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UNIO CUM CHRISTO



The Global Witness
of the Reformed Faith



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Unio cum Christo celebrates and encourages the visible union believers possess in Christ when they confess the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, the body of Christ. Thus, its mission is (1) to be an international scholarly and practical journal for the global Reformed community—churches, seminaries, theologians, and pastors; (2) to encourage deeper fellowship, understanding, and growth in faith, hope, and love in the Reformed community at large; and (3) to support small and isolated Reformed witnesses in minority missional situations. It will seek to do so by the publication and dissemination of scholarly contributions of a biblical, theological, and practical nature by Reformed leaders world-wide—including leading theologians, developing scholars, practicing missionaries, pastors, and evangelists.

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Winning by Losing

PAUL WELLS

As I write and as you read this first editorial for *Unio cum Christo*, Christians are being persecuted or even tortured because they have not hidden their faith but have let their light shine in the world. This is hard to take for those of us who are sitting comfortably, not only because of our feelings, but because it seems to contradict what we believe about the Lordship of Christ. Is Christ living and reigning, are all things under his control, and does he care for his people? How can we harmonize what we believe with reports of the fate of Christians around the world?

Christianity is the most persecuted religion, and global opposition to the Christian faith seems to be on the up, no doubt because of new geopolitical factors. Things seem to be getting more apocalyptic. We are told that in our time more Christians are under the cosh than ever before. Thomas Schirmacher's article in this issue of *Unio cum Christo* provides some details on the present situation. We know the names of a good many martyrs who gave their lives in the past, because their sacrifice has been recorded and is honored by the church. They make up "the glorious company of the Apostles ... and the noble army of Martyrs" as the *Te Deum* says, those who praise the Lord and also beseech, How long? (Rev 6:10). Memory is very important, and the Christian tradition reminds us that suffering for the faith has always been, in one form or another, an integral part of not being ashamed of Christ's name and bearing his cross.

We are, however, ignorant of the names of our brothers and sisters, the myriads of men, women, boys and girls who are suffering in dark places today. Such information does not retain the attention of the celebrity-obsessed West or find its way into social media's viral posts. These martyrs are the

forgotten in north Korean cells, the unknown in the sixty or so other nations where oppression exists, in Islamic countries, sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Vietnam, in India, under Hindu intolerance, and the list goes on. If there is a growing awareness of the dangers of religious extremism, and some action on the part of whistle-blowing organizations, little is achieved in practical terms to obtain the freedom of belief that the Reformation brought and that is our taken-for-granted legacy in the West.

Add to this the untold anguish of the multitudes who live in fear of not knowing when the axe is going to fall, the threat of having one's husband or children taken away, of being imprisoned for having a Bible, of having to flit along in the shadows to worship with other Christians, or the horror of crossing the sea in makeshift vessels to escape religious violence. Surely we cannot remain indifferent to the terror that stalks our brethren by day, or bury our heads in a theology of prosperity that holds out unbiblical hopes to the eschatologically impatient.

Not that things are getting easier in the liberal West, where there are other forms of evil, softer and more subtle: the pressure of instant media exposure to the horrors of the world from Timbuktu to Kamchatka, the triviality of mind-softening media drivel, the invasiveness of political correctness, the pressure on private conscience and freedom of speech, the toxic lewdness of sin carried on triumphantly, the fact that over the last quarter of a century many former wrongs have become rights in the ethical and legal sense ... Next to tribulation in the majority world it's a mere trifle, but the future looks like a sunset rather than a new dawn. Many Christians feel that they are being squeezed out of public life and service; their faith is incompatible with what is socially acceptable as they are subjected to demands with which they are not willing to compromise.

Some of our more enlightened contemporaries seem to think that in a multicultural world tolerance and hospitality à la Derrida are a guiding light. The problem is that sooner or later a tolerant culture will reveal itself to be intolerant in some way or other. Claims of ultimate freedom unravel in unlimited despotisms, a paradox at the heart of the Grand Inquisitor scene in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Take a case in point. While claiming to be the cradle of humane tolerance, the way freedom of speech was advocated recently in France can hardly be seen as enlightened. It subtly mutated into freedom to pour scorn on others, as the scurrilous attitude of *Charlie Hebdo* showed—not free speech to enable peaceable dialogue with those of unlike mind, but entitlement to ridicule what others, rightly or wrongly, hold sacred. When the comedian Dieudonné M'Bala

was condemned for anti-Semitism a little while after the *Charlie Hebdo* debacle, it is not difficult to understand why French Muslims think that secularism is blind.

That the world has become more dangerous today seems obvious: the arms trade, random terrorism that strikes anywhere, local wars that spill into other places, or individual acts of lone terrorists, all contribute to the fragile fabric of the global world. Nor has the nuclear threat gone away, and the danger of terrorists getting a nuclear arm one day cannot be discounted. Zygmunt Bauman states that fear has become “liquid.”¹ It flows everywhere; even if it is not outside our door today, it may be tomorrow. The unexpected strikes even in security-monitored cities. The global crisis has become permanent and seemingly irremediable, unlike the economic crisis of the last century’s Great Depression. If terrorism is uncontrollable, the global economy has its unpleasant surprises as well. Politicians may act as if they were in control, but the power of the national state is diminished. The temptation to abandon all hope is palpable, as Bauman’s books illustrate.

It is therefore appropriate that the first issue of *Unio cum Christo* deal with the global witness to the Faith in this rapidly mutating situation. The goal of this journal is to provide a means of encouragement to those who find themselves hard-pressed as witnesses either in the majority world or elsewhere, to those who live in situations where they feel alone against the prophets of Baal, or almost. As Reformed believers, we can learn from each other, support each other, and travel side by side. We have the rich heritage of those who trod the same path before us. When we forget this, we impoverish both ourselves and the witness of the church. How then are we called to witness to Christ, and what are our expectations in the light of Scripture for the context described above? In light of these questions, the subject of witness, persecution, and martyrdom is presented here in a variety of articles, from the biblical foundations for witness to historical examples in the past and the present, in a broad sweep from New Testament times to the experiences of the Korean church and the silent sufferings of many Christians today.

How should Christians live in a world that has become dangerous? Surely our witness should not be fundamentally different from that of Christians of the first century. What defines a movement is its origins, and often its founder. God moves myriad galaxies, and Jesus Christ is Lord of the world and history until its end, and beyond. Everything is therefore ours *en Christo*, and we need not fear the unexpected that might strike. We continue to live our lives, wherever we are, for him, day after day, in a spirit of faith and

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

hope. Living one day at a time is what Jesus taught his followers to do. Without attempting to shoulder the suffering of the world, we are called to act and support those around us who suffer the misfortune that strikes—whether through unemployment, sickness, social exclusion, poverty, injustice or oppression. Beyond our local and national communities, let's not forget our brothers and sisters by doing for them what we can as they suffer persecution and poverty, and by intercession, because the Lord hears and answers prayer for them. History shows that God brings good out of evil and bestows blessings in suffering. Believing in divine sovereignty in a Reformed way means we will know, like Joseph of old, that “God meant it for good,” even when things are most adverse for us (Gen 50:20 ESV).

Surely the Reformed faith invites courage—first of all by having a tough mind and accepting that all things come to pass, even sufferings and persecution, by God's will, not in spite of it, and must be embraced as part of the mystery of providence and his love for his people. God works all things for good, even contrary experiences and evil, and trust must be the overdrive that kicks in where understanding stops.

What then will our witness be, and what are our expectations? In this number of *Unio cum Christo*, we will take heart through solid biblical theology, be edified by the example of those who have suffered following the Master, and be encouraged to follow their pattern by their brave words *in extremis*. This will lead us to look away to the Lord, who has a compassionate heart of love for his children, who is powerful to save, and to lead his chosen ones to glory.

The witness theme occupies a considerable place in Scripture, as Donald Carson's article indicates with his habitual clarity. *Martus* is a forensic term describing a person who knows the truth and can testify before a court of law, faithfully declaring what has been seen or heard. In the New Testament, the witness to the truth of Christ and the power of salvation often lead to arrest, exile, and death. For this reason, the Greek word was transliterated as *martyr*, one who suffers and dies to inherit the crown of life, rather than turning back on the faith.

To witness is to testify before others. This is what the apostles did, they who had direct knowledge of Christ (Acts 1:22). Their personal witness was delivered to others as the faith of the saints (2 Tim 2:2), the *paradosis* (1 Cor 15:1–3). The Holy Spirit divinely attests to truth in inspired apostolic revelation, and the human witness *is* the witness Christ bears to his saving power (John 15:26). So Paul calls on God as witness to the integrity and the truthfulness of the gospel of the Son (Rom 1:9). God the Holy Spirit is the final arbitrator of the reliability and trustworthiness of this testimony. The

prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are the object of the special attestation of the Spirit, but beyond that, when Scripture is preached, confessed, and witnessed to, the Spirit works with the word of truth. The hearts of those who are confronted by the truth are either softened to become hearts of flesh, receptive of the truth, or hardened to become like stone in rejecting the witness of the word. Those who bear witness to Christ have more than just good expectations; they know that the Spirit will work with the truth.

The dynamic of word and Spirit creates situations of conflict and confrontation. The opposition may range from indifference to violent rejection, gentle ridicule to persecution. This is part of the age-old conflict between the seed of the promise and that of the serpent. What is surprising is not that the word of witness causes opposition. It was ever so—Jesus himself recognized this to be the fate of the prophets from Abel in Genesis 4 to Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24:20, covering the range of the Old Testament canon (Luke 11:51). What is surprising is that we continue to think it shouldn't happen. "Beloved," said the apostle Peter, "do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet 4:12–14).

This, then, is the expectation of believers: suffering and persecution in the new covenant. It is the eschatological suffering with Christ in the end time that will reach a paroxysm before his return in glory. On a global scale, the New Testament does not promise us that things will get better and better; they may well get worse as opposition to Christ and his witness grows, but he will be with his ambassadors to the end of the age. Jesus's words about the vine and the branches portray union with Christ as productive of fruit that abides, as his life flows into those grafted into him (John 15:16). In what follows, Jesus states that the world hated him and it will do the same with his disciples, because they are not of the world: "If they persecuted me they will also persecute you. ... on account of my name" (vv. 20–21). The world hated both the Son and the Father, and will not treat witnesses to the truth in any other way. So "blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:10–12).

The words of Jesus do not apply to his listeners alone. Paul continues in the same vein about the present evil age, dominated by those whose minds are blinded by Satan (Gal 1:4; 2 Cor 4:4). There will be terrible times in the last days, the interim period when the church, under the cross, awaits the

return of the Lord in glory. In fact, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors go from bad to worse” (2 Tim 3:1–5, 12–13). Christ’s witnesses will share the fellowship of sufferings with their Head (Phil 3:10). Suffering with Christ is fundamental to Christian identity, because it is the consequence of witness to the truth. The danger for believers is to be pulled off course by compromise, through the devil’s temptation tactics, and to become false witnesses with regard to the truth.

Writing on eschatology and suffering, Richard Gaffin states:

the eschatology of the New Testament is an “eschatology of victory”—victory presently being realized by and for the church, through the eschatological kingship of the exalted Christ (Eph 1:22). But any outlook that fails to grasp that, short of Christ’s return, this eschatology of victory is an eschatology of suffering—an eschatology of (Christ’s) “power made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9)—confuses the identity of the church. . . . Until Jesus comes again, the church “wins” by “losing.”²

So a profound paradox runs through the New Testament and on from there throughout the church age. It is part of the paradox of the gospel and of Christ’s own person and work. The Lord was despised and rejected, put to death in weakness, but raised in glory. The gospel is foolish ignorance for those who are perishing, the wise of this world, but for those who believe, it is the power of God for salvation and the wisdom of God, against all conventions and appearances. It is something to be proud of (Rom 1:16–17); losing in the world’s terms is winning by the power of the gospel in the light of eternity. Pascal got it right in his famous wager (*pari*): winning everything in this life is nothing next to losing eternity. By losing in this world in God’s service, we win for eternity, just as Christ lost his life in obedience to the Father but took it up again as the firstfruits of the new creation.

Persecution and opposition seem to be the bane of the church, which is weak in terms of the powers of this age. It often seems that she will come to nought and be wiped out completely, but God raises up his people and snatches them from the dragon’s jaws. “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10) is the witness of the church as well as the apostle. This is no beggarly *apologia pro vita ecclesiae*, but simply what the eye of faith sees: that out of human weakness comes divine strength, out of death comes new life, and out of suffering glory. The old creation is in labor pains

² Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism,” in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, ed. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 216.

delivering the new (Rom 8:22). The world will never see it, nor did the world see it in the Lord. Only the eye of faith sees it, and this truth will strengthen any knees that tremble in the heat of opposition, and renew hope for those who are down-trodden to the point of despair. Moreover, all that we do here in this passing world will not be done out of secular concerns, but for Christ's kingdom.

Dying we live, losing we win, because the way of the cross is the way of victory. God's people should learn in bad times, or in better, that the good times will be eternal because Christ won the victory. He is winning, and will win, in spite of the adversary, our sinfulness, and many failings. United with Christ, the church wins; divided from him by worldly power and compromise, she falls.

Those who pass through fiery trial know this all too well, because they know that the way of the cross is the only hope possible. We in the West are at a certain disadvantage here. Because of the heritage of the Reformation, we have come to take freedom and the good life for granted, and too often we act as if we were "at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1). But it was not always so; these privileges were hard won through affliction and martyrdom. At present they seem to be eroding gradually, and who knows what the future will hold if our nations persist in turning their backs on the gospel? Who can say that tribulation will not be ours one day, if a godless church and radical secularistic autonomy rule the roost?

When and if this happens, our question should not be *why* but rather *why not*? Is this not the lot of all who are faithful to the Lord Jesus? If that should be the case, we too will have the joy of winning by faith in Christ, even though everything may disintegrate all around. As the old hymn goes, after the "night of weeping will come the morn of song." We may lose every battle, but the final war will end in Christ's victory. Such faith is hope for the hopeless and comfort for the downtrodden.

***Martyreō* and Cognates in the New Testament: Some Notes**

DONALD A. CARSON

Abstract

This study of *martyreō* and its cognates begins with observations on the distribution in the New Testament and continues with earlier usages in Greek literature and the Septuagint. While in early Judaism witness is not yet equated to martyrdom, instances of bearing witness leading to death emerge. The study goes on to define the specific usages in various parts of the New Testament. Witness leading to suffering anticipates the later Christian notion of martyrdom. Some theological conclusions are: (1) witness is about God's revelation in history; (2) early witnesses sometimes report about events beyond ordinary experience (e.g., the resurrection of Christ); (3) witnessing is prolonged in conjunction to the work of the Spirit; and (4) it is unsurprisingly accompanied by persecution.

The verb *martyreō* and its cognates do not have a narrowly-defined and technical meaning. This makes it all the more important to observe syntactical and semantic contexts with some care, and especially to observe the idiolectic distinctives found in some authors.

I. Notes on Distribution in the New Testament

Without providing the detailed data readily available in any concordance (digital or otherwise) and in superior articles like those in *NIDNTTE*,¹ it may nevertheless be worthwhile to remind ourselves of some of the distribution patterns that surface in the NT. The verb occurs 76x in the NT, but primarily in the Johannine corpus (31x in John, 10x in the Johannine letters, 4x in Revelation), as compared with 1x in Matthew, 1x in Luke, 8x in Paul, and 8x in Hebrews. By contrast, of the 19x the noun *martyrion* occurs in the NT, none is found in John's Gospel or in the Johannine letters, only 1x in Revelation, and 9x in the Synoptics (3x in each).² Again, the noun *martyrs* occurs 35x in the NT, none in the Johannine gospel or letters (though 5x in Revelation). On the other hand, the noun *martyria* shows up 37x in the NT, and of these 26 occurrences are in the Johannine corpus (14x in John, 4x in John's letters, 8x in Revelation).³ The verb *martyromai* occurs 5x in the NT (Acts 10:26; 26:22; Gal 5:3; Eph 4:17; 1Tim 2:12), the compound *diamartyromai* 15x, nine of them in Acts, "where it almost always serves as a special expression for the proclamation of the apostolic message, the urgently wooing address of the gospel of Christ (e.g., Acts 4:20; 8:25 [the word of the Lord]; 18:5 [Jesus as Messiah]; 20:24 [good news of God's grace]; 28:23 [the kingdom of God])."⁴ Almost a dozen other cognates appear in the NT, none of them frequently, and they are well surveyed by the classic book on this subject by Trites.⁵

II. Notes on Earlier Usage

Referring to the act of bearing witness, *martyria* occurs once in Homer, along with several instances of *martyros*, referring to the person who bears witness. Later classical authors prefer *martyrs* for the latter. Occasionally *martyrs* can be used to refer to gods (often cited is Pindar *Pyth.* 4.167, *ammin martyrs estō Zeus*, "let Zeus be our witness"), but more commonly to human beings and even to bits of evidence. By contrast with *martyria*, the noun *martyrion* tends to be used for the content of the testimony rather than for

¹ Moisés Silva, revision ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 3:234–46.

² Inevitably that will prompt Johannine scholars to remember that John is awash in occurrences of the verb *pisteuō* but has no instance of the noun *pistis*.

³ Owing to textual variants, not all authorities are agreed on these numbers (e.g., *martyrion/mysterion* in 1 Cor 2:1).

⁴ *NIDNTTE* 3:293.

⁵ Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, SNTSMS 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 66–77.

the act of testifying or of bearing witness. Thus, it can sometimes be rendered “evidence” or even “proof.” Admittedly *martyria* sometimes carries that sense: the line between *martyria* and *martyrion* is not as rigid as some might wish. Both *martyrion* and the verb *martyreō* occur as early as Pindar. The verb commonly means “to bear witness,” and is frequently used to confirm the truth of a statement, whether to someone’s advantage or disadvantage.

Very often and certainly important are the many instances in which this word group is used in the legal sphere. In such cases witnesses are expected to give truthful testimony without constraint (such as torture). But when the word group stretches beyond the legal sphere to the domain of private and even public (but non-legal) relationships, its terms may refer not only to “the establishment of events or actual relations or facts of experience on the basis of direct personal knowledge,” but also to “the proclamation of views or truths of which the speaker is convinced.”⁶ In such cases *martyria* may be not so much the giving of objective testimony as an expression of philosophical or moral conviction.

Usage in the LXX follows roughly similar patterns, though several distinctive occurrences surface. For example, *martyrion* in Psalm 119 (118) and elsewhere (e.g., Deut 4:25) can refer to the Torah, conceived not only as established law and specific commands but as godly wisdom. The psalmist loves and marvels at such “testimony” (119:119, 129—presumably God’s testimony), pledging to observe it (119:88, 146). Such “testimony” is to be cherished precisely because it is the expression of the covenant, and thus the means of knowing God. Another LXX coinage is the pleonastic use of *pseudomartyreō* in the Decalogue (Exod 20:16; Deut 6:20) with *martyria pseudēs*. By and large, however, *martyria* occurs rather sparsely in the LXX.

The most frequently-occurring member of this word group in the LXX is *martyrion*, but mainly (about 140x) as a mistranslation of Hebrew *mô‘ēd* in the expression “the tent of meeting.” This is commonly rendered in Greek *hē skēnē tou martyrion* (“the tent of witness,” e.g., Exod 28:43), even though *mô‘ēd* never means “witness.” The reasons for this strange inaccuracy are hard to decipher. The ark of the covenant, which of course was housed in the Most Holy Place within the tent of meeting, is often called “the box of the testimony” (*hē kibōtos tou martyriou*, about 20x, e.g., Exod 20:33), and the tablets within the ark of the covenant can be called “the tablets of the testimony” (*hai plakes tou martyriou*, e.g., Exod 31:18). Recognizing that “witness” or “testimony” (*martyrion*), as we have seen, can refer to the law or the law-covenant, it is possible that certain semantic borrowing has taken

⁶ TDNT 4.478; cited also in NIDNTTE 3:235–36.

place,⁷ with the result that by *hē skēnē tou martyrion* the LXX translators meant something like “the tent of the law-covenant,”⁸ rather than “the tent of the testimony.”

The noun *martyrs* in the LXX continues in its classical sense to refer to someone who bears witness to events based on observation or at least personal knowledge. That *martyrs* may be called to give testimony in a legal context, confirming an agreement or an event. Sometimes God himself is invoked as the witness (e.g., Gen 31:43–54; 1 Sam 12:3–7); indeed, he may step forward as a witness against Israel (e.g., Jer 26:23 [29:23]). More commonly, however, the word refers to human witnesses—e.g., the elders are witnesses to the contract Boaz makes (Ruth 4:9–11). Considerable emphasis is placed on the responsibility of witnesses to speak the truth, along with severe warnings against lying witnesses (e.g., Exod 23:1; Deut 19:16–18; Ps 27:12; Prov 12:17; Isa 8:2). The concern to establish and confirm the truth and avoid mendacity is strengthened by the procedural stipulation that certain kinds of decisions can be established only on the basis of multiple witnesses (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6–7; 19:15–18).

Despite the strong lines of continuity between the use of the witness word group in classical Greek and its use in the Greek of the Old Testament, there does not appear to be any instance where *martyrion* or a cognate refers to subjective convictions that have no basis in objective observation. More interesting is the growing recognition in the literature of Second Temple Judaism that bearing witness could issue in suffering, even martyrdom. Nevertheless there does not appear to be any instance in this literature of *martyrs* or any cognate of the word group referring to people who bear witness to the point of death, indeed who bear witness *by* dying as martyrs.⁹ In other words, “the Old Testament and later Judaism are excluded as the place of origin of the title of martyr” as it came to be used in early Christianity.¹⁰

III. Notes on Some Distinctive New Testament Usages

In broad strokes, the NT writers maintain the usage found in earlier Greek. The relatively few occurrences of the word group in the Synoptic Gospels

⁷ Cf. Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 86–88.

⁸ Doubtless that is why, in the two places where *hē skēnē tou martyrion* occurs in the NT (viz., Acts 7:44; Rev 15:5), the NIV translators render it “the tabernacle of the covenant law.”

⁹ Cf. *TDNT* 4:486–88, and especially Norbert Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer: Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie* (Munich: Kösel, 1961).

¹⁰ Brox, *Zeuge*, 176.

are dominated by legal use, many in connection with the trial of Jesus. That trial conjured up evidence understood to be false by the writers of the Gospels: note some of the occurrences of the *pseudo-* compounds of our word group (Matt 26:59–60 par. Mark 14:56–57), the instances of *katamartyreō* (Matt 26:62; 27:13; Mark 14:60), two passages with *martyrs* (Matt 26:65 par. Mark 14:63), and four with *martyria* (Mark 14:55–56, 59; Luke 22:71). Acts can continue this legal use of words in this group in connection with the (false) witness surrounding the execution of Stephen (Acts 6:13; 7:58). Other NT corpora also use the words of this group in a legal sense abstracted from contextual overtones of false witness. For example, the demand for “two or three witnesses” (Deut 17:6; 19:15), clearly in a legal sense, surfaces in several NT books (Matt 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19; Heb 10:28). But it may be more helpful to identify distinctive uses. As there is no straight-line development of the usage of this word group across time, but rather idiolectic preferences related in part to the themes of individual authors, it may be misleading to present the evidence in temporal order—so I have purposely not done so.

(1) *Hebrews*. Remarkably, the verb *martyreō* appears in the passive voice in seven of its eight occurrences (the exception is Heb 10:15). Especially in chapter 11 it is clear that those who make up this corridor of faith have been “testified to” or “witnessed to”—i.e., commended—by God himself, who hides behind the passive verbs.¹¹ It is all the more remarkable, then, that in 12:1 they have themselves become “a great cloud of witnesses” whose testimony is for the benefit of the church.

(2) *Synoptics*. We have already observed how the relatively small number of instances of this word group in the Synoptics tends to function in a legal context and focus on the passion narrative. But one distinctive expression draws our attention. In Matthew 8:4 (par. Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14), Jesus tells the leper, now healed, to show himself to the priest “and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony [*eis martyrion*] to them.” This should probably not be taken in an exclusively negative sense, as if the expression means that the healing will be validated and thus serve to accuse, or perhaps even condemn, the leaders for their unbelief. Rather, this “testimony” speaks to the truth of who Jesus is because it attests to his power to heal: the validation prescribed by the Law thus provides a testimony to Jesus’s identity, whether it is well received or not. Indirectly, then, the law bears witness to

¹¹ Contrast Acts 22:12, a rare use of the passive outside of Hebrews, where Paul is “highly respected” (*martyroumenos*), that is, testified to, commended, not by God but “by all the Jews living there.”

Jesus (cf. 5:17). Similarly in Matthew 10:18: “you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony [*eis martyrion*] to them and the Gentiles (NRSV; ESV has “to bear witness before them and the Gentiles”; NIV, “as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles”). Once again, this cannot be purely negative. The witness Jesus’s followers bear is to Christ and his gospel, regardless of how it is received (cf. also Mark 13:9; Luke 21:13–14). And finally, the phrase *eis martyrion* occurs in Mark 6:11 (par. Luke 9:15), where Jesus instructs his trainee apostles to “leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony [*eis martyrion*] against them.” Here the overtone is clearly negative: shaking off the dust of one’s feet is not an open-ended witness that may be accepted or rejected, but a sign that rejection has already taken place.

