodox diocese. For instance, in Mark 15:25 "the third hour," as well as "the ninth hour" in 15:34, were originally translated as "9.00 AM" and "3.00 P.M." These were changed to "the third hour after sunrise" and "the ninth hour after sunrise" as requested by the Russian Orthodox Church so that the texts could be used in the Orthodox liturgy.

Finally, I should point to some issues regarding the most pressing challenges for Russian New Testament scholarship. The first is the widespread surface nature of religious faith in Russia (especially in the Russian Orthodox Church), with a sometimes ritualistic and magic-like approach. People with such an understanding of Christianity still dominate many local Orthodox parishes. They feel no need for a deep exegesis of the New Testament or a new Russian Bible translation, inclining to the Church Slavonic Bible and to the Russian Synodal translation.

The second pressing problem in the long term is a constant lack of qualified specialists in New Testament research and teaching at regional Russian universities and seminaries. Those few specialists in the area who have an international background in their professional and academic education and studies work in Moscow and St. Petersburg and are typically not ready to relocate to a regional institution for economic and social reasons.

An additional issue in Russia is the process for obtaining state recognition of the discipline of theology. Although theology has recently been recognized as an official academic discipline, the government mostly prefers to deal with the Russian Orthodox Church, which looks like a more ideological and confessional approach. At the practical level, it means that universities which teach theology (Biblical studies is usually a part of the theological department) are not completely free to hire whomever they want to teach and do research, because this choice has to be approved by the Russian Orthodox Church authorities. The very few existing Catholic and Protestant universities in Russia still do not have their own approved standards for teaching theology as an academic discipline. Due to this issue, many scholars who cannot receive official approval to teach at a theological department for political or ideological reasons need to leave the area of theology and instead join universities which offer the New Testament as a part of religious studies or the study of the ancient Near East.

Therefore, at the present moment, more serious cooperation and interaction between Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and between the church and the academy could improve system relevance in Russia. While there are some good examples of such cooperation, it should be intensified. In addition, this would be facilitated by building extensive church and academic networks between Russian and Western theological institutions and by recognizing a single theological educational standard for all denominational programs in universities on an equal basis.

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Paul Trebilco, Professor of New Testament in the Theology Program at the University of Otago, Dunedin/Aotearoa New Zealand. 1988, he was appointed to the staff of the Theological Hall, Knox College and as an Honorary Lecturer in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Otago. He became part of the new Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Otago in 1997 and was head of department from 1998 to 2009. Research interests: Jewish communities in Asia Minor, Christian communities in an urban environment (particularly focusing on early Christians in Ephesus and on self-designations and outsider-designations); Christian communities in Ionia, Western Asia Minor, up to 500 CE; Johannine Epistles. Latest monograph: *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament: Early Christian Communities and the Formation of Group Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Florian Wilk, since 2003 Professor of New Testament at Georg-August-Universität Göttingen; 2002–2003 Professor of Biblical Theology at Evangelische Fachhochschule (University of Applied Sciences) Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe, Bochum. Research interests: Exegesis of the New Testament in its Jewish-Hellenistic context and in correlation with the Old Testament/Septuagint; the letters of Paul; the synoptic Gospels; Biblical theology. Latest monograph: *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Neues Testament Deutsch 7/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, in print).

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Herausgegeben von Eve-Marie Becker, Jens Herzer, Angela Standhartinger und Florian Wilk

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