(3) *Acts*. The most striking development of the theme of witness in Acts concerns the witness that the apostles and others bear to the resurrection of Jesus Christ—not only in contexts where the *mart-* word group is used (e.g., “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” [Acts 4:33]), but also in contexts where the theme of bearing witness to Jesus is very strong even if this word group is not present (e.g., “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” [Acts 4:19–20]).¹² This is in line with the injunction of the resurrected Jesus in Luke 24:46–48, where the witnesses attest to not only the resurrection but the veracity of the gospel: “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” The connection with the opening chapter of Acts is obvious: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). The replacement for Judas Iscariot has to “become a witness with us of his resurrection” (1:22). This element of Christian witness captures not only the Twelve and others who traveled with Jesus from the beginning (2:32; 3:15; 13:31), but also Paul, who likewise sees the risen Lord Jesus (22:15; 26:16). Indeed, Paul’s evangelistic ministry can be summarized as testifying about Jesus (23:11). Even where the *mart-* word group does not in Acts directly have as its focus the resurrection of Jesus or the gospel, it continues to carry the

¹² This is the place to remind ourselves that a full coverage of the theme of witness would include not only many passages that speak of hearing and seeing certain things, but also of the use of *autoptai* (“eyewitnesses”) in Luke 1:2, which stands as a sentinel over all of Luke-Acts.

sense of “bearing witness” to something observed, such as good deeds, one’s reputation, or the like (Acts 6:3; 10:22; 16:2; 22:5, 12; 26:5).

One further feature in Acts that must be noted is the use of *martys*. As opposition arises against Christians and the witness they bear, it becomes increasingly clear that the way of the witness is the way of the cross. Paul looks back on his pre-Christian life and confesses, “And when the blood of your *martys* Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him” (Acts 22:20). The NIV here translates *martys* by “martyr,” leaving “witness” for the footnote. This is a mistake: the semantic crossover may be beginning in this passage, but it is not yet established. See further the comments on the Apocalypse, below.

(4) *Paul*. The word group occurs 35x in the Pauline corpus, with twelve of them showing up in the Pastoral Epistles. Mirroring usage in Acts, Paul bears witness to the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead (1 Cor 15:15). Indeed, if Christ has not been raised, it follows that Paul and others who have borne such witness are demonstrated to be false witnesses (*pseudomartyres*, 15:15). Sometimes the verb *martyreō* attests something important but less transcendent than the gospel: e.g., Christians doing what is right (2 Cor 8:3; Gal 4:15; Col 4:13), or Jewish people having a zeal for God (Rom 10:2). Unique is Paul’s use of the verb in Romans 3:21, where, after insisting that the righteousness he is proclaiming has been made known apart from the law, the apostle nonetheless insists that the Law and the Prophets testify to this righteousness. Lodged in a salvation-historical context, presumably this means that the Law and the Prophets “testify” to the righteousness secured in the gospel by anticipating it, pointing it out in advance, announcing it along the trajectories of redemptive history as well as in specific words.

Some have suggested that Paul “may have been the first to give the noun *martyrion* the special sense of gospel proclamation”¹³—e.g., “just as [lit.] the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you” (1 Cor 1:6; cf. NIV, “God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you”). Similarly in 2 Thessalonians 1:10, the substance of the testimony is as broad as the gospel (“because you believed our testimony to you”). Yet Paul does not turn *martyrion* into a technical expression that inevitably refers to the gospel. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 1:12 the word can refer to what Paul’s conscience does to him (“Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world ... with integrity and godly sincerity”).

As in classical Greek and the LXX, the apostle can use *martys*, invariably in the singular, to refer to God, who bears witness to Paul’s words and

¹³ NIDNTTE 3:241.

actions (Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; Phil 1:8; 1 Thess 2:5).¹⁴ The plural form of the noun is used to refer to the “many witnesses” who testify to Timothy’s call and ministry (1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 2:2). It is also used to refer to the two or three witnesses required by Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15 (2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19).

(5) *John*. We have already noted that the frequency with which this word group occurs in the Johannine corpus widely outstrips its use elsewhere in the NT, and that John uses the verb *martyreō* and the noun *martyria*, both signaling action, and never *martyrion* or any of the *mart-* compounds. Even *martys* (“witness”) is absent from John’s Gospel and Epistles (though it does appear several times in the Apocalypse). John says quite a bit about those who bear witness, but his vocabulary preference is for the words favoring action rather than identity.

We may usefully outline John’s use of the word group under four headings:

(a) John commonly uses the verb *martyreō* in one of its common senses, human attestation, human “bearing witness” to public facts. John the Baptist directs his followers to bear witness to the fact that he, John, never claimed to be the Messiah (John 3:28). Toward the end of Jesus’s public ministry, some people bear witness to the resurrection of Lazarus (12:17). Jesus himself does not need human testimony (2:24). When Jesus tells the court, “If I said something wrong . . . testify as to what is wrong” (18:23), he is demanding that the temple guards provide truthful witness of substantive evidence. In 3 John, where the verb and noun together occur three times (vv. 3, 6, 12), the witness about Gaius and Demetrius is faithful commendation based on observation of good behavior.

(b) Although all four canonical Gospels open their respective accounts by describing the ministry of John the Baptist, the Fourth Gospel, much more strongly than the other three, casts that ministry in terms of witness borne to Jesus. John “came as a witness [*eis martyrian*, ‘for a testimony’]¹⁵ to testify [*hina martyresē*] concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not that light; he came only as a witness [*hina martyresē*, ‘in order to bear witness’] to the light” (1:7–8; cf. further 1:15, 19, 32–34, 3:26, 31–32). When Jesus publicly affirms the validity of the witness of John the Baptist, the wording suggests that the Baptist’s witness covers more than observable phenomena but includes his “take” on Jesus: “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth” (5:33).

(c) Other people and things bear witness to Jesus, including the Scriptures (5:39), which doubtless amounts to saying that God bears witness to Jesus in

¹⁴ Cf. the plural where Christians bear witness along with God: *humeis martyres kai ho theos* (“You are witnesses, and so is God”).

¹⁵ Not to be confused with *eis martyrion*, discussed above.

the Scriptures (cf. Gal 3:8). The Father bears witness to Jesus (e.g., 5:32). Most commonly, however, Jesus's disciples bear witness to him, but commonly in contexts where that to which they bear witness is both the observable and its proper inferences. Whoever accepts Jesus's testimony "has certified that God is truthful" (3:33). The faith of the Samaritans begins with the testimony of the Samaritan woman—i.e., her witness to her experience with Jesus, and the inferences to be drawn (4:39). The witness of the disciples to Jesus is drawn into and becomes part of the witness of the Paraclete (15:26–27; cf. 1 John 5:6). In the closing verses of the Gospel, "the disciple who testifies to these things and wrote them down" is certified to be providing truthful testimony (21:24). The sweeping witness of the first Epistle runs from historical eyewitness testimony regarding the incarnation¹⁶ to conviction about the truth of the gospel: "The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. . . . And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. . . . And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 1:2; 4:14; 5:11).

(d) In John's Gospel, Jesus also bears witness to himself. The expression *martyrō peri* ("I bear witness concerning") occurs 19x in John's Gospel, once in 1 John, and nowhere else in the NT. Of the 19 occurrences in the Gospel, eight stipulate *martyrō peri emou* ("I bear witness concerning me"); another three read *martyrō peri emautou* ("I bear witness concerning myself," 5:31; 8:14, 18).¹⁷ At a superficial level, this testimony of Jesus to himself leads to a formal contradiction. In John 5:30–31 we read, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. If I testify about myself [*martyrō peri emou*], my testimony is not true." A little later, however, when Jesus declares that he is the light of the world, his opponents criticize him for appearing as his own witness; his testimony must therefore be invalid (8:12–13). Jesus replies at some length:

¹⁶ I here take the traditional view, rather than the suggestion put forward by Matthew D. Jensen, *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ: A Reading of 1 John*, SNTSMS 153 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), who argues that that to which John bears witness is Jesus's resurrection, not his incarnation. For the purposes of this essay, it makes little difference which option one selects: in either case, John runs from witness regarding historical events (the incarnation, the resurrection) to affirmation of the gospel.

¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, "Gospels Before Normativization: A Critique of Francis Watson's *Gospel Writing*," *JNTS* 37 (2014): 193–95, appeals to these statistics to demonstrate that the so-called Egerton Gospel is dependent on John, not the other way around, since the *peri emou* expression is found in GEger A 4 (using Watson's label).

Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me. (8:14–18)

How do these two passages belong together in the same book? How shall we think about the concatenation of “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true,” and “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid”?

As Simpson puts it, “If the statements are juxtaposed outside the context of the conversation there is a contradiction.”¹⁸ In reality, the conversational context clarifies and limits the naked statement in both cases. In the first, Jesus’s insistence that he is not testifying about himself is cast against the background of 5:16–30. There, Jesus’s insistence that he has the same rights to act on the Sabbath as his Father does elicits the charge that he is calling God his own Father in a way that makes himself equal with God (5:17–18). In other words, Jesus’s Jewish opponents saw the force of Jesus’s claim, but interpreted it in polytheistic categories: if Jesus makes himself equal to God, then there are two Gods, the Father and Jesus. Jesus’s response paves the road toward the peculiarly Christian understanding of monotheism. Jesus insists he is not another God, an independent God; far from it: he can do nothing by himself (5:19). Yet at the same time, this unique Son does *whatever* he sees the Father doing, including the kinds of things that only God can do, such as making a universe (1:3) and raising the dead and giving them life (5:21). Meanwhile the Father, for his part, intends that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father (5:23), which inevitably means honoring him as God. *Within the framework of this theological dialogue*, Jesus’s statement “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true” is not so much a judicial pronouncement of what constitutes valid testimony, as a revelatory statement insisting that he is *not* providing independent claims, for he is *not* an independent, second God. He does what the Father gives him to do; he says what the Father gives him to say. His claims are thus of a piece with what God says, which is why Jesus goes on to say, “There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true” (5:32). John the Baptist likewise bore truthful testimony to Jesus (5:33)—yet, says Jesus, the fact that Jesus mentions this is not because he “accepts” human testimony: the one who is identified as having the

¹⁸ Thomas W. Simpson, “Testimony in John’s Gospel: The Puzzle of 5:31 and 8:14,” *TynBul* 65 (2014): 214.

authority of God does not hang about waiting for someone to acknowledge his status. Jesus does not need John and his witness. Jesus mentions John, he says, so that “you may be saved” (5:35): the crowds need the witness of John the Baptist, but Jesus does not. Jesus himself has weightier witness than that of John, namely the Father himself, disclosed in the works Jesus does and in the Scriptures God provides (5:36–39). Jesus does not accept the witness of the Baptist in the sense that he does not accept glory from human beings (5:41). Jesus’s opponents, however, do not believe the witness of John the Baptist, they do not see the significance of the signs Jesus performs (including the healing in this chapter that precipitates this discussion), and they do not grasp what the Scriptures speak, so how can they possibly believe what Jesus says (5:47)? So we conclude, again, that Jesus’s statement “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true” is not so much a judicial pronouncement of what constitutes valid testimony, as a revelatory statement disclosing the oneness of Jesus’s testimony with the testimony of God himself.

When we turn to the second disputed witness passage, once again the dialogue context is important. “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going” (8:14), Jesus insists—unlike his opponents, who judge by human standards and who have no idea where Jesus came from or where he is going (8:14). In other words, Jesus can testify about himself, making these spectacular claims, because what he is doing is speaking out of his own experience—and in this, he stands with his Father, who bears witness to the same truth (8:16–18).

All of this is in line with what Jesus elsewhere says to Nicodemus: “Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony [*martyria*]” (3:11): Jesus speaks out of the uniqueness of his own experience, his own origin, his own identity with God. Indeed, the reason he was born and came into the world was “to testify to the truth” (18:37). Thus the witness Jesus bears is witness to *what he knows out of his own unique experience*, but in the nature of the case it cannot be witness to *what others think of as verifiable fact*, since they have no similar experience. From their perspective, it is a revelatory claim, one they cannot accept. All the testimony of Jesus’s words about his origin and mission and status, all the testimony of Jesus’s works, all the testimony of the Father in the pages of Scripture, cannot be squeezed into the restricted, unbelieving, and frankly sinful grid of their limited criteria. Human demands for legitimation, grounded in the criteria of merely human and fallen experience, are hopelessly inadequate, because they cannot

hear or see the revelation God provides, the revelatory witness without which there can be no grasp of who Jesus is.¹⁹

(6) *Revelation*. The distribution in the Apocalypse of the words from our word group I summarized at the beginning of this article. Some of the distinctive uses are bound up with the apocalyptic genre in which most of the book is written. John's task, he declares, is to testify to everything he saw—that is, to “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (1:2), which apparently came to him when he found himself in exile on Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9). The notion of seeing the word of God is not transparent, but John probably means that what he saw was the sequence of apocalyptic visions, which constitute the message of God, the word of God. In that sense, he saw the word of God. If so, John is bearing witness to what he has personally experienced, even if that experience is visionary and cannot be corroborated by other witnesses. In short, as sometimes in the Gospel of John, the content is revelatory. The expression “the testimony of Jesus (Christ),” found in both these verses, is ambiguous: does *martyria Iēsou (Christou)* refer to the testimony that Jesus provides, or perhaps to testimony about Jesus, i.e., testimony whose content is Jesus? Certainly Jesus can elsewhere be described as “the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5; 3:14). As the faithful witness, there must be ways in which Jesus *bears* witness. But when the same expression occurs in 12:17, most commentators take it to refer to testimony about Jesus: “those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus [*martyria Iēsou*].” As Spicq puts it, “All missionary preaching is a *martyrion* announcing the advent of salvation (1 Cor 1:6; 2:1; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 2:6; 2 Tim 1:8), so that it can be said that the disciples ‘hold to the testimony of Jesus’ (Rev 12:17; cf. 19:10; 20:4; Acts 22:20).”²⁰ Again, when the expression occurs twice in 19:10, it probably has the same meaning. John had fallen down before the interpreting angel, who tells him to stop: “Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus [*martyria Iēsou*]. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears witness to Jesus” (lit., “For the Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus [*martyria Iēsou*]”). The flow of thought

¹⁹ Despite many interesting and stimulating elements in the book by Andrew T. Lincoln (*Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000]), his reading of much of the language of witness in John as contributing to the shape of the Fourth Gospel as a lawsuit does not adequately wrestle with the revelatory nature of the witness of Jesus to himself.

²⁰ Ceslaus Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2:449.

seems to be something like this: Don't worship me, the angel whose task it is to interpret these prophetic visions and who stands with you as a fellow servant who joins you in bearing witness to Jesus. Rather, worship God, who has given these visions that bear witness to Jesus, these visions that are thus identified with the Spirit of prophecy, God's Spirit of prophecy.

Most striking, however, is the way in which Antipas, a Christian in Pergamum who was executed for his faith, is called Christ's "faithful witness" (*martyr*, 2:13). More broadly, John describes the wretched action of Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth, who becomes drunk on the blood of God's saints, "the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus" (17:6). The language reminds us of the reference to Stephen in Acts 22:20. Both there and here in the Apocalypse, believers who bear witness to Jesus may seal their witness with their blood. These are the transitional passages that show the first stages of how the very word for witness came eventually to mean (Christian) martyr—that is, Christians who give their lives to maintain their witness to Jesus.²¹

IV. *Final Theological Reflections*

We may usefully draw attention to four things:

(1) One of the remarkable elements about Christianity is its claim to revelation *in history*. The many sacred writings of Hinduism and Buddhism are not cast the same way. The Qur'an is largely devoted to Allah directly addressing human beings, mostly with commands; the book includes relatively little history.²² Muhammad himself, though hugely important as the final prophet (which means the last one in the sequence of events we call history), is not considered inspired to write the words of the Qur'an; rather, he is presented as the faithful recorder of what Allah gives him. As a result, there is no complex doctrine of two authors, one divine and one human, and therefore no wrestling with the ways in which the social location or the idiolectic preferences of the human author might in some measure determine what is written. From the Muslim point of view, this protects the otherness of Allah, along with the perception that the Qur'an is the utterly pure word of God. By

²¹ By further extension, of course, the word "martyr" came to refer to all those who give their lives for a cause, regardless of the cause. In other words, the word came to be dissociated from its Christian roots. In some sectors today, the word has undergone another change. Someone might say, in exasperated criticism, "Oh, don't be such a martyr!," referring to someone who feels very sorry for himself.

²² The history of Muhammad is considered very important for exemplary purposes, of course, but that is largely relegated to the Hadith.

contrast, Christians insist that God's self-disclosure in history, including his sovereign use of the words of specific human beings, far from jeopardizing his transcendence, in reality demonstrates the measureless lengths to which he goes to rescue his rebellious image-bearers. Such self-disclosures *in history*, not only in specific historical events but even in words deployed by specific historical individuals, establish the trajectories that bring us to the supreme self-disclosure in history, the incarnation of the Word.

This emphasis on history means that there are huge swaths of God's self-disclosure that can be witnessed. To the Muslim, such a notion threatens to make God contingent; to the Christian, God remains sovereign and true in such revelation-in-history events, regardless of whether the human witnesses faithfully report what takes place, or even understand it.

All of this means that the witness language of the NT is extraordinarily important. "The principal events of the public ministry of Jesus were wrought in the presence of his chosen companions and apostles. They had been present in Jerusalem during the final week and were in a position to attest the facts of his trial, crucifixion, and burial. Above all, they were competent witnesses to vouch for the fact of his resurrection."²³ The book of Acts is especially forceful in this respect, not least in the speeches. Even in the appointment of a replacement for Judas Iscariot, the nascent church was eager to "choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us" (Acts 1:21–22), for only such men could be witnesses of this historical revelation. The four evangelists, however theologically driven they may be, are no less committed to establishing the facts of the origins of the gospel, largely based on eyewitness testimony.²⁴ If possible, Paul is even more forceful. Not only does he insist that the historical data surrounding Jesus's death and resurrection are matters "of first importance" that are established by a plethora of witnesses (1 Cor 15:1–8), but that if Jesus did not in fact rise from the dead, then these witnesses are liars, false witness—and Christian faith is invalid and useless (15:12–19). In other words, the validity of Christian faith turns, at least in part, on the truthfulness of faith's object, of God's self-disclosure *in history*, which is attested by witnesses.²⁵

²³ *NIDNTE* 3:243.

²⁴ In the past this has been a common perception of the nature of the canonical Gospels (e.g., A. Barr, "The Factor of Testimony in the Gospels," *ExpTim* 49 [1937–38]: 401–8), now competently revived in the work of Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

²⁵ Implicitly, then, we must reject the approach to history advocated by some who will speak of a historical event only if it is entirely explainable by the causes admitted by the guild of

(2) Not everything to which people bear witness lies in the public, historical, arena, observable in principle by anyone who happens to be there. In the Apocalypse, John the Seer bears witness to the visions God gives him. He thus speaks from his experience, but of course the experience to which he bears witness is not in the public arena. More importantly, Jesus testifies concerning himself, including what he has learned from the Father: all of this is real experience, but not experience that is verifiable by other witnesses. Such revelation is *reported* in the public arena by these witnesses (in this case, by Jesus and by John), even though *the revelation itself* is not in the public arena—quite unlike the revelation that does actually take place in the public arena (like the resurrection of Jesus).

(3) Beyond the first generation of Christians, believers bear witness to Jesus by testifying as to who he is, what he has done, and what they have experienced of him. The expectation that they will be “brought before governors and kings *as witnesses* to them and to the Gentiles” (Matt 10:18) envisages a time beyond the initial eyewitnesses. This form of bearing witness is developed into a larger theme in the Gospel of John and the Revelation of John: Jesus himself has a lawsuit running with the world, and his followers are witnesses in this massive “legal” drama, along with such witnesses as the Scriptures, the reported preaching of John the Baptist, the works Jesus does, and the Holy Spirit. This is one way in which NT apologetics works itself out: the claims of Christ are contested in this world in which the kingdom has been inaugurated but not yet consummated, and the witnesses of various kinds are boldly aligned to command and elicit faith (e.g., John 5:33–34, 36; 10:25–26), even though in the final analysis there is no acceptance of all this witnessed truth apart from the illumining work of the Spirit (e.g., 1 Cor 2:10b–16).

(4) Because the world is so adamantly opposed to Jesus’s Lordship, it cannot be a surprise that to bear faithful witness to him frequently arouses opposition and persecution. Jesus’s followers should not expect better treatment than Jesus himself received (John 15:18–25). The Book of Acts applies the terminology of witness to the first Christian martyr (22:20), and the Apocalypse, knowing that Christians are on the verge of facing severe persecution, encourages them to “hold” to the “testimony of Jesus.” Although the NT documents never complete the semantic slide of the *mart-* word group from “witness” to “martyr,” it is easy to understand how the challenge

historians, i.e., by the causes recognized by philosophical naturalism. On such a reading, the resurrection of Jesus is an event, but not a historical event; rather, it is an event open only to the eyes of faith.

Christians faced in bearing witness toward the end of the first century paved the way for the change and made it inevitable. In the twenty-first century, a new generation of Christian witnesses constitute the latest generation of Christian martyrs.²⁶

²⁶ See especially John L. Allen Jr., *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (Colorado Springs: Image, 2013); Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: A Faith under Attack* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

Witness in the Theology of Hebrews

DAVID G. PETERSON

Abstract

In the pages of Scripture, God bears witness to the person and work of his Son, and testifies to the faith of key biblical characters. These in turn testify to Christians about the many dimensions of enduring faith. Jesus is effectively the ultimate witness to the faith that triumphs through suffering. Although Hebrews does not use the language of witness with reference to Christians, they are urged to imitate the faith and patience of those who inherit God's promises, and to confess Jesus as the source of their hope and lifestyle.

Hebrews uses the language of “witness” in three significant ways, each related to Scripture. God testifies to his Son, God testifies to the faith of key biblical characters, and these characters testify to Christian believers about the life of faith. These emphases come together in Hebrews 12 with a climactic exhortation to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (12:1b–2 NIV). By implication, the suffering and exalted Lord Jesus is the supreme witness to persevering faith (12:3–4). As such, he is the source of ultimate encouragement and hope for disciples who struggle against opposition and sin (12:4–17).

I. *The Testimony of God to the Person and Work of Christ*

1. *The Law of Moses*

In an exhortation that anticipates 12:1–3, Hebrews 3:12 challenges all who share in a heavenly calling to “fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest.” Focusing on the faithfulness of Jesus in fulfilling his high-priestly ministry (cf. 2:17), the writer asserts that, “he was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house.” But Jesus is worthy of greater honor than Moses, “just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself” (v. 3). As “a servant in all God’s house” (v. 5), Moses was part of the “house” or “household” that God is building (v. 4). But Jesus is described as “the Son over God’s house” (v. 6; cf. 1:1–4).

Since Christians are identified as “his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory” (v. 6), the writer clearly envisages a continuity between the people of faith to whom Moses ministered and the people of the new covenant. This is an important preparation for the argument in 11:1–12:1, where certain OT believers are “witnesses” to the sort of faith that Christians are called to exercise. These models of persevering faith are to be contrasted with Israelites who hardened their hearts in unbelief and rebellion, and failed to enter God’s promised “rest” (3:7–4:11).

There is an allusion to Numbers 12:7 in the description of Moses as a faithful servant “in all God’s house” (3:5). But the writer is not talking about the faithfulness of Moses in a general or comprehensive sense. His honored role as God’s servant was for the specific purpose of providing a testimony (*eis martyrion*) to “what would be spoken by God in the future.” Moses’s responsibility was to receive face-to-face revelations from God (Num 12:6–8), and be faithful in passing them on to his people.¹ The future passive participle (*tōn lalēthēsomenōn*) refers to later revelations by God from the temporal perspective of Moses. This could include subsequent biblical prophecies about the Messiah, but most obviously points to the revelation brought by the Son of God himself, concerning the salvation he came to achieve (1:2; 2:1–3).²

¹ Harold W. Attridge (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 105) points to the way Jewish tradition developed the significance of Moses’s intimate encounter with God, making him “the intermediary par excellence between God and humanity, the sort of claim made for Jesus in Hebrews.”

² William L. Lane (*Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A [Dallas: Word, 1991], 78) agrees that, “Moses’ prophecy was a corroboration of the new salvation, which began to find expression in the preaching of Jesus (2:3).”

Moses gave testimony to Christ and his work in advance of his coming, through the revelation he conveyed to Israel in the law. Most importantly, he built the tabernacle and established the worship of Israel according to the “pattern” that was shown to him “on the mountain” (Heb 8:5, citing Exod 25:40). Although the law that he was given was only “a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (10:1), its provisions prepared for, and confirmed the necessity for, every aspect of the work of Christ. Consequently, Hebrews expounds that work in terms of the fulfillment of what was revealed to Moses (cf. 8:1–6; 9:1–10:18; 13:10–14).

2. *Prophets and Psalms*

Hebrews uses the verb *martyrein* three times in relation to what God reveals elsewhere in the OT about the person and work of the Messiah.³ God bears witness to the eternal priesthood of his Son in the revelation of Psalm 110:4 (Heb 7:8, 17). A whole chapter of the writer’s “word of exhortation” (13:22) is devoted to explaining how Jesus became “a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” This revelation means that, “he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” The Holy Spirit testifies through Jeremiah 31:33–34 to the definitive forgiveness of sins arising from Jesus’s once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Heb 10:15). The need for the new covenant and the way it is fulfilled in Christ becomes the focus of the argument in 8:7–10:18.⁴

In other NT contexts, this manner of speech draws attention to the authority of prophets (Acts 10:43) or the Law and the Prophets (Rom 3:21) in testifying beforehand to the Messiah and the blessings of the new covenant (cf. Acts 13:22, where God testifies in Scripture to the character of David). In Acts 14:3, God is said to have “testified to the message of his grace by granting that signs and wonders be performed through (the apostles)” (Acts 14:3 HCSB; cf. Heb 2:4).⁵

³ Hermann Strathmann (“*μάρτυς κτλ.*,” *TDNT* 4:496–99) contends that the verb *martyrein* is used in the NT with reference to a human declaration of facts; a good report; the witness of God, the Spirit, or Scripture; religious witness in the sense of evangelistic confession; and the witness of Jesus to the nature and significance of his person.

⁴ Cf. David G. Peterson, *Transformed by God: New Covenant Life and Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 77–103.

⁵ Strathmann (“*μάρτυς κτλ.*,” 4:497) concludes that the verb in such contexts “guarantees the correctness of specific statements” and can mean “to declare emphatically, on the guarantee of an existing authority.”

II. *The Testimony of God to the Faith of Biblical Characters*

It is particularly significant that Hebrews mentions God's testimony to the faith of "the ancients" (*presbyteroi*, "elders") in 11:2, before applying their example to the situation of his readers in 12:1–13. An inclusion is formed by references to receiving testimony through faith in 11:1–2 and 11:39–40. As an outworking of the challenge in 10:35–39, persevering faith, even in the face of persecution and suffering, is the theme of this chapter. The verb "endure" (*hypomenein*) is a key term in 10:32; 12:2, 3, 7, and the noun "endurance" (*hypomonē*) is used in 10:36; 12:1.

1. *God's Testimony in Scripture*

The passive form of the verb *martyrein* in 11:2, 4, 5, 39, signifies God's testifying to the faith of these people in Scripture. Although "commended for" (NIV), "received approval" (NRSV), or "won God's approval" (HCSB), are all acceptable translations, the context points to a testimony being given in the biblical record. Strangely, however, none of the narratives from which these examples are drawn explicitly highlights faith.⁶ Surveying these narratives in view of the definition of faith provided in v. 1, the writer seeks to illustrate different dimensions of faith from observations about the lives of successive biblical characters. Similar reviews of sacred history appear in Jewish and early Christian literature, but the difference in the approach of Hebrews is that "certain motifs, such as that of inheriting the promises, seeing the invisible, and receiving divine testimony, punctuate the review and are probably part of our author's adaptation of the genre."⁷

Translators have struggled to give an adequate representation of the terms describing faith in v. 1, and scholars continue to debate their meaning, but "the first part of the definition relates to the attainment of hoped-for goals, the second to the perception of imperceptible realities."⁸ The debate has particularly focused on whether the word *hypostasis* should be understood subjectively as "confidence" (NIV), or "assurance" (NRSV, ESV), or whether it should be understood objectively as "reality" (HCSB). Similarly,

⁶ Like Paul in Romans 4, the writer of Hebrews may have been particularly influenced by what Gen 15:1–6 says about the faith of Abraham and God's response. There are allusions in Heb 11:12 to the divine promise in Gen 15:5, but the writer's reflection on Abraham's faith also refers to passages that make no specific mention of faith.

⁷ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 306–7. Cf. Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988).

⁸ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 308. Attridge observes that "the notion of aiming at and often attaining something, such as divine favor, salvation, inheritance, or a promised blessing, is constantly repeated" in the chapter, and "the author continually highlights instances where individuals perceived through faith a reality not apparent to the senses."

there has been division about whether *elengchos* should be translated “assurance” (NIV), “conviction” (NRSV, ESV), or “proof” (HCSB). But the subjective and objective dimensions of faith are linked as the chapter unfolds. Indeed, “the subjective side emerges when *hypostasis* is linked with ‘faith,’ which pertains to the believing person. The objective side emerges when *hypostasis* is connected with ‘things hope for,’ since the object of hope lies outside the believer.”⁹

2. Different Dimensions of Faith

a. Faith and Worship

Even though Genesis 4:3–5 is not specific about Abel’s faith, Hebrews 11:4 asserts that, “by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did” (HCSB). Abel’s faith is evaluated in terms of his actions (cf. 11:8).¹⁰ By this visible demonstration of his faith, Abel was “commended as righteous” (*emartyrēthē einai dikaios*) (11:4). This commendation happened as (lit.) “God approved his gifts.”¹¹ Here the writer reflects on the words of Genesis 4:4 (“the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering”). Abel’s offering is understood to express a right relationship with God. “The close connection between faith and righteousness through the programmatic Habakkuk 2:3–4 in the preceding context ... means that being righteous may be predicated of one who has responded to God in faith.”¹² Although dead, Abel still “speaks” through the biblical narrative to Christian readers (cf. 12:24). His life was short, but he received a commendation from God for the faith expressed in his offerings.

b. Faith and Perseverance

The next character to be examined is Enoch. Hebrews 11:5 declares that, “by faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him” (ESV). This expansion on Genesis 5:24 acknowledges the Jewish tradition that he was translated or assumed into heaven without having to die.¹³ Hebrews goes beyond that tradition in

⁹ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 36 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 472. Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 339–40.

¹⁰ Attridge (*Hebrews*, 316) notes various patterns of Jewish interpretation and the possible influence of the Palestinian Targum on the perspective of Hebrews. This version of Gen 4:3–16 describes the dissension between Abel and Cain as arising from their different beliefs about God.

¹¹ A genitive absolute construction in the present tense (*martyrountos ... tou theou*, “as God approved”) indicates that this divine testimony accompanied the offering of Abel, and was the means by which he was approved or commended as righteous.

¹² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 403.

¹³ Cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 317. In the context of Genesis 5, with its many references to the death of Adam’s descendants, what is said about Enoch is startling.

asserting that Enoch was exalted “by faith.” The justification for this is that, “before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.” Once again, the verb *martyrein* draws attention to the commendation of God in Scripture. Hebrews reflects the LXX rendering of Genesis 5:22, 24 (“Enoch pleased God”), which is an interpretation of the Masoretic Text (“Enoch walked with God”). The conclusion “without faith it is impossible to please (God)” (v. 6) sums up what has been said about Abel and Enoch. Both are used to illustrate the truth that genuine faith involves believing that God exists and that “he rewards those who seek him.” In contrast with Abel’s short life, however, Enoch’s long life involved an enduring moral and spiritual fellowship with God (cf. Gen 6:9).

c. Faith and Obedience

There are no further references to the commendation of God until the concluding statement in vv. 39–40. But the writer’s interpretive method in vv. 1–6 continues to surface in the rest of the chapter. Biblical narratives are examined to see how the lives of key characters are driven by hoped-for goals and God-given perceptions of unseen realities. This approach to the biblical record reveals the testimony of God to further dimensions of faith.

Noah’s confidence in God’s warning about the approaching flood was expressed in obedience (v. 7). His faith involved “holy fear” or respect for God (*eulabētheis*), leading him to build an ark to save his family. God commended his faith by using it to condemn the unbelief of those around him. Alluding to the link between faith and righteousness in 10:38 and 11:4, the writer concludes that Noah became “heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith” (*tēs kata pistin dikaiosynēs*). Noah was next in the biblical sequence of those like Abel who “because of their faith, were attested to be righteous.”¹⁴

Abraham is the center of attention in vv. 8–19, because of his significance in the outworking of God’s redemptive plan. The promise made to Abraham about “a place he would later receive as his inheritance” (v. 8 NIV; cf. Gen 12:1) is first recalled. On the basis of this promise, he obeyed and went forth, “even though he did not know where he was going.” Like Noah, his faith was expressed in obedience to God’s call. His motivation was the hope of obtaining the land, which recalls the reward perspective of v. 6. However, the notion of “inheritance” implies a gift of God’s grace, not something to be earned by faith.

Entrance into the land required renewed faith and a fresh commitment to obedience. Abraham had to live like “a stranger in a foreign country,”

¹⁴ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 320. Contrast Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 347.

together with those who were “heirs with him of the same promise” (v. 9). When the writer describes Abraham as “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (v. 10), he pictures the patriarch as seeking something more than he could see or experience. Waiting for God to provide an earthly inheritance, he came to realize that life is a pilgrimage towards a future that God alone can provide. There is no suggestion in the Genesis narrative that Abraham engaged in a pilgrimage toward heaven. As a man of his own era, however, he had an “eschatological” faith, because he was “continuously waiting for the consummation of redemption.”¹⁵ In this respect, he became a model for those who believe the promises of the gospel.

d. Faith and Testing

God’s second promise to Abraham was that he would give him numerous descendants and make him into a great nation (Gen 12:2; cf. 13:16; 15:5). Although Abraham was “as good as dead,” and Sarah herself was barren, he was enabled to become a father (vv. 11–12). By faith, he literally received “the power for laying down of seed” (*dynamis eis katabolēn spermatis*).¹⁶ Both Abraham and Sarah were called to ignore their age and circumstances, and to trust in the fulfillment of God’s promise.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all died without receiving the land of Canaan as an earthly inheritance. The things promised by God were only seen and welcomed from a distance (v. 13). When they admitted to being “foreigners and strangers on earth” (cf. Gen 23:4; 47:4, 9), they made it clear that they were “looking for a country of their own” (v. 14, *patrida*, “a homeland”). If they had been yearning for Mesopotamia as their place of origin, they would have had time to return and make their home there. Instead, they were longing for “a better country—a heavenly one” (v. 15).

As in v. 10, the writer draws a close connection between the faith of Israel’s forefathers and the faith of Christians. The situation of the patriarchs is presented in terms that show the similarity of their situation to ours, and the need for a forward-looking faith.¹⁷ They did not have the clear promise

¹⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, WBC 47B (Dallas: Word, 1991), 352. Lane shows how the idea of a city that is firmly founded by God echoes biblical descriptions of Zion (e.g., Pss 48:8; 87:1–3, 5; Isa 14:32; 33:20; 54:11–12). Hebrews takes such language to apply to the heavenly city of God, which is the ultimate destination of all true believers (12:22–24).

¹⁶ Scholars are divided about whether Abraham is the subject of v. 11 (NRSV) or Sarah (NIV, ESV, HCSB). For example, O’Brien (*Hebrews*, 415–16) argues for the former, and Schreiner (*Hebrews*, 351–53) for the latter.

¹⁷ The faith that perseveres and reaches its God-given destination will not look back longingly to where it has come from. Neither will it be content with the immediate blessings of life in this world.

of a heavenly homeland that we do, but God delighted in their expectant faith and, through Jesus Christ, “he has prepared a city for them” (v. 16; cf. 13:14). This is the heavenly Jerusalem mentioned in 12:22–24.

Abraham’s faith was further tested when he was asked by God to sacrifice his one and only son (vv. 17–19; Gen 22:1–8). Since God had specifically declared that his offspring would be reckoned through Isaac (Gen 21:12), there was seemingly no hope for the promise to be fulfilled if Isaac died. However, “Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead.” He received Isaac back from death “in a manner of speaking” (v. 19, *en parabolē*). As in 9:9, the word *parabolē* is probably used to signify that this event pre-figured an eschatological reality, namely the resurrection of God’s one and only Son, and the resurrection of those who believe in him.¹⁸

e. Faith and Sanctification

In vv. 20–31, faith is further portrayed as a force sustaining God’s people in times of opposition and affliction, enabling them to overcome fear and temptation, and to fulfill God’s purpose for them. Moses receives the greatest attention in this section. By faith, he “refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (v. 24; cf. Exod 2:5–14).¹⁹ Like Abraham, he rejected earthly comforts and security, in order to serve the living and true God. Although he could have enjoyed “the fleeting pleasures of sin” (v. 25), and all the treasures of Egypt (v. 26), his desires and ambitions were different. Moses chose to be “mistreated along with the people of God” (cf. 10:32–34; 13:3). Here we see that faith has a sanctifying effect, separating people from worldly values and commitments, motivating them to live for God and the reward of knowing him personally.

Paradoxically, Moses judged that there was greater value in suffering abuse or “disgrace for the sake of the Christ” (v. 26, *ton oneidismōn tou Christou*, [lit.] “the reproach of the anointed”). The writer of Hebrews could be assuming “some sort of prophetic consciousness on the part of Moses.”²⁰ But it is more likely that he is reflecting the language of Psalm 89:50–51, indicating that Moses shared the reproach experienced by God’s anointed people throughout their history.²¹ In so doing, Moses accepted the insults and

¹⁸ Cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 335; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 425.

¹⁹ O’Brien (*Hebrews*, 430) argues that the author read Exod 2:11–14 to mean that, by killing an Egyptian and identifying with the Hebrew slaves, Moses was effectively renouncing his status as a member of the royal household.

²⁰ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 341. Like other elements of the portrait of Moses in Hebrews 11, “this remark too anticipates later paraenesis and is shaped by Hebrews’s homiletic program” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 342).

²¹ O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 432–33.

disparagement that would ultimately be experienced by the Messiah and his followers (cf. 12:1–13; 13:12–14; 1 Pet 4:12–19).

Moses feared God, rather than the anger of Pharaoh, and this enabled him to leave Egypt and take the Israelites with him. He persevered in faith, “*as though he saw him who is invisible*” (v. 27 NRSV [emphasis added], BDAG [*hōs horōn*]). Moses endured opposition and difficulty by focusing on the One who is invisible (cf. vv. 1, 6). As well as transforming his own life, such faith was used to bring deliverance and hope to his suffering people (vv. 28–29; cf. Exod 4–14). This argument prepares for the writer’s exhortation to Christians, that they should endure and enter into their heavenly inheritance by looking to the exalted Lord Jesus, who is perceived and known by faith (12:2; cf. 2:8–9; 3:1–2).

f. Faith and the Future

Hebrews 11 draws to a close by mentioning the faith of four judges (Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah), one king (David), Samuel, and the prophets (v. 32). The writer then describes what these people accomplished in the political and military sphere (vv. 33–34), with a particular allusion to Daniel (“shut the mouths of lions”; cf. Dan 6:22–23), and the three who were cast into the Babylonian furnace (“quenched the fury of the flames”; cf. Dan 3:25–28).

In the writer’s perspective, however, the supreme goal of faith is victory over death in resurrection (v. 35; cf. v. 19). Certain women received back their dead in this life (e.g., 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:17–37). Other believers had to endure torture and refused to be released from imprisonment, so that they might obtain the “better resurrection” to eternal life.²² Images of persecution and imprisonment pile up to convince the recipients of Hebrews that their experience has been one with that of believers in former generations (vv. 36–38; cf. 10:32–34). As they face further testing, they are encouraged to persevere with similar confidence in God and his promises (10:35–39; 12:1–13).

III. *The Perfecting of Believers in Christ*

Despite the fact that believers in both testaments share similar circumstances and are called to make similar responses, the writer concludes by emphasizing a significant difference. OT characters were “commended for their faith,” in the sense that God testified to their faith in the pages of Scripture, “yet none

²² Some vivid examples of this occur in the Apocrypha, written after the period of history covered in the OT (e.g., 2 Macc 6:19, 28; 7:9, 11, 14).

of them received what had been promised” (v. 39; cf. v. 13). Although they saw the fulfillment of certain promises in this life (e.g., 6:15; 11:11, 33), none of them experienced the comprehensive blessings of the messianic era. The singular noun in v. 39 (*epangelian*, “promise”) refers to eschatological salvation as a whole, viewed from the standpoint of OT prophecy.²³

The failure of these men and women of faith to experience the promised eternal inheritance was through no fault of their own. In his gracious providence, God had “planned something better for us,” in the sense that *their* enjoyment of perfection through Jesus Christ would only be “together with *us*” (v. 40).²⁴ The writer uses the language of perfection previously employed to highlight the benefits of Christ’s saving work for those who believe.²⁵ His point is to express the extraordinary privilege of living in the new covenant age.

Perfection could not be attained through the Levitical priesthood (7:11), and “the law made nothing perfect” (7:19; cf. 9:9; 10:1–4). But a better hope has been introduced by the sacrifice of Christ (10:14), making it possible for Christians to approach God with confidence in the present (cf. 4:14–16; 10:19–22), and ultimately to share in the promised eternal inheritance (12:22–29; 13:14). That inheritance was offered to the people of God typologically in the gift of the promised land and the provision of the sacrificial system, but it has only now become attainable because of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Those who were called to trust God in the OT era will receive the promised eternal inheritance when they are resurrected, because the mediator of the new covenant has “died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (9:15).

Christians must persevere with confidence in God and his promises so as to obtain the rich reward of eternal life. In this respect, the faithful who are commended in Scripture offer both encouragement and challenge. But Christians are in a better position than their OT counterparts, because “the unseen truth which God will one day enact is no longer entirely unseen; it has been manifested in Jesus ... the ‘end’ in which all believe and towards

²³ The challenge to Christians in 10:36 is to persevere, so that when you have done the will of God, (lit.) “you will obtain the promise” (*komisēsthe tēn epangelian*), namely, eternal life (cf. 10:34, 39). The plural noun in 11:13 (*mē komisamenoi tas epangelias*, [lit.] “they did not obtain the promises”) refers to a variety of promises, which were seen from afar and welcomed by OT believers, but not experienced.

²⁴ The NIV rightly translates *prolepsamenou* “planned”: the concept is similar to God’s foreknowledge in Rom 8:29, meaning a divine resolution to provide in advance for his elect.

²⁵ Cf. David G. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the “Epistle to the Hebrews,”* SNTSMS 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982), 156–59; “Perfection: Achieved and Experienced,” in *The Perfect Saviour: Key Themes in Hebrews*, ed. Jonathan Griffiths (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 125–45.

which all move, has been anticipated and proleptically disclosed.”²⁶ Put differently, the way into the heavenly sanctuary has been opened by Jesus in his death and heavenly exaltation, so that Christians can draw near with confidence and hold fast to the hope he has given us (4:14–16; 6:18–20; 10:19–22; 12:22–24).

IV. *The Testimony of Biblical Exemplars to Christians*

Apart from Hebrews 10:28, the noun *martyrs* is only used once in Hebrews, where it relates to “the great cloud of witnesses” (12:1) listed in the previous chapter.²⁷ Their number is greater than the writer could discuss in detail (11:32). As those who have God’s testimony to their faith recorded in Scripture, they now “surround” Christian believers and become a source of encouragement to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” so as to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” The argument moves from a passive use of the verb in chapter 11 (“attested by reason of faith”) to a use of the noun that suggests action in chapter 12 (“witness to the validity of faith”).²⁸ This noun evokes “the recurring motif of bearing and receiving good testimony in chapter 11.”²⁹ The focus on endurance makes it clear that the race is not a sprint but a long-distance event.

Since the writer goes on to encourage “fixing our eyes on Jesus,” it is most likely that he views these witnesses as *exemplars*, rather than as spectators: his emphasis falls on “what Christians see in the host of witnesses, rather than on what they see in Christians.”³⁰ Believers are encouraged to gaze at these OT witnesses, as well as at the very human Jesus (cf. 2:18; 4:15; 5:7–8), which suggests meditating on what Scripture says about them all.

²⁶ C. K. Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Background to the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. William D. Davies and David Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 382–83.

²⁷ The same noun is used in 10:28 with reference to the requirement that, “anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses” (cf. Deut 17:6; 19:15). This sense of “witness to the facts” is more common in other NT documents (e.g., Matt 26:65; Mark 14:63; Acts 6:13; 7:58). Cf. Strathmann, “μάρτυς κτλ.,” 4:489–90.

²⁸ Here I affirm what is denied by Strathmann, “μάρτυς κτλ.,” 4:491. Witnesses are generally more than observers, being required to make known to others what they have observed or experienced themselves (e.g., Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39–41; 13:31; 22:15; 26:16). Only Acts 22:20 comes close to later Christian use of the term *martyrs* to describe someone who gives testimony to the truth of Christianity as a martyr. Cf. Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, SNTSMS 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 217–21.

²⁹ N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–3 in Its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context*, SNTSMS 98 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 170.

³⁰ O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 451. Schreiner (*Hebrews*, 376) contends that both senses may be intended in the context. Cf. Croy, *Endurance*, 170.

Although athletic imagery is used to describe the Christian life in v. 1 (“run with perseverance the race marked out for us”), the noun *agōn* (“competition, contest, race”) can have the more general sense of “a struggle against opposition” (BDAG). A related verb (*antagōnizomenoi*) is used in v. 4 to describe the “struggle” of the readers against sin. This refers to their past and present experience of hostility and persecution from “sinners” (v. 3; cf. 10:32–34; 12:5–13; 13:3), rather than their inward struggle against sin, which is mentioned in v. 1. Their struggle against unbelieving opponents is likened to the struggle of Jesus, though the writer points out that “you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (v. 4).³¹

V. The Supreme Testimony and Enabling of Jesus’s Faith

In effect, Jesus becomes the ultimate witness to the faith that triumphs through suffering (12:2–4), though the writer does not specifically describe him in these terms. Jesus’s experience of opposition from sinners is linked with enduring the cross and “scorning its shame.” Moreover, his endurance was driven by “the joy set before him,”³² and the implied challenge is for readers to have the same perspective in their struggle. Jesus is “the perfect example—perfect in realisation and effect—of that faith we are to imitate, trusting him.”³³

The encouragement to fix our eyes trustingly on Jesus takes into account his earthly struggle and its triumphant conclusion: he “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (v. 2; cf. Ps 110:1). The ascension and heavenly session of the Son of God is central to the writer’s argument (cf. 1:3, 13; 2:5–9; 4:14; 8:1; 9:11–12; 10:12–13). Heavenly enthronement was Jesus’s destiny as Messiah, enabling him to rule in the midst of his enemies (Ps 110:2), and installing him as the heavenly high priest of the new covenant (Ps 110:4). Moreover, Jesus’s heavenly session concluded the earthly struggle he endured, which believers in varying degrees must now share. Jesus has entered God’s “rest” (Heb 4:1–11), and believers are summoned to “guide their pilgrimage by looking to Jesus, considering both his earthly career and his celestial glory. Their conduct should be modelled on his earthly perseverance; but they are also to meditate on his session, the reward of that perseverance.”³⁴

³¹ The writer does not blame them for their failure to resist to the point of shedding their blood, but points them to the greater suffering and shame of Jesus.

³² The preposition *anti* in 12:2 could give the meaning “instead of (the joy),” but its use in 12:16 suggests that its most natural sense in both contexts is “for the sake of.” Cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 357; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 455–56.

³³ Brooke F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1914), 397. Cf. Croy, *Endurance*, 167–68.

³⁴ David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, SBLMS 18

When the writer identifies Jesus as “the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (12:2 NIV [2011]), he links faith to the redemptive effect of Jesus’s death and heavenly exaltation. In this way, Jesus is presented as more than an example of persevering faith: he is the enabler of such faith for believers.

The noun *archēgos* was previously used to describe Jesus as “the pioneer of their salvation” (2:10 NRSV [emphasis added]). In that text, the most obvious meaning is that he is “leader” or “pathfinder” of the “many sons” whom God is “bringing” (*agagonta*) to glory (cf. Heb 6:20 [*prodromos*, “forerunner”]). However, there is also an emphasis in Hebrews on Jesus as the “founder” (ESV) or unique “source” of salvation for others (HCSB; cf. 2:9; 5:9 [*aitios*]), who does for believers what they could not do for themselves (cf. 2:14–15; 7:25; 9:28).³⁵ Although in 12:2 he is the “pioneer of faith,” who goes ahead of his followers in suffering, dying, and being raised to glory, the pairing of *archēgos* with the unusual term *teleiōtēs* (“perfecter”) points to the salvific outcome of his faith. This second noun describes “one who brings something to a successful conclusion.”³⁶

There is a correlation in Hebrews between the perfecting of Christ (2:10; 5:9; 7:28) and his function as perfecter (12:2; cf. 7:19; 10:14; 11:40). As “pioneer and perfecter of faith,” he constitutes “the new ground, content and possibility of true realization of faith in God. By his salvific achievement, he created a new dimension and channel for the fusion of obedience, confidence, hope and fidelity, because he pioneered this road.”³⁷ Put another way, this “messianic redeemer designation” describes Christ’s “perfecting work on his church”: the Redeemer himself has “gone ahead in the history of this way of faith and made it possible.”³⁸

Although the emphasis in 5:7–9 is on the uniqueness of Christ’s work on behalf of his people, even there it is said that, “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” What the apostle Paul calls “the

(Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 95 (emphasis removed). Compare the focus on looking to the reward in 11:10, 14–16, 26; 13:13–14.

³⁵ Cf. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 57–58; “Perfection: Achieved and Experienced,” 129–30. The same noun is used with reference to Jesus in Acts 5:31, where the context gives the meaning “prince” or “leader,” but in Acts 3:15 “author” is the more appropriate rendering.

³⁶ BDAG. Cf. Croy, *Endurance*, 176. HCSB renders the whole expression “source and perfecter of our faith,” but this obscures the contextual emphasis on Jesus as pioneer or leader in the sphere of faith. The word “our” (as also in NRSV, ESV) has no parallel in the Greek and narrows the application to Christian faith, whereas 11:39–40 embraces OT believers in the perfecting work of Christ.

³⁷ P. J. Du Plessis, *TEAEIOS: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 226. He argues from 11:39–40 that the perfecting of believers is wholly dependent on Christ’s achievement as “perfecter of faith.”

³⁸ Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Meyer-Kommentar, 13th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 431, 434 (my translation).

obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26; cf. 6:12–14; 12:1; 15:16, 18) is made possible by the obedience of Christ (Rom 5:18–19). So also in Hebrews 12:1–4 there is a challenge for believers to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, persevering in the obedience that faith makes possible (cf. 1 Pet 2:18–25). Since Christ has given faith “a perfect basis by his high-priestly work,”³⁹ his faith, and what it achieved, both for himself and for others, becomes a greater incentive and empowerment for faith than the faith of OT exemplars. He is both the specific source of Christian faith and “the first person to have obtained faith’s ultimate goal, the inheritance of the divine promise which the ancients only saw from afar.”⁴⁰

VI. *The Testimony of Christians*

Although Hebrews does not use the language of witness with reference to Christians, it is easy to see how this theme might be developed. The writer’s concern is that his readers should be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:12 NRSV, ESV; cf. 13:7). Such imitation involves looking to the example of the witnesses in chapter 11, and throwing off “everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” so as to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (12:1). Supremely, however, it means “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (12:2), carefully considering the significance of his suffering, death, and heavenly exaltation for us, so that we “will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:4).

Those who focus on the glorified Lord Jesus in this way will be ready to listen to the exhortations of Scripture, such as Proverbs 3:11–12 (cited in 12:5–6). They will “endure hardship as discipline” (12:7), trusting in God’s fatherly care, and understanding his good purpose in allowing his children to suffer in various ways (12:7–11). In their struggle, they will learn to support and strengthen one another (12:12–13; cf. 13:1–3). With this pattern of life, they will bear witness to the distinctive character and sustaining power of Christ-directed and Christ-empowered faith.

A verbal dimension to this witness may be implied by a reference to Jesus as “the apostle and high priest of our confession” (3:1 NRSV, ESV, HCSB). The word *homologia* is used here in a technical sense to describe the community’s confession about Jesus: “the essential core of the Christian conviction that the writer shared with his audience.”⁴¹ This confession was to be

³⁹ Gerhard Delling, “τέλος κτλ.,” *TDNT* 8:86.

⁴⁰ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 356.

⁴¹ Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, 75. Cf. O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 130–31.

held fast without wavering, since it expressed their hope for God's help in the present and their hope for final salvation (4:14; 10:23). Furthermore, the writer exhorts his readers to offer continually to God through Jesus "a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (13:15 NRSV [*homologountōn*]). This could refer to formal acts of confession or praise when they gathered together (10:24–25), but also to opportunities in everyday life to identify Jesus as the reason for the hope that they had and the lives they lived (cf. 1 Pet 3:15–17).

The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*

GERALD BRAY

Abstract

The story of Polycarp presents the challenge of steering a *via media* between hagiographical and demythologizing interpretations. The article explains the problems with regard to dating his martyrdom and the method of separating out the anachronistic and hagiographical details within the account. There is nothing in the *Martyrdom* that could not have been written in the mid-second century, and there is no compelling reason why it must be dated considerably later than the events it describes. At a time when the church was growing, Polycarp's fate was not just a story but also a sign and a pastoral encouragement.

I. *The Origin of the Text*

Polycarp of Smyrna is one of the most fascinating, albeit little-known, fathers of the early church. His literary output was modest, consisting (as far as we know) of a single epistle to the Philippians, but his real claim to fame lies elsewhere. According to ancient tradition, he was ordained by the Apostle John and was himself the teacher of Irenaeus, whose great book *Against Heresies* is one of our chief sources for the theology of the post-apostolic church. If these claims are true, then Polycarp is one of the main links in the chain connecting the New Testament with the flowering of Christian literature in the latter half of the second century. But just as important as his life and teaching was his sacrificial death, which was immortalized in a letter written by his church at Smyrna to another congregation in the obscure city of

Philomelium.¹ It describes the heroic way in which the very old man faced execution for his faith in Christ, and its account helped to turn him into an example for later generations to follow.

That Polycarp became famous for his martyrdom at a time when the church was growing in strength (and consequently producing more martyrs) is universally accepted, but beyond that scholarly opinion is divided. At one extreme are the traditionalists, who take the *Martyrdom* at face value and resist all attempts to turn it into a hagiography with only a limited connection to historical facts. At the other extreme are those who believe that the account of Polycarp's death is a fiction invented by later generations of Christians who were looking for a heroic martyr figure and thought that he would be ideal for the purpose. In the middle are the vast majority of scholars who believe that the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is based on historical facts, but that these have been embellished for didactic and hagiographical purposes. These scholars differ among themselves about where the line between fact and fiction should be drawn, but there is a consensus of sorts, to the extent that they all agree that it is impossible to know this for sure!²

What may be regarded as more or less certain is that the text as we now have it dates from a time considerably later than the events it describes. We know this because the concluding paragraphs of the extant versions tell us so. It appears that the original letter was written by a certain Evarestus, who must have been a scribe of the Smyrnaean church, and that it had been taken to Philomelium by a letter-carrier called Marcion.³ A copy of it had apparently been kept by Irenaeus, and it was this copy that was later transcribed by an unknown Gaius. It was subsequently retranscribed by an Isocrates (or Socrates), and finally by Pionius, who is known to have been martyred on March 12, A.D. 250.⁴ It is also generally agreed that Polycarp was put to death on February 22 or 23, a day that was described as “a great Sabbath,” again according to the witness of the text.⁵ The uncertainty about

¹ A city located about fifteen miles northeast of Pisidian Antioch, where Paul had preached the gospel. Its bishop attended the first council of Constantinople in A.D. 381, but it is otherwise virtually unknown.

² For a detailed summary of the different positions, see Paul Hartog, ed., *Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 171–90. Most of the details and conclusions in this section are drawn from this study, which is now the most complete and reliable available. The English translation used for this article is J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and revised by Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 131–44.

³ Not to be confused with the Marcion of Pontus who preached heresy in Rome in the mid-second century!

⁴ *Mart. Pol.* 22.2–3.

⁵ *Mart. Pol.* 21.

the exact date stems from the fact that we do not know whether the Sabbath in question was a Saturday or a Sunday.⁶ That in turn means that Polycarp's martyrdom must have occurred in 155/156, 160/161 or 166/167, when February 22 fell on a Saturday. Earlier and later dates have sometimes been suggested, but most scholars now rule them out because it is harder to connect them to external events and to other people mentioned in the narrative.⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, who quoted about half the text practically *verbatim*, claimed that the martyrdom occurred on February 23, 167, but the more usually accepted year is 156, a conclusion that is tentatively accepted by Hartog (among others), though he does not rule out the possibility that it may have taken place in 161.⁸

The chief problems associated with dating may be classified under the headings of "anachronism" and "hagiographical details." As far as anachronism is concerned, it has often been claimed that some of the language and assumptions of the *Martyrdom* reflect a later period of the church's development. For example, the word *katholikē* is used to describe the church, and there is a concern to dissuade Christians from offering themselves as potential sacrifices, a practice that is often thought to reflect an anti-Montanist emphasis.⁹ There is also the question of the cult of the martyr's relics, which the *Martyrdom* appears to encourage and which is generally thought to have originated in the third century. Under the heading of hagiographical details may be included certain things that are not found in Eusebius's transcription, most notably the mention of the miracle of the smell of baking bread and the appearance of a dove in the flames of Polycarp's funeral pyre.¹⁰ The suggestion has been made that details like these were post-Eusebian additions and thus evidence that the text was still being developed in the middle of the fourth century, almost certainly for hagiographical purposes.

⁶ If the *Martyrdom* was following Jewish usage it would have been a Saturday, and possibly called "great" because of an association with a Jewish festival like Purim. But if the authors were adopting Christian usage, it may have been a Sunday, since later Christians sometimes distinguished their day of worship from the Jewish one by calling it "great." But since Polycarp was arrested on a Friday, it seems most likely that he was tried and put to death on a Saturday, not a Sunday, making it February 22.

⁷ For the details, see Hartog, *Polycarp's Epistle*, 191–200.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁹ Montanism did not appear until somewhat later, though it was known at least from A.D. 172 onwards.

¹⁰ *Mart. Pol.* 15.2; 16.1. Much has been made of these differences, but they are very minor. In total, Eusebius lacks only six words, and this may well have been a slip of the pen, either by him or (more likely) by the scribe who made the copy he was using. Certainly it is unwise to base any firm conclusion on such slender evidence.

In the nature of the case, there can be no definitive answer to questions of this kind. What can be said however is that there is nothing in the *Martyrdom* that could not have been written in the mid-second century, and so there is no compelling reason why it must be dated considerably later than the events it describes. Further research into the period and the evidence of parallel texts make it clear that the conditions surrounding martyrdom and the reactions of the church to it were more advanced by A.D. 150 than most early twentieth-century scholars thought, a fact that inevitably lends greater plausibility to the *Martyrdom* as an authentic account. Furthermore, some elements in the *Martyrdom* seem to reflect the second century more than the third. One of these is the role ascribed to Jews, who appear to be in collusion with pagans in their attempts to persecute Christians, and another is the apparent ease with which Christians could be accused and put to death without due process. The latter phenomenon, in particular, was severely criticized by Christian apologists such as Tertullian, writing around A.D. 200, and it is notable that known forgeries, like the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, were punctilious in their concern to portray the trials of Christians as procedurally normal, even if the accusations made against them were only dubiously legal. That the *Martyrdom* makes no attempt to hide the irregularity of the proceedings that led up to Polycarp's death may therefore be taken as evidence that it is faithfully reproducing historical circumstances that would have been much harder to present without comment in the mid-third century, when Pionius was copying the text that we now possess.

A third feature of the *Martyrdom* that would have seemed odd to later generations is the paucity of references to the New Testament, even though there are clear parallels to the suffering and death of Jesus. This reluctance to cite the Gospels is understandable in a mid-second century text, when their status as canonical Scripture was still new and unfamiliar, but it would have been almost unthinkable a generation later, as the evidence of both Irenaeus and Tertullian indicate. On the whole, therefore, a date for the *Martyrdom* that puts it before A.D. 180 (and perhaps as early as 156) seems preferable to any later alternative, and despite the acknowledged tradition of copying, there is no sign of any tampering with the evidence that would make such an early composition impossible.

Having said that, it is also clear that the *Martyrdom* is not a strictly historical account of events. Polycarp's death was not just a fact but a sign, and it is as a sign that it was regarded as particularly important. Quite why the church at Philomelium wanted to know about it is uncertain, but whatever their motive was in requesting an account of it, the Smyrnaeans made certain that they received ample instruction as to the deeper meaning of

Polycarp's sacrifice. Whether the words attributed to the saint are authentic is impossible to say, and some of them (such as his prayer) appear to be too carefully structured to have been spontaneous. However, by the standards of the ancient world, that does not necessarily compromise their genuineness, because literary convention almost always insisted that the speeches of great men should be recorded stylistically, rather than literally. In other words, thoughts appropriate to the occasion were put into their mouths and everyone took it for granted that that is what they should have said, whether they actually did so or not. So universal was this practice that anything else would have seemed abnormal to the Philomelians. Furthermore, there are plenty of incidental details surrounding the martyrdom which give it an air of authenticity and that must be taken into account when assessing the historical accuracy of the text.

Much more suspect from this point of view are the parallels drawn, explicitly or implicitly, with the suffering and death of Jesus. That Polycarp was imitating Christ was an unexceptional idea and would have been expected from any account of his death, but some of the details, such as his interrogation by a man called "Herod," seem to push the likelihood of pure coincidence beyond the bounds of credibility. Was there a conscious attempt by the Smyrnaeans to make Polycarp's sacrifice look as much like that of Jesus as possible, regardless of the actual facts? The best answer to this seems to be that the parallels between Polycarp and Jesus are not consistent—for example, the interrogator was called Herod, but the proconsul who condemned Polycarp was not named Pilate—and usually too trivial to have any theological meaning in themselves. It is much easier to assume that the author(s) of the *Martyrdom* drew parallels with Jesus as and when they noticed them (and that modern critics have suggested additional similarities that did *not* occur to the original writers) than it is to suppose that somebody deliberately sat down to remake Polycarp in the image of Jesus. Nevertheless, the existence of the parallels is a reminder that Polycarp's death was seen to have a theological significance that it would be unwise to ignore when attempting to interpret it.

Granted that the *Martyrdom* is more than a historical account, how should it be described? Here scholars appear to be at a loss for words. Some say that it is "theological," a general term that can mean many things but that (in the ancient context) usually refers to the development of Christian doctrine. The *Martyrdom* is the earliest known text to offer a spiritual rationale for the suffering of Christians as part of the divine plan, but although this is "theological" in a sense, it does not seem to be the main point of the letter. Others would call it "hagiographical," claiming that its purpose was mainly to

glorify Polycarp and uphold his example as a model for others to follow. In a sense, that is hard to deny, but the *Martyrdom* lacks the features of classical hagiography that would make this categorization definitive. There are extraordinary events surrounding Polycarp's death, but he performs no miracles, nor were his remains preserved for any such purpose. The strange things that occurred during his martyrdom were not so odd that no natural explanation is possible, and there have been scholars who have attempted to deal with them in that way—though admittedly without carrying much conviction.¹¹ It therefore seems best to conclude that the *Martyrdom* is hagiographical by accident rather than by design, even though that element remains significant.

Perhaps the best approach to the text is to think of it as primarily pastoral in intention. The Smyrnaeans were concerned not merely to glorify their deceased bishop but also to fortify the faith of those who might easily lose heart at the thought that the only fate that awaited them as Christians was persecution and an ignominious death. They wanted to make it clear that God had a purpose in allowing such things to happen, and that believers could rest secure in the knowledge that their potential sacrifice would not be in vain. This was the true meaning of Polycarp's martyrdom, and the aspect of it that appealed most to those who read and circulated the letter. As humbler folk, they could hardly expect to imitate Jesus to the degree that Polycarp apparently did, but their own sufferings were not in vain. Polycarp appears as a kind of intermediary between Jesus and the ordinary church member, and that, after all, was what a bishop and leader of the church was expected to be.

II. *The Content of the Text*

As found in modern editions, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is conventionally divided into twenty-two chapters, most of which are further subdivided into sections, making a total of fifty-three in all (or fifty-four with the introductory inscription) and covering no more than seven pages of a paperback book.¹² The whole text could easily be read out loud in less than an hour, and that was probably what often happened. Eusebius's reproduction of chapters 8.1–19.1 (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.15.14–45) is almost

¹¹ See Hartog, *Polycarp's Epistle*, 174–75 for the details.

¹² There are also two extra “epilogues” in the Moscow manuscript, which give different endings to chapter 22. Hartog's edition takes up sixteen pages in both Greek and English, but the paragraphs are very well spaced and contain a copious *apparatus criticus* at the bottom of the Greek text.

word-for-word identical to the text, with only a few omissions and the occasional “correction” of a word to make it more literary. Thus, for example, we find the “proper” Greek *hekatontarchēs* for the more popular, but Latinate *kentyriōn* (18.1), and a few alterations to the tenses of certain verbs, but that is about all. Potentially more significant is the omission of the phrase “prepared for a sacrifice” and the words “he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Lord God Almighty ...’” in 14.1, particularly when combined with the omission of the words “blameless, on behalf of sinners” in 17.2. Taken together, this may suggest that Eusebius, or the copy he was using, was less definite about the nature of Christ’s atonement than the received text is, but this can only be a guess and as with other omissions of this kind, they may have been accidental.¹³

The *Martyrdom* takes the form of a letter, and the first chapter makes its purpose clear. The Smyrnaeans wanted the Philomelians to understand that the recent events in Smyrna, in which a dozen members of the church had lost their lives, had been intended by God as a witness to the gospel.¹⁴ The episode was crowned by the sacrifice of Polycarp, whose death put an end to the persecution, probably (though this is implied rather than explicitly stated) because there was no more important figure in the church who could have been put to death. The letter stresses that Polycarp imitated the example of Christ, not just by his death, but even more by the way he patiently waited to be betrayed and did not seek martyrdom. It appears that for the Smyrnaeans, the most significant thing was that Polycarp knew that his first duty was to care for his flock, which he could not have done if he had put himself forward as a sacrifice on behalf of others. Staying alive and protecting the church was his primary task; only when the authorities came to get him did he surrender and accept that his imitation of Christ would lead to his death.

In the second chapter, we are reminded that all the martyrs of the past suffered according to God’s will. The chapter lists different kinds of punishments to which they were subjected, and reads very much like an elaboration of Hebrews 11:32–38.¹⁵ Chapter three makes it clear that in the eyes of the writers, the anti-Christian attacks were the work of Satan, but that Satan did not have it all his own way. A man called Germanicus took on the wild animals set upon him, with some success before they finally overwhelmed him,

¹³ If it had been deliberate, we would expect that more of the text would have been omitted. The words themselves are so few, and so well integrated into the text, that it is hard to believe that they could have been added by a later hand.

¹⁴ *Mart. Pol.* 19.1.

¹⁵ Oddly enough, Hartog seems to have missed this. See *Polycarp’s Epistle*, 275–79. He quotes a number of biblical and apocryphal parallels, particularly from 4 Maccabees, but makes no mention of Hebrews.

a feat which amazed the onlooking crowd.¹⁶ But however impressed the bystanders may have been with that, they did not sympathize with the victim. On the contrary, they cried “Away with the atheists,” by which they meant the Christians, who denied the existence of the ancestral gods, and demanded that Polycarp should be sought out and subjected to similar treatment.¹⁷

In sharp contrast to Germanicus was a certain Quintus, who had recently arrived in Smyrna from Phrygia and who had encouraged his fellow Christians to give themselves up voluntarily.¹⁸ The proconsul tried to get him to recant too and succeeded, which to the authors of the letter was all the proof they needed to condemn Quintus’s original eagerness for martyrdom, of which they disapproved.

It is only in chapter five that Polycarp makes an appearance, and his behavior appears in sharp contrast to that of Quintus. Far from seeking martyrdom, Polycarp fled the city at the urging of the church. He went to a house in the country where he spent his time in prayer, but three days before his arrest he had a dream in which his pillow was set on fire, and he concluded that he would be burnt alive. That this knowledge came to him while he was deep in prayer was a reminder to all concerned that this was God’s will, though he did nothing to bring it about.

The sixth chapter explains what happened next. A posse had been sent out to find Polycarp and arrest him, so he fled to another house just before the one in which he had been staying was discovered. The soldiers realized that their quarry had escaped and seized two young slaves, one of whom confessed under torture. The writers of the letter had no sympathy for this, regarding the slave boy as a Judas who betrayed his master, a comparison that was made all the easier because the man who had sent the soldiers and to whom Polycarp was delivered when found bore the name of Herod.

Chapter seven recounts how the slave boy led the soldiers to Polycarp and arrested him on a Friday evening. Many have seen allusions to the arrest of Jesus in this account, but while there are some similarities, there are also important differences. For a start, Jesus was arrested on a Thursday, not a Friday, and the encounter between Polycarp and the soldiers was quite different from that between Jesus and his captors in the garden of

¹⁶ The Roman proconsul who ordered Germanicus’s death tried to make him recant by appealing to his age. Eusebius took this to mean that Germanicus was too young to die, and that if he had recanted, he could have been spared to live a long life. But it may equally mean that Germanicus was too old to be forced to endure such a punishment. See Heb 11:33.

¹⁷ *Mart. Pol.* 3.2.

¹⁸ This was a Montanist practice, and since the Montanists came from Phrygia, Quintus has frequently been linked to them. However, this is a supposition that has no support from the text, and the Phrygian connection may well have been accidental.

Gethsemane. Polycarp offered them a meal and asked for an hour to pray, whereas Jesus had already eaten his last meal with his disciples and was praying when he was arrested. The effect of Polycarp's behavior on the soldiers, as may be imagined, was powerful, and the *Martyrdom* relates that many of them realized that they were seizing the wrong kind of person, though there was nothing they could do about it.

The eighth chapter recounts how Polycarp was taken for questioning. It begins by telling us that he spent the hour of prayer allotted to him in intercession for the church throughout the world, a reminder that Polycarp understood that he was united with all Christians everywhere and that their welfare was more important than his own. Finally, he was put on a donkey and taken to the city for examination on the "great" Sabbath.¹⁹ Herod, it turns out, was accompanied by his father Nicetas, possibly in deference to Polycarp's great age, since Nicetas would obviously have been closer to it and therefore have commanded greater respect. They tried to get him to recant and acknowledge Caesar as Lord by offering incense to him (not to one of the pagan gods), but he refused. They then became abusive and bundled him out of their carriage so fast that he scraped his leg—a detail that has the ring of authenticity—though he was too preoccupied with everything else that was going on to notice or feel the pain.

Polycarp's entry into the stadium, recounted in chapter nine, was preceded by a voice that called out to him from heaven, telling him to be strong and act like a man. The *Martyrdom* tells us that only the Christians heard this, which obviously calls the authenticity of its account into question, but it may be that there was a noise of some kind which the Christians, who were in tune with Polycarp's spirit, interpreted in the way that they did. In the circumstances, it could hardly have been he who explained it to them! Once again, Polycarp was invited to swear by Caesar and to cry "away with the atheists," by which the proconsul meant the Christians. Polycarp however, turned the tables on his accusers by agreeing to curse the "atheists," who in his eyes were the pagans!

The proconsul realized this of course, and so insisted that Polycarp revile Christ explicitly, but the latter replied in what are the most famous words in the *Martyrdom*: "For eighty-six years I have been serving him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who has saved me?" (9.3). Most commentators have assumed that Polycarp was eighty-six years old at this point, which would mean that he was baptized as an infant, since he could not have "served Christ" before his baptism. Some have claimed

¹⁹ Here again, some commentators have seen an allusion to Jesus, who entered Jerusalem on a donkey five days before he was put to death, but the circumstances were completely different.

that he was baptized as a boy and so was in his nineties when he was martyred, but that seems unlikely, and it is easier to conclude that he was baptized as an infant, the first clear case of this in Christian literature.²⁰

The tenth chapter continues the same theme, giving Polycarp the opportunity to confess that he was a Christian and to ask for permission to explain to the proconsul what that meant. In reply, the proconsul told him to persuade the crowd gathered to watch his execution, but Polycarp refused to do that. He claimed, quite correctly, that Christians were expected to give an account of their faith to rulers and judges when asked to do so, but that they were under no obligation to bend to the cries of an unruly mob.²¹

At this point the proconsul threatened Polycarp with the wild animals that had consumed Germanicus, but Polycarp refused to yield under pressure. He was then threatened with the stake, to which he replied that physical suffering for an hour was nothing compared to the fire of everlasting judgment, which he would have to face if he recanted. Whether this is an accurate account of what transpired is impossible to say, but it is not improbable, even if the account was clearly designed by the writers to remind the church that there was a fate worse than death that awaited anyone who might recant under pressure. What Polycarp was reported as saying was what most Christians thought, and there is no sign of anything miraculous or even extraordinary. The easiest solution must surely be to accept that something like this did take place and that Polycarp's words were used by the Smyrnaeans to teach other Christians an important spiritual lesson.

Polycarp's confession evidently produced a psychological release in him that the *Martyrdom* describes as being "filled with courage and joy." There was no going back now, and the knowledge that a great weight had been lifted from his conscience gave Polycarp the stamina he needed to carry on. The proconsul was taken aback at Polycarp's boldness and announced his confession to the crowd, who immediately called for him to be thrown to the wild beasts. But unfortunately for them, Philip the Asiarch, whose responsibility the execution was, had just abolished that form of punishment and so their preferred solution was impossible. When they realized that, the mob cried for him to be burnt at the stake, so fulfilling the prophecy which Polycarp had received in his dream.

An oddity about this is that the text says that the mob consisted of both Jews and pagans (12.2), even though it was the Sabbath day and the accusation

²⁰ See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church. History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 363, whose arguments to the contrary are weak.

²¹ Scriptural support for this position can be found in Rom 13:1–7; Titus 3:1; and 1 Pet 2:13–14, though Polycarp does not quote any of these texts directly.

against Polycarp was that he had tried to destroy the pagan gods. Would Jews have been party to something like that? Observant ones surely would not have been, if only because they would have been resting on the Sabbath day, but not all Jews were observant, and there may have been some who joined in with the pagans on this occasion, seeing their opportunity to be rid of a man who was just as dangerous to them as he was to anyone else. We know that there were Smyrnaean Jews in the first century who eagerly persecuted Christians, and it may be that this was still the case a century later.²² What the text does *not* say, however, is that the Jews incited the riot. That seems to have been the work of the pagans, with some Jews taking part, which is significant. The Jews were not exempt from all blame, but the text cannot be regarded as particularly anti-Semitic.

Chapter thirteen continues the persecution theme with the story of how the crowd built Polycarp's funeral pyre in a matter of minutes. Apparently there were some Jews who helped in this, but once again, they were not the instigators. Polycarp stripped naked in readiness for the fire, and the *Martyrdom* tells us that he took the unusual step of removing his sandals, something that he had never done before. The reason given for this is that his people were always eager to touch him as a sign of their respect for his holiness, something which he had never encouraged. Finally, when everything was ready, his executioners prepared to nail him to the stake, but he asked them to desist. Once more, there is a similarity of sorts with Jesus on the cross but also a great difference, because in Jesus's case the marks of the nails were to be proof after his resurrection of the genuineness of his death, whereas that consideration did not apply to Polycarp.

More significant are the details recorded in chapter fourteen, where Polycarp is compared not to Jesus but to the burnt offering of a ram in the Old Testament. This echoes the aborted sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham (Gen 22:13) and shows familiarity with other places in the Hebrew Bible.²³ Not only does this allusion reflect the nature of Polycarp's sacrifice, but it reminds us of the close connections that still existed between the church and the synagogue, where mention of such burnt offerings would have been familiar. The idea that they may have been transferred to Christian martyrs after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 could have been a factor motivating Jewish opposition to the claims made for Polycarp.²⁴

²² See Rev 2:9.

²³ See for example, Lev 5:15.

²⁴ The *Martyrdom* notes that Jews were particularly opposed to granting Polycarp's body to the Christians, and fear of how it might be used may have been a factor in this (17.2).

Most of the chapter is taken up with Polycarp's prayer, which deserves to be reproduced in full:

Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ,
 through whom we have received knowledge of you,
 the God of angels and of powers and of all creation and of the entire race of the
 righteous who live before you:

I bless you because you have considered me worthy of this day and hour
 to receive a portion in the number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ,
 unto the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body,
 in the immortality of the Holy Spirit.

May I be welcomed before you today among them, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice,
 just as you, the undecieving and true God,
 prepared beforehand and revealed in advance and accomplished.

For this reason, and for all things, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you
 through the eternal and heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son,
 through whom be glory to you, with him and the Holy Spirit,
 both now and unto the coming ages. Amen.²⁵

The liturgical flavor of the prayer is unmistakable, as is its Trinitarian structure. Polycarp was a bishop and a man of prayer, and so would no doubt have been used to praying in this way, but it seems highly unlikely that an onlooker would have been able to record such a lengthy and complex text as this one. Virtually all scholars agree that it was composed for the purposes of the account, but even so, it probably reflects what Polycarp would have said if he could. It glorifies the Father, who has revealed himself in Christ and who is the Creator of all things. This is an implicit rebuke to the claims of the pagans and a pointed reminder to Christians that the God they worship is in control of all things. It also focuses on Polycarp as God's elect, especially chosen for the sacrifice that imitates that of Christ and gives the one who undergoes it eternal life in the Spirit. That in itself was reason for praise and thanksgiving, in spite of the apparent tragedy that was about to unfold.

Polycarp did not claim to have earned the right to die for his faith but rather that he had been counted worthy by God. He was aware of his inadequacy and prayed for strength and support as he faced the challenge before him. He was called to imitate Christ but not to replace him; Jesus remained the great high priest who bought our salvation with his blood, and for whom there could be no substitute. The prayer strikes a balance here—as a martyr, Polycarp is honored because he has been chosen by God, but he is not venerated because of his exceptional suffering.

²⁵ *Mart. Pol.* 14.1–3.

Chapter fifteen describes the actual burning, which the Christian on-lookers described as “miraculous.” The fire did not immediately consume the martyr but arched over him in a way that made it seem that his body was like gold or silver being refined, giving off a sweet fragrance more like incense than ashes (v. 2). The received text adds that it was like the smell of baking bread. Some critics have regarded this detail as a later interpolation because it is not found in Eusebius, but it makes no difference to the overall impression being conveyed and its absence was probably a simple omission. More significant is what is recounted in the sixteenth chapter, where we are told that Polycarp had to be finished off with a dagger (or sword) because his body did not burn, and that when he was slain a dove emerged from his insides, along with enough blood to quench the flames.

Eusebius omits mention of the dove, perhaps because it was obviously not historically accurate, but he included the comment that enough blood flowed out of Polycarp for the fire to be quenched, something that was just as unlikely. Again, it is easier to posit an accidental omission than to regard these details as a later interpolation. What it sounds like is that the burning was botched by the executioners—a common enough phenomenon. The letter uses this to claim that it proved that Polycarp was a man chosen by God and a prophet whose words were fulfilled, which is no doubt the reputation that the Smyrnaeans wanted him to have. The idea of being refined like gold and silver was familiar from the Old Testament prophets, and there is no reason to look any further than that for the source of this portrait of Polycarp’s demise.²⁶ Comparisons with the death of Jesus are superficial—it may be true that Jesus was pierced by a spear on the cross, but he was already dead, and blood and water flowed from his side; there was no dove taking flight!²⁷

Once Polycarp was dead, chapter seventeen tells us that the Christians were denied possession of his body, a refusal that the *Martyrdom* ascribes to the machinations of Satan. Apparently Nicetas (the father of Herod) argued with the proconsul that Polycarp might be worshiped instead of Jesus, which from his point of view would have been worse, because at least the bones of Christ were not available for veneration. At the same time, the *Martyrdom* uses this incident to remind its readers that Christians do not worship martyrs, however much they may honor them, because the glory of the martyrs resides in their loyalty and devotion to Christ, not in any achievement of their own.

²⁶ Zech 13:9; Mal 3:2–3; and Isa 1:25. There are possible links with the New Testament as well. See for example 1 Pet 1:7; 4:12.

²⁷ John 19:34. As elsewhere, the echoes of Jesus’s suffering are audible but insufficient to justify the conclusion that the Smyrnaeans were deliberately imitating it in their description of Polycarp.

It was at this point, chapter eighteen tells us, that the centurion in charge ordered Polycarp's bones to be burned, and the charred remains were then scooped up by members of the church and buried. The *Martyrdom* adds that it was their intention to commemorate the day as Polycarp's "birthday" into the kingdom of heaven, and to use his example as a way to inspire others. Chapter nineteen tells us that although he was the twelfth person to suffer martyrdom in Smyrna, he was the only one who was a household name among non-believers as well as in the church. This was because he was a distinguished teacher and had died "according to the Gospel of Christ" (19.1), an obscure phrase that appears to mean that he died not voluntarily, but because he had been sought out and apprehended by the enemies of the church, just as Jesus had been.

This is the effective end of the story, because the last three chapters are really an appendix, explaining how it had come to be written up, when it had taken place, and how it had been transmitted.

III. *The Significance of the Text for Today*

In conclusion, it is clear that the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* brings into focus one of the most important phenomena of the early church. Against all reason, Christians were being put to death for their faith, and both Jews and pagans seem to have had an interest in this. Christians were accused of failing to worship the genius of Caesar (*not* of ignoring the pagan gods), though nobody seems to have noticed that Jews were guilty of this too!²⁸ This was because Judaism was granted an exemption from the imperial cult, whereas many Christians were Gentile converts, and it was apparently felt that they should have been willing to swear allegiance to the state to which they belonged. It must have seemed to many pagans that Christians were using their religion as an excuse for disloyalty, a dilemma that could only be resolved if Caesar were to give up his pretensions to divinity. That eventually happened, but it was a victory for the church, which continued to demand that believers put it before the empire.

We may admit that Polycarp's martyrdom had some similarities to the death of Jesus, but it was in no way equal to it. It was much closer to Old Testament sacrifices, and it stood in a relationship to the sacrifice of Christ

²⁸ The accusation made against the Christians is significantly different from the one recorded by Pliny the Younger in A.D. 111. Pliny claimed that because of widespread conversions to Christianity, pagan worship was being abandoned, but although he mentioned the imperial cult in passing, he did not make it the basis of his objection to Christianity. See Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.96.

that was not unlike theirs. What really mattered to the Smyrnaeans was that Polycarp had died as a church leader should. To the end, he put his people before himself and set an example for them. He was an extraordinary man and the events surrounding his death were sufficiently unusual to make people reflect on that, but he was not (and could not be) a substitute for Christ himself. To the end, he was a servant following his Lord and master, and that is how the church at Smyrna wanted his death to be understood.

For many centuries, martyrdom was a somewhat obscure and misunderstood phenomenon in the Christian church. With some exceptions, it died out after the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century and became a thing of the almost legendary past. Stories of the martyrs were amplified into hagiography, and their relics (or supposed relics) were collected and venerated as if they possessed special divine powers. Excesses and distortions of this kind alienated the sixteenth-century Reformers, who suppressed the cults they encountered and sometimes tried to prove that the stories on which they were based were essentially false. Protestants were certainly put to death for their faith from time to time, but no attempt was made to venerate them after their deaths.²⁹

It was not until the twentieth century that martyrdom returned to the Christian theological agenda in any serious way. It is now known that more Christians have died for their faith in the century after 1914 than in the rest of the church's history combined, and at the present time Christianity is the most persecuted faith in the world. Not only Islamic fundamentalists, but Buddhists, Hindus and people of no religion are attacking Christians on almost every continent. Even in the supposedly enlightened democracies of the Western (and formerly "Christian" world) Christian believers now suffer discrimination on grounds of conscience of a kind that would have been unthinkable a generation ago. At present there is no sign that this situation will improve any time soon—on the contrary, the general feeling is that things are liable to get worse before they get better, if they ever do.

This unhappy situation is forcing Christians to reassess their roots as a community of martyrs. The early church was persecuted, but despite its sufferings, it thrived and eventually triumphed over its enemies. Something similar has occurred in recent times in countries that once lay behind the "iron curtain." There are now observers who suggest that the attacks on Christians by Islamic extremists may be counter-productive in the longer

²⁹ The Oxford martyrs who were burnt at the stake in the reign of Mary I (1553–1558) may be a partial exception to this, but when the suggestion was made (in the nineteenth century) that a church should be erected to their memory, it failed to attract support. Instead, a martyr's memorial was erected, which still stands in St. Giles but is largely ignored by the passers-by.

term, and that the church will come out of its current distress stronger than ever, though that remains to be seen. What is certain is that martyrdom, once the stuff of ancient history, has become a contemporary reality once again. To become a Christian today is to take a risk and to invite opposition from a hostile world that may well take judicial and penal forms. In this climate, the church cries out for leaders of the caliber of Polycarp, men and women who will be faithful unto death and inherit the crown of everlasting life. It may be no accident that it is John's vision of the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:8–11 that makes this point more forcefully than any comparable New Testament passage.

Just as the Smyrnaeans believed that the account of Polycarp's death was meant for the church at large, so the apocalyptic vision of John has a resonance for our time that grows louder by the day. The attacks of Satan against God's people will never cease, but just as the church at Smyrna was convinced that it would triumph in the end, so we too have the promise that if we are faithful to the teaching we have received and loyal to Christ and his gospel, the gates of hell will not prevail now any more than they did back then.³⁰

³⁰ See Matt 16:18.

Jan Hus: A Reformation before the Reformation

DANIEL BERGÈSE

Abstract

John Hus, his life, work, and conflicts are recounted in this article, with the circumstances that lead him to martyrdom at the stake on July 6, 1415, six centuries ago. His work galvanized Bohemia and contributed to the identity of the Czech nation and places him in the gallery of those who were precursors of the Reformation, such as Waldo and Wycliffe. Some comparisons are drawn between Hus and Luther, who were both passionate for the truth. They desired it, sought it, and wanted to unearth it wherever it was buried by centuries of human tradition. It was the light that did not leave them even in the darkest night. No other consideration could obstruct them, even though their lives were at stake.

I. Introduction

On July 6, 1415, six centuries ago, Master Jan Hus, priest and former rector of the University of Prague, died at the stake. His only fault was to talk too much or perhaps to be heard too much. His sermons in the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague silenced protests. In line with Francis of Assisi, Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, and others, and before Girolamo Savonarola (executed in 1498), he denounced the wealth of the Roman institution and the taxes the

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pope levied throughout Europe. In the church, everything was bought or sold, and in Bohemia, the church owned about half the land, whereas the king owned only one sixth. Beside this widespread simony, Hus dared to point the finger at the hypocrisy of numerous prelates (including the pope) who were thirsty for power and pleasure. At Constance, in order to host the council (which convened from 1414 to 1417), new brothels were opened and prostitutes procured for the members of the council.¹ Throughout Europe, many called for a reformation of the church, and Hus embodied this cause in Bohemia. At Constance, however, he was condemned for heresy. His numerous diatribes against the immorality of the clergy did not play in his favor, but how was Hus a heretic in Rome's eyes, a forerunner of the sixteenth-century Reformation? A presentation of the context and a look at his work will help us to answer this question.

II. *The Context*

a) *The Emergence of Czech Nationalism*

Jan Hus was born in Bohemia, a small kingdom of central Europe, around 1369. Since the reign of Wenceslas I (1230–1253), the country had been a place of immigration for Germans. They brought skills beneficial to the economy but threatened the cultural and social autonomy of the Czechs, since Bohemia belonged to the Holy Empire, which was becoming more Germanic. From 1346 on, Bohemia had an energetic sovereign in the person of Charles IV, who transformed Prague into an influential intellectual center with the first university in the German speaking world. The importance of the city grew and, with 80,000 inhabitants at the end of the century, it was among the most populated in Europe. Behind this apparent success, social tensions were growing among the Czechs, who realized that they had been “colonized” by the Germans who occupied key positions. The nationalists wanted the Czech language to occupy a place of choice, and this played against the Roman Church, which was making its power felt throughout Europe.²

After the death of Charles IV, the situation became even more volatile when Wenceslas IV became emperor in 1378. Far less competent than his father, he was unable to establish his authority, and Sigismund, his brother,

¹ See the fascinating book by Paul Roubiczek and Joseph Kalmer, *Warrior of God: The Life and Death of John Hus* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1947); French translation (FT), *Jean Hus, guerrier de Dieu* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1951).

² The states accepted less and less the fiscal obligations of Rome. In 1365, England refused to pay taxes to the pope. John Wycliffe, then spokesperson of the parliament, provided the judicial foundations for this refusal.

king of Hungary, challenged him as emperor. War followed with German armies (on the side of Sigismund) and Czech ones (on the side of Wenceslas). In 1400, the Germans laid siege to Prague, which fueled Czech nationalism. The same year, the great electors divested Wenceslas IV of his imperial title and gave it to Count Rupert of Palatine.

In a chaotic atmosphere of mixed social, national, and religious claims, when Hus, a Czech from a poor family in southern Bohemia, became the university rector in Prague, he was the symbol and pride of an entire people. Neither the empire nor the church could tolerate the independence of Bohemia. They calculated that by striking the symbolic head and declaring Hus to be heretical, they could cool the fervor of the Bohemians who supported him. It did not turn out exactly that way, but this explains what took place after Hus's execution. The Hussite movement in Bohemia became a political force and raised armies that on several occasions successfully resisted the coalition forces of the pope and the emperor. Indeed, the Hussite wars lasted from 1419 to 1434.

b) *The "Great Schism" in the West*

The desire of the Council of Constance to deal with the Hus case can also be explained by the internal situation of the Roman Church, and the fear of a split. Since 1378, the church existed with two rival popes. The exile of the bishop of Rome in Avignon in 1309 cast a significant shadow over Christendom, the scandalous behavior of the popes tarnished the image of the head of the church, and many questioned the legitimacy of papal wars to defend St. Peter's see or its interests elsewhere.³ The subsequent opposition of Urban VI in Rome and Clement VII in Avignon, commonly called the "Western Schism," saw rival popes fighting for control of the church, excommunicating each other and setting up their own synods.

Each bishop and secular ruler had to decide which pope to support in a way that had little to do with religious considerations. Historians have also observed that during this period—in an absurd way—every Christian was cursed by one pope or blessed by the other! No wonder that the Roman institution was weakened and more and more voices called for a reformation of the church "in her head and members." But the only answer given was tighter repression, as illustrated by the Cathars. While in the eleventh century, Bishop Wason argued that the pastors of the church ought not to call upon the secular sword to punish heretics, things changed in the next

³ Furthermore, in the 14th century, the amount dedicated to war frequently exceeded 60% of the revenue!

century.⁴ In 1231, Pope Gregory IX established the Inquisition, the systematic prosecution of heretics and death sentences (used by common law) increased against all those so-called enemies of the Catholic faith.

The solution advocated by the University of Paris to the schism was for the cardinals on both sides to assemble a general council and unseat both popes and elect a new one. This proposal was against tradition since it gave the council ultimate authority, with the power to undo popes at will. At the time of his trial, Hus put his finger on this issue in order to confound his accusers, even if this was not the issue at stake.

A council met at Pisa in 1409, without the two popes, and a new one was appointed. This decision only worsened the crisis, since the two former popes challenged the validity of the council and remained in office, making three pontiffs who claimed legitimacy! The church was unable to resolve the crisis and Emperor Rupert died and Sigismund of Hungary, who was appointed in his stead, helped the Roman Church out of the dead-end.⁵

Another general council gathered in the city of Constance at the end of 1414. The emperor obtained the removal of the three popes and the election of a new one, Martin V, putting an end to the schism that had lasted for too long. Hus's trial must be considered in light of this project, as the survival of the Roman institution could not be compromised by one individual who continued to challenge the authority of the church and her representatives.

III. Reform according to Jan Hus

a) The Influence of John Wycliffe

By his commitment, his sermons in Prague, and his entire trial Hus showed himself to be a man of faith, deeply attached to the Holy Scriptures and the defense of truth. He was not, however, a pioneer in the spiritual or theological field. He followed paths opened by others before him. If he was a faithful Catholic, his quest for truth and authenticity led him to embrace the ideas of the Oxford professor John Wycliffe, who died in 1384.

⁴ Bishop Wason writes, "We have not received power to cut off from this life by the secular sword those whom our creator and redeemer wills to live so that they may extricate themselves from the snares of the devil ... Those who today are our adversaries in the way of the Lord can, by the grace of God, become our betters in the heavenly country ... We who are called bishops did receive unction from the Lord to give death but to bring life." Cited in Jean Comby, *How to Read Church History* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 1:167; translation of *Pour lire l'histoire de l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 1:173.

⁵ Sigismund clearly grasped that if he could bring back the church to a normal situation, his imperial throne would be firmly established.

Wycliffe is known for having begun the translation of the Vulgate Bible into English, which reveals three important aspects of his thought:

1. Holy Scripture is the true authority in matters of faith;
2. Access to the Bible must be as broad as possible, and lay people have as much a right to it as clerics and academics;
3. Latin is no longer the language of the church, but only of the Church of Rome.

Wycliffe led a widespread protest against moral abuse in the church of his time in England, and in that, he was the voice—though not always the example!—of authentic Christianity.⁶ His reading of the Bible led him to an anti-Roman and anti-clerical radicalism and to challenge many beliefs and ceremonial practices. He rejected most of the sacraments, excessive ceremonies and feast-days, the veneration of saints and the worship of images and relics. All this resulted in his first trial in 1377, but because of the protection of the duke of Lancaster, the condemnation by Pope Gregory XI remained void. In 1381, he published a work against the doctrine of transubstantiation, asserting against the dogma of the fourth council of Latran in 1215, that the bread is not transformed in the Eucharist but remains bread and that the presence of Christ is spiritual. His doctrine of the church was also far removed from that of Rome. The church is the community of the elect or of those who are saved, not the historical church attested through the hierarchy. The sacramental acts of the clergy in the mediation of grace are only valid if they proceed from those who display signs of salvation, that is, who are morally worthy. The people of God only owe obedience to the clerics who are not in a state of mortal sin. Wycliffe considered the schism of 1378 as a judgment of God that confirmed the identity of the pope as the antichrist.

Doctor Wycliffe would ultimately be deprived of his position of professor at Oxford, but thanks to the protection that he enjoyed, he would escape the stake, and he left a legacy in the action of a group of disciples, the “Lollards.” More important, however, are the books that Wycliffe wrote, most of which were preserved, especially at Oxford University.

In the last years of the 14th century, the sister of King Wenceslas, married to Richard III of England, eagerly promoted exchanges between the universities of Prague and Oxford. Young Czechs studying in England discovered Wycliffe’s works and the thought of a heretical professor lived on in Bohemia.

⁶ Although he protested against the abuses of the clergy in matters of income, he himself kept on receiving benefices and prebends throughout his life.

b) *The Path of Jan Hus*

In 1391, for the first time, the name of student Hus appears in the register of Prague University. He was then a poor student of modest background. In 1396, he decided to pursue studies in theology, a subject for which he hitherto had shown no particular interest, and two years later when beginning to teach, he was already affirming a reform of the church to be necessary. He gave great attention to Wycliffe's first works brought back to Prague and started to copy them and would later translate them into Czech.

In 1400, he was ordained as a priest, and, two years later, installed as preacher of the Bethlehem Chapel. This building was erected about ten years earlier so that there would be a place in Prague where the gospel could be preached in the language of the people. Hus quickly became the most listened to Czech preacher. He transformed this chapel into a symbol of national identity and a center for propagating reformational ideas.

Hus cultivated good relations with his German colleagues at the university and the archbishop, and this surely contributed to his being appointed first dean of the Faculty of arts, and then, in 1402, rector of the University for a year. Later, in 1406, he was honored with the appointments of court chaplain and confessor of the queen. If King Wenceslas (an alcoholic) turned out to be an unreliable protector, the queen, who frequently listened to him at the Bethlehem Chapel, would always regard him highly.

Meanwhile, Wycliffe's writings spread, although condemned in England; in May 1403, 45 theses were selected from them to be examined by the university. The Germans were in agreement with the Church of England, which had rejected these theses, whereas the Czechs approved of them. Hus remained neutral, noting that phrases of Wycliffe should not be taken out of context and that their precise meaning should not be misunderstood, and he also indicated some inaccuracies of translation.⁷

Later, however, in 1407, suspected by Wenceslas, who wished to gain influence with the Germans, Hus was dismissed from his function as Synod preacher, being suspected of "Wycliffite" sympathies. He abandoned his reserved attitude in a sermon preached on July 14, 1408 in the Bethlehem Chapel, when he refuted accusations leveled against the Wycliffite doctrine, challenging what he considered to be unjust caricatures.

After the council of Pisa in 1409, the situation became very confused. The king took advantage of it to assert the independence of Bohemia: he changed the statutes of the university to grant more influence to the Czech

⁷ Jean Puyo, *Jan Hus: Un drame au cœur de l'Église*, Temps et visages (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998), 58–59.

representation than the Germans who left to found their own university in Leipzig. Hus regained his position as rector, but of a greatly weakened university, with fewer students and with much opposition. The archbishop, believing that it was a favorable moment to eradicate the Wycliffite heresy, had prohibited books burned, resulting in riots that forced him to flee for his life. The university rehabilitated Wycliffe's writings, without pronouncing them free of heresy.

As Wenceslas attempted to take control of the Bohemian church, the new archbishop and others faithful to Rome called upon the pope to act against Hus. He was summoned to appear before John XXIII in Bologna and threatened with excommunication in case of non-appearance. Despite a declaration of faith (September 1, 1411) in which he presented his position in the most Catholic way possible, he did not succeed in erasing suspicion of heresy.⁸ Moreover, the following year, a new scandal broke out: the pope, to finance a war against the king of Naples, promulgated the sales of plenary indulgences. Hus could not remain silent. The pope has no power over the eternal destiny of souls, even less for money; and, on the other hand, no right to declare and wage war. The response was harsh. Hus was declared anathema in the churches of Bohemia, and the city of Prague was placed under a ban as long as Hus stayed there.⁹ This situation placed Master Hus in a serious dilemma. He observed that the people he loved, and upon which he counted, could not resist for long "this tight net of the antichrist." The king himself asked Hus to leave the city for a while. He exiled himself at the end of October 1412 and after a few weeks wandering found refuge with Baron of Lefl.

As Hus was not far away, he made frequent trips to Prague. During one of them, in 1413, he posted on the wall of the Bethlehem Chapel the *Treatise of Six Errors*. This time of forced exile was productive for his thought and literary output as he wrote his programmatic work: *De Ecclesia*. He was again summoned, this time to the council of Constance. In contrast to the previous summons from the pope, in which he saw no positive perspective, Hus perceived an opportunity to present and defend his views in the presence of the whole of Christendom, represented by the delegates to the council. He did indeed suspect that it could turn out badly, but the safe-passage received by Emperor Sigismund was a favorable sign.

⁸ He wrote his declaration upon the request of King Wenceslas, who sought appeasement with Rome.

⁹ The ban entailed the suspension of clerics. The religious services, marriages, baptisms, and burials were no longer performed.

c) *The Trial*

In October 1414, Hus set off for Constance with a few of his friends, the opening of the council being scheduled for November 5. He was able to come and go freely for a few weeks, to attend religious services, since the pope had lifted the anathema and the interdict. However, he was arrested under a false pretence before the emperor, who would withdraw his support for Hus, had reached Constance. The council was not chiefly preoccupied with Hus's case, but with Pope John XXIII, considered by many members of the council to be unsuited because of notorious immorality, not to mention his sacrilegious behavior.¹⁰

Hus spent long months in prison without an opportunity to meet the council, while a commission collected information relevant to charges against him.¹¹ It scrutinized his writings and received the testimony of his Czech opponents, who were especially virulent, bringing all kinds of accusations, mixing shamelessly truth and fiction. Hus was also subjected to regular interrogations, seeking to obtain a confession or to have him recant supposed heresies.

But with the coming of spring 1415, the imbroglio relating to the papacy found a partial and unexpected resolution when the pope, feeling that his throne was escaping him, surreptitiously left Constance. Instead, the council not only continued to deliberate, but it was also the occasion of a victory for the conciliar party. On April 6, the general council proclaimed itself the supreme authority in Christendom, which constituted a stunning turnaround in relation to the belief in the succession of St. Peter in the person of the popes. John XXIII was solemnly deposed on May 29 while the Catholic Church, until the election of Martin V at the end of 1417, spent more than two years without a pope, an unprecedented situation!

As the crisis resolved itself, the council turned its attention to the question of the threat of heresy. First, they came back to the person and work of Wycliffe. Although he and his writings had already been condemned more than once, the council considered its duty to pronounce itself. On May 5, it condemned 305 articles by Wycliffe; his books were burnt and his body was exhumed and his remains dispersed. As for Hus, against his expectation, it was not the intention of the council to hear him at length, and even less to let him expound his thought in sermons. His appearance was only to take place once the hearing was closed to permit an abjuration, since the conviction of heresy had already been established.

¹⁰ Significantly, Cardinal Giuseppe Roncalli, when he became Pope John XXIII in the twentieth century, wanted to erase the memory of this predecessor—considered today by the Catholic Church as an anti-pope—by taking again his name and number.

¹¹ In prison, he lived under very harsh conditions and almost lost his life.

The nobility of Bohemia, already alienated by Sigismund's perjury, requested the council give Hus the opportunity to express his views. In order not to further aggravate the situation, the council agreed in principle and dedicated three sessions to the accused. It would be exaggerated to say that he was able to express himself freely. On June 5, during the first appearance, there was such a noise that Hus could hardly hear himself. In the second meeting, Hus was able to express himself on the priesthood and the presence of the body of Christ in the Eucharist, but the next day he was ordered to answer only very briefly to the questions. Finally he was ordered again to abjure his errors in order to avoid the stake. He remained firm even if he could not refute opinions falsely attributed to him or defend teachings which he was convinced were faithful to the Catholic tradition.

Hus was thus found guilty of heresy. On June 23, it was decreed that all his books were to be burned, and on July 6, after an audience in which the charge, the sentence, and the solemn excommunication were pronounced, he was led to the place of execution.

d) *The True Points of Contention*

What were the real differences between Hus and the official doctrine of the church? Putting aside false accusations invented to get rid of this Czech agitator, with regard to the dogmas of the first four councils concerning the nature of God and the incarnate Son, Hus—like the sixteenth-century Reformers after him—was perfectly orthodox. He confessed the Trinity defined at Nicea and Constantinople and the two natures of Christ according to the teaching of Ephesus and Chalcedon. He believed in the truth of the Holy Scriptures, without rejecting some unscriptural traditional beliefs such as purgatory or the assumption of Mary. While his attacks on the clergy were often outspoken, they targeted behavior he judged scandalous, without calling into question the institution itself. In contrast to Wycliffe—although, like him, he dared to call the pope antichrist—Hus remained convinced that ecclesiastical right was legitimate and that the Roman Church could call herself the Catholic church.

It is often difficult to clarify his thought on specific topics since, depending on the circumstances, his discourse could vary greatly. In some cases, it is legitimate to ask whether his desire to present himself as a good Catholic did not lead him to take distance from certain statements he made when he took up the mantle of protest leader. This tension is apparent when one considers his famous *Treatise against Six Errors*. The first affirmation about the Eucharist condemns the idea that the priest at the altar creates the body of Christ, and seems to present the position of Wycliffe. This is what the fathers

of the council understood: Hus revived the “heresy” taught by the professor of Oxford. But throughout the trial, during interrogation in prison or before the assembly of the council, Hus was eager to distance himself from this characterization. During his second appearance, he did so by using the language of the Council of Latran of 1215 itself: he acknowledged that at the time of consecration the bread disappears, being “transubstantiated” into the body of Christ. Surprised, one of the members of the council requested confirmation, “Do you say that the body of Christ is there, totally, really, and in a multipliable fashion?” His answer was unambiguous, “Truly, really, and totally; the body of Christ is in the sacrament of the altar, this body born of the Virgin Mary, which suffered, died, and was raised, and is at the right hand of the Father.”¹² Jean Puyo asks, “Could Jan Hus be more orthodox?”¹³ And André Vauchez’s prudence is understandable when he proposes that Hus is “probably more orthodox than Wycliffe”!¹⁴

On the doctrine of the church, Hus is clearly and consistently problematic for Rome. Although his attitude was on the whole one of respect toward the hierarchy of the church, and although he did not adopt the Wycliffite ideal of the complete submission of the visible church to the invisible, many signs indicate a different ecclesiology from the one shaped by St. Augustine, which prevailed throughout the Middle Ages. Several positions presaged a new way of seeing things, a way incompatible with and a threat to the Roman system.

First, in line with the Christocentric mysticism based on the *via moderna* of the Brothers of the Common Life, Hus considered that the relationship of the believer to Christ does not depend on the mediation of the church. Regarding the forgiveness of sins, he believed much more in sincere repentance than the efficacy of indulgences. Similarly, he dared to separate God’s absolution from the liturgical act of the clerics. He unambiguously stated,

Let anyone, whoever it may be, pope, bishop or any other priest, cry: “Man, I forgive you your sins, I free you from your sins and all the pains of hell,” *it is empty clamour and it is vain: it avails nothing unless God forgives the sinner who heartily rues his sins.*¹⁵

The consequence is important because ecclesiastical authority does determine the eternal destiny of believers.¹⁶ The church is dispossessed of the power of the keys concerning salvation and damnation. This is confirmed

¹² As cited in Puyo, *Jan Hus*, 138.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ André Vauchez, in *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours*, ed. Michel Mollat (Paris: Desclée, 1990), 6:288; as cited by Puyo, *Jan Hus*, 89.

¹⁵ Cited in Roubiczek and Kalmer, *Warrior of God*, 127; FT, *Jan Hus*, 120 (emphasis mine).

¹⁶ To the great sorrow of the members of the council, Hus asserted that Wycliffe was in heaven with the “blest” in spite of the condemnations against him.

by the *Treatise of the Six Errors*, since the third article rejects the so-called power of the priest to remit sins and their punishment, while the fifth article rejects the power to excommunicate.¹⁷

A consequence of this—which Hus assumed—is the lessening of the distance between clerics and laity. Since the ultimate authority in the church is Christ and since the hierarchy does not exclusively control access to Christ, the clergy is not the judge of everything or itself beyond judgment. Neither is the laity only a flock that is led; it is comprised of the members of the body of Christ. When Hus preached at the Bethlehem Chapel, he loved to call upon his hearers and to ask them their opinion! He gave Christian people their voice back. Moreover, he was convinced that the civil authorities have a duty in regard to the church, and they should, if the occasion arises, punish clerics who behave badly.

Furthermore, the direct appeal to Christ and “hearing” the voice of God apart from the mediation of the church expresses a movement in Western thought, in an ever stronger affirmation of the individual, characterized by the emergence of the “I.” The message of the gospel underscores the worth of the individual since it addresses the heart and invites personal decision. Religious questions are not matters of consenting with implicit faith to the dominant discourse. What was changing was the balance between the collective and the individual. Hus’s aim was not to challenge the right of the church to assert the content of the faith; he was not strictly a rebel; rather, he could not accept a mere argument from authority. Throughout his trial, he explained that he was willing to revise his positions if some good reason were put forth. In his main work, *De Ecclesia*, he writes: “Who can forbid a man to judge according to his reason?”¹⁸ After having removed from the church the power of the keys in the administration of grace, he challenged her claims in the formulation of truth. The discourse of the church is not infallible; conscience can demand her to present her credentials.

From this, a question arises: upon what basis does the conscience recognize truth if not necessarily via the discourse of the church? Hus invokes reason, which is not a norm for faith, but a means of inquiry. It is useful and necessary, but it is only a guide to truth. Hus was convinced that truth resides in God’s revelation, in the Holy Scriptures. He clearly was one of the first to formulate what would later be called the right of private

¹⁷ Jan Hus, “De sex erroribus compilatum, atque cura ipsius Pragæ parietibus Bethlehemiticis inscriptum (1413),” in *Historia et monumenta Ioannis Hus atque Hieronymi Pragensis*, ed. Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1558; repr., Nürnberg: Montanus & Neuberus, 1715), 1:238, 239–40.

¹⁸ As cited in Puyo, *Jan Hus*, 91; cf. Jan Hus, *De Ecclesia: The Church*, trans. David S. Schaff (New York: Scribner’s, 1915), 262, 224, 227, 234, 251, and 257.

conscience, the right and duty of Christians to test the teaching of the church in light of Scripture. After the publication of the pontifical announcement of the sale of indulgences in Bohemia (1412), Hus expressed himself in this way:

Therefore a disciple of Christ must examine papal bulls, and if they are in agreement with the laws of Christ, not oppose them in any way. But if they are against Christ's laws he must join Christ Himself to oppose them. ... Holy Writ is the law of Christ and therefore nothing must be added to it and nothing taken away. For the law of Christ is sufficient, and alone it is enough to lead and rule the militant Church.¹⁹

We discern here the famous *sola Scriptura*, the formal principle of the 16th century Reformation. Hus is concerned to bring the "law of Christ" to bear on decisions and acts of the contemporary church, rather than to challenge the whole tradition with the teaching of Scripture. Nevertheless, the affirmation that Holy Scripture "alone ... is enough to lead and rule the militant Church" opens the door to critique the beliefs and practices of tradition. Hus planted a few important signposts. Most symbolic was his desire to reconstitute the cup to the laity, as for two centuries the priest alone had access to the chalice, while the people had to be content with the host. In several chapels and churches in Bohemia, Hus restored the cup to the faithful. The council of Constance reproached him and called it heretical. "What madness," wrote Hus, "to condemn as heresy the Gospel of Christ, the epistles of St. Paul, yea, the deeds of Christ and His apostles and the other saints."²⁰ After his death, communion under two species became the emblem of the Hussite movement. The Reformation unanimously inherited this legacy.

IV. Conclusion: From Jan Hus to Martin Luther

With the Waldensians, Wycliffe, and others, Hus was one of the forerunners of the great Reformation movement that would unfold in the 16th century. Striking similarities can be noted between the path of Hus and that of Martin Luther.

First, both were born in the Holy Roman Empire and incarnated national claims and identity. While Hus was largely responsible for the emergence of the conscience of the Czech nation over against Germany and Rome, Luther was as a prophet of the German nation against the hegemony of Rome. Both contributed to the development of their language: Hus the

¹⁹ Cited in Roubiczek and Kalmer, *Warrior of God*, 130; FT, *Jean Hus*, 123.

²⁰ See Roubiczek and Kalmer, *Warrior of God*, 233; FT, *Jean Hus*, 204.

Czech language, and Luther the German through his theological writings, and his remarkable translation of the Bible.

Both were university teachers confronted by a similar global context: on one hand, the domination of scholastic erudition from which they sought to escape, and on the other, a Catholic institution that continued at the time of Luther to create one scandal after another through the behavior of her leaders, the papal wars, etc. At key moments, they both had to face the problem raised by indulgences. The publication of 1517 was the spark that would light the fire of the Reformation, but that of 1412 had already provoked indignation not only in Hus, but also in the population of Bohemia. The rejection was so passionate that students of the University of Prague burnt publicly the papal bull which contained the promulgation of indulgences. This episode anticipated Luther's gesture of burning in 1520 the bull that condemned his writings.

A striking element in the comparison of the two stories is the convocation of Hus to Constance and Luther to the diet of Worms. If no council gathered at Worms, the stated objective of the ecclesiastical authorities was the same: to eradicate a protest movement either by an abjuration or by physically eliminating its leader. Luther, who had already been excommunicated (like Hus), received from the Emperor Charles V a safe conduct, which assured his security, and which bears resemblances to the tragic story of Hus. To his friends, who discouraged him from going to Worms, Luther replied: "Yes, I will go to Worms even if there are as many devils as tiles on the roofs. They were able to burn Jan Hus but were not able to burn the truth." The emperor too remembered the events at Constance. When some prelates advised him to lift the protection granted to Luther through the safe passage, he answered, "I do not want to have to blush like my predecessor Sigismund." Hus's martyrdom was Luther's gain.

Beyond the historical parallels, it is interesting to note that the theological breakthroughs in Hus's thought foreshadowed the doctrine and the spirituality of the sixteenth-century Reformation: the direct relationship with Christ that was so dear to Luther, the rights of conscience, and the definition of ultimate authority as no longer belonging to the church, but to Scripture.

Regarding the church, Hus's thought is incomplete, but even in this there are hints of the doctrine of the covenant later developed in Reformed circles. Between the position of Wycliffe—which perhaps anticipates Anabaptist ecclesiology—and Roman Catholic teaching, Hus opens a third way. He does not propose the rejection of the historic church, the institutional church and her prerogatives, for the historical reality of the church is not to be confused with the elect people known to God alone. The

doctrine of the covenant of grace would provide a foundation for a third way. Reformed ecclesiology clarifies Hus's intuitions. His revalorization of the laity would also be taken up by Luther, to whom we owe the affirmation of the priesthood of all believers and the end of the sacerdotal institution as a mediating channel between God and men.

The gathering of these elements confirms our initial impression that there is a filial relationship between Hus's work and the Reformation. Luther acknowledged it when he said: "We are all Hussites without knowing it." However, Hus did not initiate or anticipate the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone and through faith alone (*sola gratia, sola fide*). For Hus, as for the whole medieval church, and for other pre-reforming movements, grace was not the pivot of the relationship between man and God, but only a help and a comfort within a system that remained deeply legalistic. Luther will shatter all this! The power of his thought was the (re)discovery of the gospel of grace apart from merit, the glorious liberty of the children of God. This was not Hus's language. His last letter written from prison is significant. As he was preparing for martyrdom, he wrote: "I wrote this letter awaiting my death sentence in prison, in the chains in which I suffer, I hope, *for divine law*."²¹ Luther would not have expressed himself in this way. Is the darkness in which Hus remained on this point an underlying cause of the limited impact of his action? Did not Luther set Europe on fire precisely because he opened a radical new way to God? Between the two, a century elapsed during which mentalities evolved: there were the advances of humanism; there was Erasmus. A Christian reading of history does not forbid us to think that the action of the Holy Spirit was all the more palpable when the gospel was again proclaimed in its purity.

To conclude, both Hus and Luther were passionate for the truth. They desired it, sought it, and wanted to unearth it wherever it was buried by centuries of human tradition. It was the light that did not leave them even in the darkest night. No other consideration could obstruct them, even though they might lose their lives. In 1410, when the situation in Prague became critical and Hus was forbidden to preach, he defied the prohibition with these remarkable words:

In order that I may not by my silence lay myself open to the reproach that for a piece of bread or for fear of man I have abandoned the truth, I will defend till death the truth that God has vouchsafed me, especially the truth of the Holy Scriptures. I know that truth remains and is strong and will retain victory to all eternity.²²

²¹ As cited by Puyo, *Jan Hus*, 154 (emphasis mine).

²² Cited in Roubiczek and Kalmer, *Warrior of God*, 103–4; FT, *Jean Hus*, 99.

Luther similarly introduced his famous 95 theses with these words: “Out of love for the truth and for the purpose of clarifying it, the following theses will defended be at Wittemberg ...”

If Christ himself came into the world “to testify to the truth” (John 18:37), let us acknowledge that these two witnesses were wonderful followers of their Master. Today, when this ideal evokes more questions than passion, the combat and sacrifice of Hus is preserved by the motto of the Czech Republic: “Truth conquers.” And if we were to define what stood at the heart of every true reform of the church, it would be fair to say that it is the progress of God’s people in the way of truth. In this specific sense, Hus deserves the title of “reformer” before the Reformation.

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The Forerunners of the Reformation

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Abstract

The plague, abuses in the church, and mysticism constitute the background for considering forerunners of the Reformation. They should not be viewed as directly causing the Reformation, but as anticipating in various ways reformational concerns. While some advocated practical reforms (e.g., Jan Hus and Savonarola), others developed theological reflection (e.g., the Brethren of the Common Life). Conciliarism, another reform movement through councils, ironically by its failure, propelled the cause of the Reformation. Finally, humanism, by its return to the sources and Scripture, paved the way as well. In conclusion, it is observed that the division between forerunners and Reformers sometimes is not very definite.

Because the Reformed witness is rooted in Scripture, elements of its biblical emphases appear in the ancient and medieval eras of the church. This reality has led to the consideration of those leaders and theologians who anticipated the concerns of the Protestant Reformers. These have been designated forerunners of the Reformation, particularly those who ministered in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries just prior to the birth of Protestantism. Like the early Protestant Reformers, the forerunners developed their biblical witness within the medieval church that was under the sway of the Pontiff of Rome. In fact, both Reformers and forerunners confronted the Papal See that emphatically proclaimed that none could be saved unless he was a member of the Roman

Church. This can be seen in Pope Boniface VIII's 1302 encyclical, *Unam Sanctam*.¹ Thus, whether prospering or perishing, Christendom, in the millennium of the Middle Ages, was under the hegemony of the Roman Church.

The church nearly perished in the late medieval era due to the scourge of the Black Death: "Everywhere is woe, terror, everywhere. ... I am not mourning some slight distress but that dreadful year 1348, which not merely robbed us of our friends, but robbed the whole world of its peoples."² Petrarch's report of the Plague's carnage reveals that 1348 did not end the tsunami of suffering. He laments, "And if that were not enough, now this following year reaps the remainder, and cuts down with its deadly scythe whatever survived that storm. Will posterity credit that there was a time when ... almost the whole earth was depopulated? ... *Can it be that God has no care for the mortal lot?*"³ The Plague's reduction of medieval Europe evoked desperate acts of self-flagellation and escalated hostility toward Jews.⁴ Medieval society barely survived the "deadly scythe."

Yet death in this Dark Age not only came *upon* the church but sometimes also came *from* the church. On July 6, 1415, sixty-six years after the Plague subsided and six hundred years ago this year, the Czech Jan Hus, a forerunner of the Reformation, was burned as a heretic by the Council of Constance. Yet in the midst of such medieval suffering and persecution, there were glimmers of light. Learning, including biblical studies, was facilitated by the revolutionary invention of the printing press.⁵

I. The Need for Reform in the Medieval Church

Along with and emerging from the physical carnage of the Plague, there were also symptoms of spiritual decay in the church. Records from the

¹ Carter Lindberg, ed., *The European Reformations Sourcebook* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 10–11.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁴ Jean de Venette wrote in his *Chronicle* for the year A.D. 1349: "Stripped to the waist, they gathered in large groups and bands and marched in procession through the crossroads and squares of cities and good towns. There they formed circles and beat upon their backs. ... As a result of this theory of infected water and air as the source of the plague the Jews were suddenly and violently charged with infecting wells and water and corrupting the air." *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ Jakob Wimpfeling (1450–1528) explained the power of the printing press: "In the year 1440 ... Johannes Gutenberg rendered a great and well-nigh divine blessing to the whole world by the invention of a new kind of writing. For this man was the first to invent the art of printing in the city of Strasbourg. From there he went to Mainz where he successfully perfected it. ... Many prominent and famous men have praised the art of printing. ... 'O Germany, you are the inventor of an art more useful than anything from the ancients for you teach how to copy by printing books.'" *Ibid.*, 6–7.

mid-1300s onward indicate that the church confronted various abuses. Simony, for example, was the purchasing of church offices. And during this era, the creation and legitimization of indulgences appeared. The theological grounding for the sale of indulgences was established by Pope Clement VI's *Unigenitus Dei Filius* (January 27, 1343) through his declaration of the reality of the church's treasury of merit.⁶ The purchase of indulgences was subsequently recognized as a means of shortening sinners' sufferings in purgatory by Pope Sixtus IV's *Salvator Noster* (August 3, 1476).⁷

The omnipresent realities of disease, death, superstition, and ethnic hostility weakened and compromised the church, facilitating the rise of avaricious royalty and clergy.⁸ This crisis of values became widespread and was depicted by a well-known mythical account of "Reynard the Fox" (1498).⁹ On the cusp of the Reformation, humanist scholar, Desiderius Erasmus (d. 1536) parodied clerical and papal corruptions in his best-seller, *Praise of Folly* (1509).¹⁰

Allegorical biblical interpretation, as developed by Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349) in his *Interpretation of the Bible*, was the hermeneutical norm.¹¹ Personal merit in salvation was broadly embraced and explained by a theology of "doing what is in one" or doing one's best as seen in the writings of Gabriel Biel (d. 1495).¹² Some in the Augustinian tradition countered this

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

⁸ *The Reformation of the Emperor Sigismund* (c. 1438) describes some of these social woes and proposal for reforms; see Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 5.

⁹ Selections of this text are found in *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰ Erasmus stated that "the deadliest enemies of the church" are "these impious pontiffs who allow Christ to be forgotten through their silence, fetter him with their mercenary laws, misrepresent him with their forced interpretations of his teachings, and slay him with their noxious way of life!" Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* and *Letter to Maarten Van Dorp, 1515*, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 96, 110; cf. Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16, "On the first level, one receives the literal historical sense mediated through the meaning of the words; on the second level through the meaning mediated by the matter itself, one receives the mystical or spiritual sense which in general is threefold: (1) If the matters denoted by the words are related to what is to be believed in the New Testament, then one retains the allegorical sense. (2) If they are related to what we should do, it is the moral or tropological sense. (3) If, however, they are related to what we may hope for in the future blessedness, then it is the anagogical sense ... Thus 'The letter teaches what happened; allegory teaches what you should believe; the moral sense teaches what you should do; the anagogical sense teaches to what you are to strive.' ... With God's help I will remain with the literal sense."

¹² Biel explains: "You ask what it means for a man to do what is in him. ... From this we can now say that he does what is in him who, illumined by the light of natural reason or of faith, or of both, knows the baseness of sin, and having resolved to depart from it, desires the divine aid [i.e. grace] by which he can cleanse himself and cling to God his maker. To the one who does this God necessarily grants grace—but by a necessity based on the immutability of his decisions, not on external coercion." *Ibid.*, 17.

by arguing for God's sovereign grace as the source of man's salvation. Representative works are Thomas of Bradwardine's (d. 1349), "Of God's Case against Pelagius" (1344), and Gregory of Rimini's (d. 1358) "Of the Commentary on the Sentences."¹³

Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* did not overlook the theologians as an additional group in need of reform. Indeed, he writes, "Then there are the theologians, a remarkably supercilious and touchy lot," who "interpret hidden mysteries to suit themselves: how the world was created and designed; through what channels the stain of sin filtered down to posterity; by what means, in what measure and how long Christ was formed in the Virgin's womb; how in the Eucharist, accidents can subsist without a domicile." They even ask, "Is it a possible proposition that God the Father could hate his Son? Could God have taken on the form of a woman, a devil, a donkey, a gourd, or a flint-stone?" He then identifies them by name, "These subtle refinements of subtleties are made still more subtle by all the different lines of scholastic argument, so that you'd extricate yourself faster from a labyrinth than from the tortuous obscurities of realists, nominalists, Thomists, Albertists, Ockhamists and Scotists and I've not mentioned all the sects, only the main ones."¹⁴ Thus, by means of sarcasm, Erasmus calls them to account.

II. *Mysticism and Medieval Piety*

In the midst of the challenges of the era, a mystical piety gained ascendancy. Medieval *Mystics* left a legacy that impacted the Reformers.¹⁵ The leading mystics included Meister Eckhart (d. 1327), Johannes Tauler (d. 1361), an anonymous work entitled, *The German Theology*; Ludolf of Saxony (d. 1371); Geert Groote (d. 1384); Gerard Zerbolt (d. 1389); Thomas à Kempis (d. 1471); and Johannes Busch (d. 1480).

How did these mystics describe the Christian life? Johannes Tauler, for example, called for a life of detachment in the Holy Spirit: "What, then, does true detachment ... really mean? It means that we must turn away and withdraw from all that is not God pure and simple ... This degree of detachment is imperative if one wishes to receive the Holy Spirit and His gifts. It is essential to turn totally to God and away from all that is not God."¹⁶ The *Theologia*

¹³ See Gordon Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); *Gregory of Rimini: Tradition and Innovation in Fourteenth-Century Thought* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961).

¹⁴ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, trans. Radice, 86–88; cf. Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 22–23.

¹⁵ Ray C. Petry, ed., *Late Medieval Mysticism*, LCC 13 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957).

¹⁶ Johannes Tauler, "Sermon Extract," in Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 17.

Deutsch (late fourteenth or early fifteenth century) urged a God-centered biblical faith by turning from selfishness and sin to the true light of divine love.¹⁷ An emphasis on the imitation of the life of Christ also appeared in works such as Ludolf of Saxony's (d. 1371) *Vita Jesu Christi*, and Gerard Zerbolt's (d. 1398) *The Spiritual Ascents*.¹⁸ Best known is Thomas à Kempis's (d. 1471) *The Imitation of Christ* that modeled a vital trust in the goodness and power of God in the troubles and temptations that threatened the helpless pilgrim:

O God, I feel uneasy and depressed because of this present trouble.
I feel trapped on every side, yet I know I have come to this hour,
so that I may learn that you alone can free me from this predicament.
Lord, deliver me, for what can I do without you, helpless as I am?
Lord, give me patience in all my troubles. Help me, and I will not be afraid ...
No matter how hard it is for me, it is easy for you, O Lord.¹⁹

Whoever and whatever the forerunners of the Reformation may be construed to have been, they labored in a motley milieu of mysticism, debate over grace and merit, allegorical biblical interpretation, and growing concerns over clerical abuses. The Protestant Reformers were aware of these late medieval forerunners and the cultural, ecclesiastical, and theological forces they encountered throughout the stormy fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

III. *What Was a Forerunner of the Reformation?*

Even before the Protestant movement appeared, a spirit of Catholic Reformation had begun and was gaining momentum.²⁰ The leaders of these

¹⁷ "The Scriptures, the Truth, and the Faith proclaim that sin is nothing but a turning away on the part of the creature from the unchangeable Good toward the changeable. ... It should also be pointed out that eternal bliss is rooted in God alone and nothing else. ... In other words, bliss or blessedness does not depend on any one created thing or on a creature's work but only on God and His works. ... The illumined ones are guided by the true Light. They do not practice the ordered life in expectation of reward." *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸ Ludolf of Saxony writes, "The sinner, who already believing in Christ and reconciled to him through penance, shall strive with greater care to adhere to his physician and come to him in trustful relationship. ... Thereby he takes very good care that he does not read superficially of his life, but rather he shall follow it step by step through the day. ... Also, he shall so read the life of Christ that it is consulted for the power of imitating him." Gerard Zerbolt, after advising meditating on death and the frailty of life, writes, "See how great is the ascent ... from fear to hope; so great also is the distance within this ascent and the work of climbing. But he who has advanced well thus far is drawing nearer to purity and charity, though he still has some steps to ascend." *Ibid.*, 19–20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰ On Catholic Reformation, see Guy Bedouelle, *The Reform of Catholicism, 1480–1620*, trans. James K. Farge, Studies and Texts 161 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008); Gaston Bonet-Maury, *Les précurseurs de la Réforme et la liberté de conscience dans les pays*

movements are often identified as forerunners of the Reformation. To what extent did medieval churchmen, theologians, and their movements develop concepts of theology and piety that anticipated or paralleled the questions and concerns of Protestantism?²¹

The Protestant faith was committed to “sola Scriptura” and to the gospel defined by “solus Christus,” “sola gratia,” and “sola fide.” These theological tenets were at the heart of the Reformers’ efforts to restore the church to a biblical character. Such explicit slogans, however, were hardly dominant in the medieval theologians. What then were the characteristics of a “forerunner”? Is it even accurate to use the term at all? Heiko Oberman, for example, defends the concept of forerunner with certain qualifications. First, “One of the reasons why a historian may be suspicious of the use of the term forerunner, while operating freely and frequently with its Latin equivalent ‘antecedent,’ is its possible causative connotation.” He adds, however, that, “We do

latins du XIIe au XVIe siècle (1904; repr., Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969); Pierre Imbart de la Tour, *Les origines de la Réforme*, 4 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1905–1935); George V. Jourdan, *The Movement towards Catholic Reform in the Early XVI Century* (London: Murray, 1914); Peter Iver Kaufman, *Augustinian Piety and Catholic Reform: Augustine, Colet, and Erasmus* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982); Francis Oakley, “Religious and Ecclesiastical Life on the Eve of the Reformation,” in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 5–32; John W. O’Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1968).

²¹ There are helpful anthologies of the forerunners of the Reformation, Matthew Spinka, ed., *Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus*, LCC 14 (London: SCM, 1953); Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought: Illustrated by Key Documents*, trans. Paul L. Nyhus (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966); and Gustav A. Benrath, ed., *Wegbereiter der Reformation* (Bremen: Carl Schunemann, 1967). For good general surveys of the forerunners of the Reformation, see Craig D. Atwood, *Always Reforming: A History of Christianity since 1300* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 7–77; Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 73–181; G. S. M. Walker, *The Growing Storm: Sketches of Church History from A.D. 600 to A.D. 1350* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961); and David Boorman, “Reformers before the Reformation,” in *Adding to the Church* (Huntingdon: Westminster Conference, 1973), 82–99. On the topic, see also Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1983); “Thomas Bradwardine: un précurseur de Luther?” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuse* 40 (1060): 146–51; Peter Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman, eds., *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 51 (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Carl Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation: Principally in Germany and the Netherlands*, trans. Robert Menzies, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874, 1877); Alister McGrath, “Forerunners of the Reformation: A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75.2 (1982): 219–42; Joseph C. Reagan, “Did the Petrobusinesses Teach Salvation by Faith Alone?” *Journal of Religion* 7 (1927): 81–91; W. Stanford Reid, “The Growth of Anti-Papalism in Fifteenth Century Scotland” (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1944); “Long Roots of the Reformation,” *Christianity Today* 7.1 (1962): 30–32.

not feel that it should be the task of the historian of ideas to establish causal connections in the historical succession of these ideas. Rather, his goal should be, by drawing on these antecedents as illuminating parallels, to place ideas in their context and point to their particular characteristics and their changing structures.” Second, “To take Luther’s doctrine of justification as the sole standard by which to identify a Forerunner limits the Reformation to this one issue and betrays a dangerous bias of confessionalism.” By contrast, “Other aspects of his thought, such as the understanding of the relation of Scripture and Tradition, the doctrine of the Church, theology of the sacraments, and the methods of biblical exegesis, have their antecedents.”²² Thus, for Oberman, a “Forerunner” in his unique historical context parallels Reformation teaching without being identical with it, nor being identified as the necessary impetus for the Reformers’ teachings.

Gordon Leff observes that theological parallelism was also present within the forerunners themselves. Within the divergent pre-Reformation critiques of the Catholic Church, there were similar elements that seem to harmonize the disparate strands. He writes, “heresy was born when heterodoxy became, or was branded, dissent; and more specifically when the appeal—common to the Waldensians, Franciscan sects, English Lollards and the Hussites—to the bible and to the evangelical virtues of poverty and humility, became, or were treated as, a challenge to the church.”²³

Carl Ullmann suggests various ways of comparing and contrasting the common efforts of the forerunners with themselves as well as the Reformers.²⁴ He suggests the following three traits of the forerunners:

- i. *Balancing Thought with Action*: “We find, and in a greater or less degree proportioned to the extent of their influence, a perfect unity and mixture of conviction with action,—of theological thought with ecclesiastical practice.”²⁵
- ii. *Establishing Truth and Refuting Error*: “The Reformers unite the thetical with the antithetical, position and opposition, in beautiful proportion. The same feature is likewise conspicuous in their true precursors, although some of these labour more to establish positive truth, some rather to refute error.”²⁶
- iii. *Opposing Scholasticism by Biblical Theology*: “In fine we may also trace another difference. It was the authority of a living scriptural theology in opposition to the scholasticism of the previous age which the Reformation was the means of asserting. There were, however, two ways leading to this scriptural theology, one mainly scientific, and another mainly practical, the way of the school, and the way of life.”²⁷

²² Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 38–39.

²³ Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relationship of Heterodoxy to Dissent, c. 1250–c. 1450* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 1:3.

²⁴ Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation*, 1:11–13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Ullmann also notes that the forerunners, much like the Reformers, advanced their agenda by engaging differing levels of theological sophistication from the popular to the scholarly:

In this manner we may classify the precursors of the Reformation, beginning from below, into those that roused and animated the lower orders, such as Gerard Groot, and the Brethren of the Common Lot,—the practical Mystics such as Thomas à Kempis,—the learned philologists such as Agricola, Reuchlin, and Erasmus,—and the theologians properly so-called.²⁸

For Oberman, the forerunners did not so much point beyond themselves as participate in an ongoing dialogue by asking the same kinds of questions that the Reformers would take up as well.²⁹ If the concept of the forerunner is historically viable, who were the primary exemplars?

IV. Leading Examples of Forerunners of the Protestant Reformation

Several primary forerunners have been identified. Here we summarize the contributions of the Waldensians, Savonarola, John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, and a few of the theologians of the Brethren of the Common Life.

1. The Waldensians

An early example of a medieval era church body that anticipated the Protestant Reformation is seen in the Waldensians, founded by Peter Waldo who died around 1206.³⁰ Leff writes about the “thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” Waldensians that “there were variations” among them, “but on the main points they agreed: namely that [they] set themselves up as an alternative church with their own lore and hierarchy ... we find a deep-seated sense of their apostlehood; there is here, as elsewhere, a hint of apocalyptic

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Forerunners of the Reformation are therefore not primarily to be regarded as individual thinkers who express particular ideas which ‘point beyond’ themselves to a century to come, but participants in an ongoing dialogue—not necessarily friendly—that is continued in the sixteenth century. It is then not the identity of answers but the similarity of the questions which makes the categorizing of Forerunners valid and necessary.” Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 42.

³⁰ For a short introduction, see Euan Cameron, “The Waldenses,” in *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period*, ed. G. R. Evans (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 269–86. Their subsequent leaders and major theological writings included Durandus von Huesca (1190); Die Edle Belehrung; Das Bekenntnis Des Johannes Leser (1368); Die Lehre der Waldenser zu Mainz (1390); Bericht uber die Lehren Osterreichischer Waldenser (1398); Verhor des Waldensers Matthaus Hagen (1458); Anschluss Markischer Waldenser an die Bohmischen Bruder (1480).

feeling in the not uncommon designation of the Roman church as the whore of Babylon and all obeying her as damned.³¹

Thus the distinctive beliefs of the Waldensians in distinction to Rome can be summarized,

- *Church Decrees*: “The Waldensians dismissed all ecclesiastical decrees and sanctions as worthless, as well as denying any authority to ecclesiastical laws of fasting, feast days, and so on.”
- *Sacraments*: “They rejected all the sacraments of the Roman church. The power of the keys (remission of sins) came direct from God; and it was granted to them, as it had been to the Apostles, to hear the confessions of those wishing to make them, and to absolve. The eucharist could only be performed by one not in sin; and since all not of their sect were sinners, this power was reserved to the Waldensians alone. It could be carried out by any just person, even a layman or a woman. Their own ritual was reduced to a minimum. Communion was made only once every year.”
- *Purgatory*: “They denied purgatory which, with true penitence, they held belonged to this life. This rendered otiose all prayers and alms for the dead and the intercession of saints who could not hear their prayers in heaven. The soul went immediately to heaven or hell.”
- *Holy Days*: “In the same way, they observed only Sundays and the Virgin’s feast day.”
- *Church Leadership*: “In their way of life they constituted a separate church, divided between simple believers and superiors, whom they were bound to obey as if they were Catholics; acceptance into the sect entailed the promise to obey. Their superiors had to observe evangelical poverty, chastity, and the absence of individual possessions. They lived from alms and abstained from manual work.”
- *The Life and Piety of the Clergy*: “They would sometimes enter Catholic churches. They would recite the Lord’s prayer thirty or forty times each day; it was their only prayer because they averred that all the others, including the *credo*, had been composed by the church, not God. These superiors (or *perfecti*), as the Apostles’ successors, were pledged to a life of missionary wandering, taking the word of the evangel to the villages and holding conventicles in houses. To be received into this elect, they had to undertake a special oath.”³²

We thus find in these core beliefs hints pointing to views later developed by other forerunners and Protestant Reformers.

2. Savonarola, a Preacher of Reform

The late Middle Ages produced several preachers of reform but the best known is Girolamo Savonarola (d. 1498).³³ Savonarola was born in Ferrara

³¹ Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2:457.

³² *Ibid.*, 2:456–57.

³³ Some of the prominent reforming preachers beside Savonarola included Militsch of Kremsier (d. 1374), “On the Antichrist” (1367); “Letter to Pope Urban V”; Matthew of Janov (d. 1393), “Rules of the Old and New Testaments”; Henry Kalteisen (d. 1465), “Preaching to the Council of Basel” (28. October, 1434); Jacob of Juterbog (d. 1465), “Die sieben Zeitalter der Kirche” (1449); Dionysius der Kartauser (d. 1471), “Zwei Offenbarungen” (before 1461 and 1461); Hans Bohm, Der Pfeifer of Nilashausen (d. 1476), “Bericht uber seine Predigt” (1476); Johann Geiler of Katersberg (d. 1510), “Synodalpredigt” (13. April, 1482); Johannes

in 1452, earning a Master of Arts degree at the University of Ferrara. At twenty-three, he became a Dominican in the Observant monastery in Bologna. He was marked by deep learning and was appointed a teacher in the monastery of San Marco in Florence, which he left after two years. When he returned to San Marco in 1490, however, he had discovered an apocalyptic preaching skill. He claimed that this ability arrived around the time of his departure from Florence in 1484. He rose to be a powerful preacher from 1494 to 1498, and was considered the dominant leader of politics in Florence. His preaching led him to become an open and severe critic of the papacy. As a powerful politician with rising political enemies and as an opponent of the pope, his days were numbered.

Eschatological worries appeared among the fifteenth-century Italians, precipitated by actual and threatened invasions of Italy by the king of France. Thus Savonarola preached on January 13, 1494[5]:

Finally, I will conclude: I have been crazy this morning, this is what you will say, and I knew you would say it before I came up here. God willed it so, yet I say—and take this as my conclusion—that God has prepared a great dinner for all Italy, but all the dishes are bitter. I have given only the salad, which was a bit of bitter lettuce. Understand me well, Florence: all the other dishes are yet to come, and they are all bitter and plentiful, for it is a grand dinner. Thus, I conclude, and keep it in mind that Italy is now on the verge of her tribulations.

O Italy, and princes of Italy, and prelates of the Church, the wrath of God is upon you, and you have no remedy but to be converted! ... O princes of Italy, flee the land of the North; do penance while the sword is not yet out of its sheath, and while it is not yet bloodied, flee from Rome! O Florence, flee from Florence, that is, flee from sin through penitence and flee from the wicked!³⁴

In the context of impending invasion, Savonarola launched a movement of repentance in order to recapture the humble lifestyle of the apostles. He

Trithemius (d. 1516), “Ansprache uber die Kirche and uber den Benedictinerorden (1. September, 1493). For literature on Savonarola, see Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490–1498*, trans. Anne Borelli and Maria Pastore Passaro, Italian Literature and Thought Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); John C. Olin, ed., *The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola: Reform in the Church, 1495–1540* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 1–15; Josef Nolte, “Evangelicae doctrinae purum exemplum: Savonarolas Gefängnismediationem im Hinblick auf Luthers theologische Anfänge,” in *Kontinuität und Umbruch: Theologie und Frömmigkeit in Flugschriften und Kleinliteratur an der Wende vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert: Beiträge zum Tübinger Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 8 “Spätmittelalter und Reformation”* (31. Mai–2. Juni 1975), ed. Josef Nolte, Hella Tompert, and Christof Windhorst (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), 59–92; Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494–1545*, Oxford-Warburg Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Routledge and Paul, 1959); David Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

³⁴ Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola*, 75.

confronted the demonic forces he perceived at work in Florence which he interpreted as the rising resistance of antichrist to the Christian faith. He was successful for a time in uniting the city due to his skills in dialogue and diplomacy and the looming crisis. But by 1497, his calls for repentance rose to a fevered pitch, with children leading in the gathering and burning of possessions deemed to be sinful that were harbored in the homes of the people of Florence.³⁵ His “Prayer to God for the promises made by Him to the city of Florence” on the occasion of “the Bonfire of Vanities” on February 1497 exudes spiritual passion and repentance:

Who does not know that, because of the sin of Your rebellious people,
 You have prepared as a revenge famine, plague, and sword?
 Oh, make Your flail turn to gladness for the good, for transgressors to justice, that is,
 wrath and fury. ...
 Open Your fount and rain down, generous Jesus, that grace which may restore to You
 Your beautiful Florence. We in this new age, having made a gift of body and of mind,
 Now give to You our hearts. Since You, Lord Jesus, have chosen us through Your grace,
 Inflame our hearts now with Your love.³⁶

Ultimately, his fiery preaching and prophecies symbolized by the “bonfire of Vanities” led him to the fires of martyrdom. Savonarola was assaulted on Ascension Day in 1497 while he preached. In May, Savonarola, the forerunner, Reformer, and prophet of Florence was excommunicated by the pope and was burned at the stake in June 1498.³⁷

3. John Wycliffe

John Wycliffe of Oxford, England (ca. 1330–1384) anticipated major concerns of the Protestant Reformation.³⁸ These included the worldliness of

³⁵ For a dramatic description of this, see *Ibid.*, 244–58, 315–62.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 244–45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xv–xvi.

³⁸ On Wycliffe and the Lollards, see William Gilpin, *The Lives of John Wicliff, and the Most Eminent of His Disciples; Lord Cobham, John Huss, Jerome of Prague, and Zisca* (London: Printed for J. Robson, 1766); Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984); “Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards,” The Geoffrey Chaucer Page, <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/varia/loollards/lollconc.htm>; J. Patrick Hornbeck, Stephen E. Lahey, and Fiona Somerset, eds., *Wycliffite Spirituality*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 2013); Gustav A. Benrath, *Wyclifs Bibelkommentar*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966); A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509–1558* (1959; repr., London: The Hambledon Press, 1982); Gillian R. Evans, *John Wyclif: Myth and Reality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Louis Brewer Hall, *The Perilous Vision of John Wyclif* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983); Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Anne Hudson, *Studies in the Transmission of Wyclif's Writings*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS907 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2008); Stephen

the clergy and the pope, the supremacy of the Scriptures over the church's teachings and traditions, as well as a non-transubstantiation view of the Lord's Supper. Accordingly, he is often called the "Morningstar" of the Protestant Reformation.³⁹

While teaching at the University of Oxford during 1376–1379, he raised several criticisms of the church. He insisted that the church had no legitimate role in matters of state. Moreover, he taught that clergy who failed to follow the biblical standards for their offices lost their spiritual authority. To aid common believers to follow Christ rather than blindly to follow corrupt spiritual leaders, he began the translation of the Bible from Latin into English. He also rejected the classic Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation. In fact, he claimed that the Bible gave no warrant for the pope's claim to be the ultimate authority of the church. He also condemned indulgences as blasphemous and totally bereft of biblical warrant. Wycliffe writes "On Indulgences":

I confess that the indulgences of the pope, if they are what they are said to be, are a manifest blasphemy, inasmuch as he claims a power to save men almost without limit, and not only to mitigate the penalties of those who have sinned, by granting them the aid of absolution and indulgences, that they may never come to purgatory, but to give command to the holy angels, that when the soul is separated from the body, they may carry it without delay to its everlasting rest. ... This doctrine is a manifold blasphemy against Christ, inasmuch as the pope is extolled above his humanity and deity, and so above all that is called God—pretensions which ... agree with the character of the Antichrist.⁴⁰

Wycliffe's teaching consequently raised the ire of Pope Gregory XI, who in 1377 commanded the imprisonment and trial of Wycliffe. But he was largely spared from prosecution except for a brief imprisonment due to his political allies in England. With the pope's death the following year, and the

Lahey, "Wyclif and Lollardy," in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. Evans, 334–54; Ian C. Levy, ed., *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 4 (Boston: Brill, 2006); Kenneth B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London: English Universities Press, 1952); Geoffrey H. W. Parker, *The Morning Star: Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Richard L. Poole, *Wycliffe and Movements for Reform* (New York: AMS Press, 1978); W. Stanford Reid, "The Lollards in Pre-Reformation Scotland," *Church History* 11.4 (1942): 269–83; Wendy Scase, "Lollardy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15–21; Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pitard, eds., *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2003); John Stacey, *John Wyclif and Reform* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); Herbert B. Workman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, 2 vols. (1901–1902; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1978); *John Wyclif: A Study in the English Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926).

³⁹ John Wycliffe, *Tractatus de Trinitate*, ed. Allen Dupont Breck (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1962).

⁴⁰ Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 15.

subsequent division of the papacy into the two warring factions of the Great Schism, he was able to complete his ministry peacefully in Lutterworth until his death in 1384. His bones, however, were exhumed as a result of the condemnation of the Council of Constance. A contemporary chronicler wrote: "They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus the brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; and they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine which now is dispersed the world over."⁴¹

Wycliffe's followers in England were dubbed the "Lollards," a word that suggests a "whisper" as in a "lullaby" or perhaps meaning a "mutter." This seems fitting since they continued Wycliffe's teachings but did so with caution given the rising danger of persecution from the church. While operating largely under cover, the Lollards advanced Wycliffe's reformation concerns. In fact, they seemed to have gone beyond Wycliffe's teaching, anticipating some of the distinctives of the English Puritans. Thus, the Lollards emphasized that the main task of a priest was to preach the Bible, a Bible that should also be translated into the language of the people so that they could read and study it for themselves. The reforms launched by John Wycliffe produced leaders such as John Purvey (d. ca. 1407), William Thorpe (d. 1407), Sir John Oldcastle (d. 1417), and William Taylor (d. 1423). In 1395, the Lollards issued *The Twelve Conclusions* wherein they criticized a broad range of Catholic practices such as vestments, the celibacy of priests and the vows of chastity by nuns, pilgrimages, confession to priests, and the veneration of images. The English Reformation was buttressed by the stories of early English *martyrs* and other heroes of the faith through the work of John Foxe's martyrology.⁴²

⁴¹ Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner's, 1910), 5.2:325.

⁴² On the English Reformation, see A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd ed. (London: Batsford, 1989), 46–60; "Heresy and the Origins of English Protestantism," in *Reformation Studies*, History Series 9 (London: Hambledon Press, 1982), 363–82; Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004). On Foxe, see John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, 8 vols., ed. George Townsend (repr., New York: AMS Press, 1965); Patrick Collinson, "Truth and Legend: The Veracity of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs," in *Clio's Mirror: Historiography in Britain and the Netherlands*, ed. A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse, Britain and the Netherlands 8 (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1985). One of the forerunners of the Reformation in England was the humanist John Colet. See John B. Gleason, *John Colet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Peter Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1969); Johnny Pressley, "John Colet and the Bible: Guidelines for the Interpretation of Scripture" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1989).

4. Jan Hus

Czech Jan Hus (d. 1415) was condemned by the Council of Constance that had been called to settle the Great Schism—the split of the Roman Church into three popes each claiming to be the rightful head of the church. Hus, influenced by John Wycliffe’s writings, was on his own terms a keen advocate for reforms in the church.⁴³ He denounced the conduct of the pope and clergy and their immoral and extravagant lives. Hus declared that Christ was the true head of the church and that God alone could forgive sins. He insisted that no pope or church leader had authority to create a doctrine if it was inconsistent with the Word of God. In fact, a true Christian could not obey a priest if the clergyman’s command was against the Scriptures. Thus, Hus anticipated Luther’s proposed reforms of the medieval church.

The works of Wycliffe were brought from Oxford by Jerome of Prague. He introduced them to Hus, who served as a professor of philosophy at Prague University. Hus had preached at the Bethlehem Chapel since 1402, a ministry center that had already developed a reformational character. A prominent pulpit graced the Chapel where the preaching was to be done in Czech. The emphasis there was on reaching the laity through a humble Christianity marked by poverty, rejecting the pomp and extravagance of Rome. Wycliffe’s criticism of papal worldliness resonated with Hus, especially since in Hus’s time there had been two contending popes from 1378, and then from 1409 there had been three. Hus viewed the Great Schism as a vast scandal for Christendom.

⁴³ Some texts by Hus and his followers include Jan Hus, *De Ecclesia: The Church*, trans. David S. Schaff (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1915); “The Bohemian Confession (1575/1609),” in James T. Dennison Jr., ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th in English Translation: Volume 3, 1567–1599* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 401–28; “Four Articles of Prague” (1420); Jan Hus, *Magistri Iohannis Hus Polemica*, t. 22, ed. Jarosla Eršil, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuation Mediaevalis* 238 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); Herbert B. Workman and R. Martin Pope, eds., *The Letters of John Hus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904). On Hus, besides the article in this journal and the references cited there, see Petr z Mladenovic, *John Hus at the Council of Constance*, trans and ed. Matthew Spinka (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), which provides an eyewitness account and letters; Matthew Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). For works on the Hussites and Hus’s impact, see Winfried Eberhard, “Bohemia, Moravia and Austria,” in *The Early Reformation in Europe*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 23–48; Thomas A. Fudge, “Hussite Theology and the Law of God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. Bagchi and Steinmetz, 22–27; *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia*, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998); Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Matthew Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); Z. K. Zeman, *The Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren in Moravia, 1526–1628: A Study in Origins and Contacts* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969).

The crisis of the Great Schism reached a crescendo for Hus when one of the three contending popes sought to finance his struggle to gain the ascendancy in the church by selling indulgences in Prague. Jan Lochman explains,

[Huss] contrasted the actual lifestyle of the power-hungry ‘Constantinian Church’ with the biblical vision of the apostolic community of disciples following Jesus, the ‘poor king of the poor’. Huss’s resolute opposition to the indulgence preaching sponsored by the Pope proved the critical turning point in his struggle. In 1412 the *Curia* placed the city of Prague under the ban because of Huss. He left for southern Bohemia but refused to discontinue his reformatory work ... He also continued his writing and finished a series of important works in Czech and Latin, among them his great work *De Ecclesia*.⁴⁴

Hus’s *The Treatise on the Church* issued a call for a biblically purified church led by a godly pope, rather than a “legate of antichrist.” For him, “It is clear that the pope may err, and the more grievously because, in a given case, he may sin more abundantly, intensely and irresistibly [than others]”; in fact, “to rebel against an erring pope is to obey Christ the Lord.”⁴⁵

To resolve the ongoing tensions between the three vying popes, the Council of Constance was called in 1414. As a leader calling for ecclesiastical reform, Hus was invited to Constance to make his case in defense of his views. In spite of the potential danger, Hus went having been given a promise of safe conduct from Emperor Sigismund. Lochman explains,

In 1414 Huss decided to defend his cause before the Council of Constance. He made thorough preparations and drafted a series of papers to enable him to counter the charges against him. He did not get a fair hearing, however. ... Huss was prepared to be corrected by the council, but only if it convinced him by arguments drawn from Holy Scripture. Even when physically weakened, Huss refused to recant. As a “heretic” he was burned at the stake on 6 July 1415.⁴⁶

His student and friend, Jerome of Prague, also travelled to Constance to defend his teacher, and he too was arrested. The following May, he was burned at the same place as Hus. To prevent any relics from being preserved from these heretics, the Council ordered Hus’s ashes dumped in the Rhine. Similarly, the Council ordered that John Wycliffe’s body be exhumed, burned and the ashes poured into a neighboring river.

⁴⁴ Jan Milič Lochman, “Huss, John (c. 1370–1415),” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 266.

⁴⁵ Hus, *De Ecclesia*, trans. Schaff, 87, 208, 211; cf. Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 15–16.

⁴⁶ Lochman, “Huss, John,” 266.

The Hussite movement continued in spite of attacks from Rome.⁴⁷ The Hussites, also known as the Taborites, produced leaders such as Peter von Mladonowitz (d. 1451), Jerome of Prague (d. 1416), Jacob of Mies (d. 1429), Nicholas the Pilgrim (d. 1459), Jan Rokycana (d. 1471), and Peter Cheltschitzky (d. ca. 1465). Some of the key documents of the movement are “The Four Prague Articles” (1420), “The 76 Articles of the Taborites” (1422), “The Inquisition’s Articles Against Peter Turnow” (1426), and “The Taborite Confession” (1431). Ultimately, Rome was forced to co-exist with the Taborites. One of their key distinctives became “communion in both kinds,” or, the laity partaking of both the bread and the wine in the Communion service. For this reason, they also have been known as the “Ultraquists” meaning that they partake of both elements in the Eucharist.

5. *The Devotio Moderna and the Theologians of the Brethren of the Common Life*

During the 15th century, there developed in northwest Europe a movement called the *devotio moderna*.⁴⁸ It emerged from the Brethren of the Common Life. This was a movement of laymen and priests who insisted on a simple life as may have been lived in the early church. The *devotio moderna* emphasized the importance of Bible reading. Their focus was to teach the Bible and to care for the poor. Thomas à Kempis’s emphasis on a biblically based personal relationship with Christ as advocated in his *Imitation of Christ* reflected the concerns of this movement. Erasmus’s education in the 1470s in the Netherlands was influenced by the concerns of the *devotio moderna*.

Three theologians of reform were closely associated with the Brethren of the Common Life (or Lot). These were John Pupper of Goch (d. 1475), John Ruchrath of Wesel (d. 1479), and Wessel Gansfort (d. 1489).⁴⁹ John of Goch

⁴⁷ Cf. Bamber Gascoigne, “History of the Reformation,” HistoryWorld, <http://www.history-world.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=227&HistoryID=ad03>rack=pthc>.

⁴⁸ For introductions to this movement, see John Van Engen, ed., *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1988); Albert Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance: A History of the “Devotio moderna”* (New York: Century, 1925), 440–74; Regnerus R. Post, *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1968).

⁴⁹ See Gustav A. Benrath, *Reformtheologen des 15. Jahrhundert: Johann Pupper von Goch, Johann Ruchrath von Wesel, Wessel Gansfort* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1968); Dennis R. Janz, “Late Medieval Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. Bagchi and Steinmetz, 5–14; Edward W. Miller and J. W. Scudder, *Wessel Gansfort: Life and Writings*, 2 vols. (New York: Putnam, 1917). For other developments in Late Medieval thought, see Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 29–57; “Theological Light from the Medieval Era? Anselm and the Logic of the Atonement,” in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and*

emphasized the need of reformation in the church and in medieval theology. John of Wesel critiqued the conduct of the clergy and the indulgence system. Wessel Gansfort was the best theologian of the three having been trained by the Brethren of the Common Life. The Brethren of the Common Life, with their emphasis on biblical study and practical Christian living, sought to harness and improve the mystical spirit of their time to improve the church.⁵⁰

Ullmann distinguishes Hus, Jerome of Prague, and Savonarola as primarily concerned with “ecclesiastical action” from John of Goch, John of Wesel, and Wessel Gansfort as focused on “theological research”: “The former work with greater power and apparent effect, and their lives possess a higher degree of dramatic interest; the latter are more retired and move within narrower circles, but their labours are of greater theological consequence.” Further, “In the struggle with the prevailing domination, the former often manifest a degree of eccentricity; the action of the latter is more spiritual and concentrated.”

Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464), the great biblical commentator, who still recognized biblical allegorical interpretation but wrestled with the plain meaning of the text, was a product of the school program of the Brethren of the Common Life and studied at Heidelberg. His insights on the conciliar debate actually anticipated some of the reasoning on man in a state of nature that was later made famous in the 1600s by philosopher John Locke. Nicholas writes,

Since by nature all men are free, any authority by which subjects are prevented from doing evil and their freedom is restrained to doing good through fear of penalties, comes solely from harmony and from the consent of the subjects, whether the authority reside in written law or in the living law which is in the ruler. For if by nature men are equally strong and equally free, the true and settled power of one over the others, the ruler having equal natural power, could be set up only by the choice and consent of the others, just as a law also is set up by consent.⁵¹

In essence, he, like Locke, argued that natural law and reason establish the foundation of human government.

To these individual forerunners, who anticipated the Reformation, we must add the internationally significant reforming movement represented by the medieval church councils. This movement and its advocates established the ecclesiastical movement denominated Conciliarism.

Reformed Heritage. In Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2002), 69–93.

⁵⁰ Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation*, 11–13.

⁵¹ *De concordantia catholica* 2.14, cited in George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, rev. ed. (New York: Holt, 1950), 319.

V. *Schism, Conciliarism, and the Necessity of the Protestant Movement*

The crisis of the Great Schism referenced above in the discussion of Jan Hus compelled the church to resolve three competing claims for the papal office.⁵² Ultimately, each papal claimant was forced to resign. However, Pope John XXIII escaped from the Council of Constance but was re-arrested. He was officially deposed on May 2, 1414. Among the seventy charges leveled against the erring pope were heresy, simony, misusing church funds, moral turpitude inclusive of fornication, adultery, incest, sodomy, poisoning Pope Alexander V and his physician, and even denying the immortality of the soul. He was convicted on 54 of the charges!

The leading Conciliarists included William Durandus (d. 1330), Conrad of Gelnhausen (d. 1390), Matthew of Crakow (d. 1410), Dietrich of Nieheim (d. 1418), Pierre D'Ailly (d. 1420), Gregory of Heimburg (d. 1472), and Andreas von Krain (d. 1484). Scholastic theologians such as William of Ockham (d. 1349) contributed to the Conciliar debate with his *Dialog over the Authority of the King and of the Papacy* (1342) and *Tractate over the Authority of the King and the Papacy* (1347).⁵³ The political issues that emerged in the medieval era were addressed especially by Jean Gerson (d. 1429) and Marsilio of Padua.⁵⁴

In 1324, Marsilio of Padua (d. 1342) wrote *Defensor Pacis*, which outlined a vision of ecclesiastical power that was not vested in the clergy but in the people. Although deemed heretical, it launched the debate over ecclesiastical

⁵² On Conciliarism, see C. M. D. Crowder, ed., *Unity, Heresy and Reform, 1378–1460: The Conciliar Response to the Great Schism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977); Gerald Christianson, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Christopher M. Bellito, eds., *The Church, the Councils, and Reform: The Legacy of the Fifteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008); John N. Figgis, *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414–1625*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 31–54; Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Conciliarism and Consent in the Late Middle Ages: Studies in Ecclesiastical and Intellectual History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984); Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism*, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* 81 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); *Ockham, the Conciliar Theory, and the Canonists* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁵³ *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Philotheus Boehner, Nelson Philosophical Texts (New York: Nelson, 1962).

⁵⁴ See Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 287–328; Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, eds., *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, 100–1625* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 362–547; Matthew S. Kempshall, "Ecclesiology and Politics," in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. Evans, 303–32; Jeffrey B. Russell, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages*, *Publications of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); Brian P. McGuire, ed., *A Companion to Gerson*, *Brill's Companions to Christian Tradition* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

power and popular sovereignty within the church. Some of his controversial tenets are: “The general council of Christians or its majority alone has the authority to define doubtful passages of the divine law, and to determine those that are to be regarded as articles of Christian faith”; “The gospels teach that no temporal punishment or penalty should be used to compel observance of divine commandments”; and “The other bishops, singly or in a body, have the same right by divine authority to excommunicate or otherwise exercise authority over the bishop of Rome.”⁵⁵

Conciliarism as the best solution to the Schism was advocated in the *Opinion of the University of Paris* (1393): “If the rival popes, after being urged in a brotherly and friendly manner, will not accept either of the above ways [resignation or arbitration], there is a third way which we propose as an excellent remedy for this sacrilegious schism. We mean that the matter shall be left to a general council.”⁵⁶ Pierre D’Ailly defended this approach in his *Conciliar Principles* (1409): “The Church in certain cases can hold a general council without the authority of the Pope.” He then goes on to list several scenarios in which this would apply. For instance, “if there were several contenders for the Papacy so that the whole Church obeyed no single one of them, nor appeared at the call of any one or even two of them at the same time—just as is the case in the present schism.”⁵⁷ These theories in favor of a Roman Church led by councils were put into practice by the Council of Constance, the body that condemned Wycliffe and Hus. Thus, in its decrees *Haec Sancta* (May 6, 1415) and *Frequens* (October 9, 1417), Constance declared:

This holy synod of Constance ... declares that this synod, legally assembled, is a general council, and represents the catholic church militant and has its authority directly from Christ; and everybody, of whatever rank or dignity, including also the pope, is bound to obey this council in those things which pertain to the faith, to the ending of this schism, and to a general reformation of the church in its head and members.⁵⁸

The council also compared the church to a garden to advocate frequent councils, “A good way to till the field of the Lord is to hold general councils frequently, because by them the briars, thorns, and thistles of heresies, errors, and schisms are rooted out, abuses reformed, and the way of the Lord made more fruitful.”⁵⁹ Thus, at Constance the principles of Conciliarism were clearly in control.

⁵⁵ Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

Ultimately and ironically, the Protestant Reformation and its rupture from Rome became inevitable due to the failure of Conciliarism. Subsequent popes did not want to be held accountable to regularly occurring councils. So Pope Pius II proclaimed in *Execrabilis* (January 18, 1460):

An abuse, at once execrable and unheard of hitherto, has appeared in our day to the effect that certain persons, imbued with the spirit of rebellion zealous not for wiser judgment but to escape from sin already committed, have presumed to appeal to a future Council from the Roman Pontiff ... we condemn such appeals and reprobate them as erroneous and damnable. ... If, however, anyone shall do anything to the contrary ... let him *ipso facto* incur the sentence of execration and incapable of absolution, save by the Roman Pontiff and at the point of death.⁶⁰

In the same spirit, Pope Leo X averred in *Pastor Aeternus* (March 16, 1516): “The pope alone has the power, right, and full authority, extending beyond that of all councils, to call, adjourn, and dissolve the councils. This is attested not only by the Holy Scriptures as well as the statements of the Holy Fathers and our predecessors on the throne at Rome.”⁶¹ Luther’s subsequent call for a Church Council to hear and debate his theology was thus *prima facie* heretical in the eyes of the pope and his church. The Reformers were compelled to turn to the magistrates for help in their reformation program and thereby established by necessity churches outside the pale of the Roman hierarchy. Protestant churches were birthed by forces of reform begun by forerunners in the medieval era who had long advocated reforms that would not be countenanced by the entrenched papal system.

VI. *The Humanists and Desiderius Erasmus as Forerunners of the Reformation*

A critical movement that anticipated the Protestant Reformation and helped secure its success was that of the humanists. Their scholarly labors and knowledge of the original sources of church history as well as biblical texts supported and sustained the efforts of the Reformers. The origins of the humanists grew out of the Renaissance that had begun even before the period of the forerunners. The leading Humanists of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries included Lorenzo Valla (d. 1457), Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499), Rudolf Agricola (d. 1485), Jacob Wimpfeling (d. 1528), Johannes Reuchlin (d. 1523), Ulrich von Hutten (d. 1525), François Rabelais (*ca.* 1483–1553), and Erasmus of Rotterdam (d. 1536).⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² For introductions to the relationship between Reformation and humanism, see James D.

Here are the contributions of a few humanists toward reform. François Rabelais's *On Education* set out a high standard of original language mastery.⁶³ Lorenzo Valla's *The Falsely Believed and Forged Donation of Constantine* undercut the papacy's claims for political temporal power.⁶⁴ Ulrich von Hutten's *Letters from Obscure Men* (1515) satirized the legalistic traditional piety of Medieval Catholicism.⁶⁵ However, the prince of them all was Desiderius Erasmus who intensified the humanists' commitment to the importance of Scripture for true Christianity.⁶⁶ Erasmus lampooned the church in his *Praise of Folly* as noted above by his excoriating critiques of the clergy and theologians. And not even the papacy escaped his exhortations: "Then the supreme Pontiffs, who are the vicars of Christ: if they made an attempt to imitate this life of poverty and toil, his teaching, cross, and contempt for life, and thought about their name of 'pope', which means 'father', or their title of 'Supreme Holiness', what creature on earth would be so cast down?"⁶⁷

Tracy, "Humanism and the Reformation," in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 33–57; Albert Hyma, *Renaissance to Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951); and Augustin Renaudet, *Pré-reforme et Humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie: 1494–1517*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie d'Argences, 1953). For Erasmus's thought, see Erika Rummel, "The Theology of Erasmus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. Bagchi and Steinmetz, 28–38; Matthew Spinka, *Christian Thought, from Erasmus to Berdyaev* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 1–22.

⁶³ "Therefore, my son [Pantagruel], I beg you to devote your youth to the firm pursuit of your studies and to the attainment of virtue.... It is my earnest wish that you shall become a perfect master of languages. First of Greek, as Quintilian advises; secondly, of Latin; and then of Hebrew, on account of the Holy Scriptures; also of Chaldean and Arabic, for the same reason; and I would have you model your Greek style on Plato's and your Latin on that of Cicero. ... At some hour of the day also, begin to examine the Holy Scriptures. First the New Testament and the Epistles of the Apostles in Greek; and then the Old Testament, in Hebrew. ... It befits you to serve, love, and fear God, to put all your thoughts and hopes in Him, and by faith grounded in charity to be so conjoined with Him that you may never be severed from Him by sin." Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 21–22.

⁶⁴ Valla speaking about the "Donation of Constantine [early medieval fictional narrative legitimating papal authority over emperor]" asserts, "I maintain that Constantine not only made no such Donation, and not only that the Roman pope can make no regulations on it, but what is more that if both be true this double papal rule is terminated due to the crime of the possessor, for we see that the decline and the devastation of the Italians and many of other countries have flowed from this source alone. If the water source is bitter, so also is the stream; if the root is impure, so also are the branches. ... But if the stream is bitter, then one should plug the source; if the branches are impure the cause comes from the roots." *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁵ "You charged me to write you oft, and propose from time to time knotty points in Theology, which you would straightway resolve better than the Courticians at Rome: therefore, I now write to ask your reverence what opinion you hold concerning one who on a Friday, that is on the sixth day of the week—or on any other fast day—should eat an egg with a chicken in it?" *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁶ John C. Olin, ed., *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus with the Life of Erasmus by Beatus Rhenanus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1975), 9.

⁶⁷ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, trans. Radice, 108; cf. Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 23.

Erasmus's cure for the failures of the church was a return to the study of the Scriptures in their original languages. Erasmus wrote *The Paraclesis*, the preface to his Greek and Latin edition of the New Testament, which was originally published in February 1516.⁶⁸ It is his classic call for knowledge of the Bible and thus is also an expression of biblically committed humanism. He writes,

Let us all, therefore, with our whole heart covet this literature, let us embrace it, let us continually occupy ourselves with it, let us fondly kiss it, at length let us die in its embrace, let us be transformed in it, since indeed studies are transmuted into morals. . . . If anyone shows us the footprints of Christ, in what manner, as Christians, do we prostrate ourselves, how we adore them! But why do we not venerate instead the living and breathing likeness of Him in these books? If anyone displays the tunic of Christ, to what corner of the earth shall we not hasten so that we may kiss it? Yet were you to bring forth His entire wardrobe, it would not manifest Christ more clearly and truly than the Gospel writings . . . These writings bring you the living image of His holy mind and the speaking, healing, dying, rising Christ himself, and thus they render Him so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon Him with your very eyes.⁶⁹

Erasmus began work on his Latin New Testament in 1512. However, the Complutensian Polyglot of 1514 under the leadership of Spanish Cardinal Ximenez was the first New Testament printed in Greek but its publication only occurred in 1522 due to waiting for the completion of the Old Testament and the approval of Pope Leo X. Only 600 copies of the Polyglot were printed. Along these humanistic efforts in Spain, the history of Spanish Reformation, which is often overlooked, is receiving increasing attention.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 91; James K. McConica, *Erasmus, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 45–49.

⁶⁹ Erasmus, "The *Paraclesis*," in *Christian Humanism and the Reformation*, ed. Olin, 105–6.

⁷⁰ For an assessment by one of the foremost scholars, see A. Gordon Kinder, "The Reformation and Spain: Stillbirth, By-Pass, or Excision?" *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 1 (June 1999): 100–125; and Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). The influence of Erasmus on Spain was significant; see for instance the classic work, Marcel Bataillon, *Érasme et l'Espagne: Recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Droz, 1937); and John E. Longhurst, *Erasmus and the Spanish Inquisition: The Case of Juan de Valdés* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1950). Juan de Valdés was one of the most important early Spanish Reformers. Some of his writings are found in Juan de Valdés, *Valdés Two Catechisms: The Dialogue on Christian Doctrine and the Christian Instruction for Children*, ed. José C. Nieto, trans. William B. and Carol D. Jones (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1981); and George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation and Evangelical Catholicism as Represented by Juan de Valdés*, LCC 25 (London: SCM, 1957), 295–394. Studies on Valdés include José C. Nieto, *Juan de Valdes and the Origins of the Spanish and Italian Reformation* (Geneva: Droz, 1970); Caros Gilly, "Juan de Valdés: Übersetzer und Bearbeiter von Luthers Schriften in seinem Diálogo de Doctrina," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 74 (1983): 257–306 [who offers a different assessment of Luther's influence than Nieto]; J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Juan de Valdés, réformateur en Espagne et en Italie, 1529–1541*

Thus, Erasmus's 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament was the first to be published, and his work proved to be very influential.

Erasmus explained his desire for the Greek New Testament:

But one thing the facts cry out, and it can be clear, as they say, even to a blind man, that often through the translator's clumsiness or inattention the Greek has been wrongly rendered; often the true and genuine reading has been corrupted by ignorant scribes, which we see happen every day, or altered by scribes who are half-taught and half-asleep.⁷¹

His second edition appeared in 1519, which was the edition used by Luther to translate the New Testament into German. 3,300 copies of the two editions were sold.

Erasmus's third edition was in 1522 and was likely the basis of Tyndale's 1526 translation of the English New Testament. His fourth edition appeared in 1527 and his fifth was published in 1535. He dedicated his Greek Testament to Pope Leo X. Ultimately Luther and Erasmus separated due to their debate over the bondage of the will. Yet Erasmus did not ultimately escape the criticisms of the Catholic Church. He was critiqued by Catholic monks who famously claimed: "Erasmus had laid the egg, and Luther had hatched it."⁷²

Erasmus died in a sort of Reformation "purgatory." In Basel, while visiting his collaborator and Protestant friend Oecolampadius, Erasmus suddenly fell ill. Although apparently loyal to the Catholic Church, he did not request the last rites and was buried in the Basel Minster, a Protestant church.

VII. Conclusion: The Forerunners Transition to Reformers

As the Reformation approached, forerunners were at work. And thus there is a point when the forerunners became the first wave of the Protestant revolt against Rome. Johannes von Staupitz (d. 1524) in his *Sermon Extracts* (1516) criticized indulgences and pointed to Christ for salvation.⁷³ Sebastian Brant

(Geneva: Droz, 1969); Daniel A. Crews, *Twilight of the Renaissance: The Life of Juan de Valdés* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Philip E. Hughes, "Juan de Valdés: Spanish Reformer," *Reformed Journal* 22.2 (1972): 18–20; and Seth L. Skolnitsky, "The Dialogue of Doctrine: A Preliminary Survey of the Theology of Juan de Valdés" (M.A. Honors Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1982).

⁷¹ Erasmus, "Letter to Dorp," in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 71, *Controversies*, ed. J. K. Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 26; cf. Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* and *Letter to Maarten Van Dorp, 1515*, trans. Radice, 165.

⁷² Olin, *Christian Humanism and the Reformation*, 16.

⁷³ "It is beyond doubt that the person may attain forgiveness of his sins by a true, honest contrition even without all the indulgences that he can avail himself of. ... The mercy of God is without measure and infinitely great. ... Christ has opened to us the well of God's righteousness." Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 21.

(d. 1521) published *The Ship of Fools* “For profit and salutary instruction, admonition and pursuit of wisdom, reason and good manners: also for contempt and punishment of folly, blindness, error, and stupidity of all stations and kinds of men.”⁷⁴ His “contempt and punishment” clearly had the Roman Church in mind as the titles of some of his poems reveal: “Contempt of Holy Writ,” “Of Beggars,” and “Of the Antichrist.”⁷⁵ Open complaints against Rome began to appear. Jacob Wimpfeling in his *Grievances of the German Nation* (1515) listed his grievances with a direct allusion to the Hussites,

It is not that we deny our debt to Rome. But we ask: Is Rome not also indebted to us? ... [O]ur compatriots crowd the road to Rome. They pay for papal reservations and dispensations. ... Is there a nation more patient and willing to receive indulgences, though we well know that the income from them is divided between the Holy See and its officialdom? Have we not paid dearly for the confirmation of every bishop and abbot? ... Let therefore the Holy Apostolic See and our gracious mother, the Church, reduce at least the most severe of the taxes she has placed on our country. ... Such a reduction of our tribute might well prevent the outbreak of violent insurrection of our people against the Church.... It would not take much for the Bohemian [Hussite] poison to penetrate our German lands.⁷⁶

And thus the boundary between the forerunners and the Reformers disappeared. The words of Staupitz were soon the concerns of Luther. Similarly, the Reformation in France would have forerunners like Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Guillaume Briçonnet who would impact the young Calvin.⁷⁷ Peter Martyr's Reformation faith began a Reformation movement in Italy that was due in part to an early gospel witness of Juan de Valdez, a Reformer who emerged from the Spanish and Italian contexts.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 7–8.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 9–10.

⁷⁷ On Lefèvre, see Philip E. Hughes, *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Guy Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Étaples et l'intelligence des écritures*, Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance 152 (Geneva: Droz, 1976); Henry Heller, “The Evangelicism of Lefèvre d'Étaples,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 43–77; Richard Stauffer, “Lefèvre d'Étaples, artisan ou spectateur de la Réforme?,” in *Interprètes de la Bible: Études sur les réformateurs du XVI^e siècle*, Théologie historique 57 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980). On Briçonnet, see Guillaume Briçonnet and Marguerite d'Augoulême, *Correspondance (1521–1524)*, *Années 1521–1522*, Edition du texte et annotations par Christine Martineau et Michel Veissière avec le concours de Henry Heller, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 141 (Geneva: Droz, 1975); Lucien Febvre, *Au coeur religieux du XVI^e siècle*, 2nd ed. (Paris: S. E. V. P. E. N., 1968), 145–71; Henry Heller, “The Briçonnet Case Reconsidered,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 2 (1972): 223–58.

⁷⁸ On Martyr, see Peter Martyr, *Early Writings: Creed, Scripture, Church*, trans. Mariano Di Gangi and Joseph C. McLelland (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994); and Mariano Di Gangi, *Peter Martyr Vermigli, 1499–1562: Renaissance Man, Reformation Master* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993).

At last, the prayer of forerunner Thomas à Kempis was answered by the gospel of free justifying grace:

O God, I feel uneasy and depressed
because of this present trouble.
I feel trapped on every side,
yet I know I have come to his hour,
so that I may learn that you alone
can free me from this predicament.
Lord, deliver me,
for what can I do without you,
helpless as I am?
Lord, give me patience in all my troubles.
Help me, and I will not be afraid,
no matter how discouraged I may be.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 20.

Pierre Viret’s Consolation for the Persecuted Huguenots

REBEKAH A. SHEATS

Abstract

This article examines the consolation that the Swiss Reformer Pierre Viret offered to the persecuted Huguenots from 1530 to the 1550s. During these years, Viret, living primarily in Lausanne and Geneva, closely followed the persecution of the Protestants in neighboring France, and offered counsel and comfort to the troubled Huguenots. The consolation he offered these suffering believers is examined and summarized through the Reformer’s letters and writings.

I. *Placards, Jean Morin, and the Shoemaker’s Son*

On the morning of October 18, 1534, the inhabitants of a predominantly Roman Catholic Paris exited their houses to find placards nailed to their walls and to posts on their street corners. These placards, affixed by unknown hands, denounced “the horrible, great, and unbearable abuses of the popish mass.” Violently deprecating the idolatry of the mass, the placards called for all true Christians to abandon the superstition of the Catholic priests and monks (who were declared to be “presumptuous enemies of the Word of God”) and begin celebrating the Lord’s Supper with its original meaning and simplicity.¹

¹ Jean Henri Merle D’Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin* (Harrisonburg, VA.: Sprinkle Publications, 2000), 3:98–103.

The Affair of the Placards, as it came to be called, terrified and infuriated the Roman Catholic populace of France. Many of the Protestants themselves disapproved of the inflammatory nature of the act, and feared the strife it would engender. In city after city across the realm, the placards were discovered. Indeed, so bold were the conspirators that a copy of the articles was even affixed to the door of the royal bedchamber. King Francis I, appalled and enraged at the dishonor and affront he deemed had been shown his person, immediately ordered a search to be made for the instigators of such a vile, seditious act.

The hunt for the treasonous conspirators began in Paris. The officer entrusted with the task of searching out the accursed “Lutherans” was a man by the name of Jean Morin, the *lieutenant-criminel* (public prosecutor), who was as well known for his cruelty as he was for his dissolute life. Knowing Morin to be perfectly suitable for the task, the king added an increase in pay as a further incentive to inspire Morin to bend all his efforts toward the discovery of the heretics. Henry Baird notes, “The judicious addition of six hundred *livres paris* [francs minted at Paris] to his salary afforded him a fresh stimulus and prevented his zeal from flagging.”² With such motivation, Morin was certain of discovering the perpetrators of the dastardly placard affair. Bartholomew Milon, son of a Paris shoemaker, was one of the first who fell prey to the zeal of the *lieutenant-criminel*.

As a young man, Bartholomew had led a profligate life, despising God and living only to satisfy his lusts and sensual pleasures. One day, while engaging in one of his dissolute frolics, Bartholomew broke several of his ribs. The ribs never properly healed, and the young man soon could no longer walk upright. With the passage of time his legs grew weaker, and at last he found himself paralyzed from the waist down.

Embittered by his ruined life and his broken, pain-racked body, Bartholomew sat all day upon his bed within his father’s shop, mocking those who passed by the shop’s window. His jeering one day caught the attention of a man (whose name has been forgotten to history) who paused to address the young cripple.

“Poor man,” the stranger replied to Milon’s mockery, “why do you mock at the passersby? Do you not see that God has broken your body to heal your soul?” The man then drew forth a French New Testament and handed it to Bartholomew. “Read it,” he said—and read it Bartholomew did.

With the Scriptures in hand, Bartholomew drank deeply of the words of

² Henry M. Baird, *History of the Rise of the Huguenots* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1880), 1:171.

life, and was changed forever. Day and night he studied the Word, reveling in the truth contained therein, and day by day he spoke of Christ, not only to his own family, but to any who would listen.

The astonishing change that marked the life of the paralyzed shoemaker's son arrested the attention of many who daily passed the little shop in Paris, and many were the souls that first heard the gracious words of the gospel from the lips of this young man.

When the placards appeared in Paris and Jean Morin began his hunt for heretics, the *lieutenant-criminel* quickly found his way to the shoemaker's door. It mattered not that Bartholomew's broken frame clearly proclaimed him innocent of having played any part in affixing the noxious placards to the city's walls; he was suspected of heresy, and that was sufficient to condemn him.

It is recorded that Morin, upon entering the shoemaker's shop, turned furiously to where Bartholomew lay. "You," he cried, pointing at the man, "get up!" Despite the deadly peril of his situation, Bartholomew could not restrain a smile at the inquisitor's imperious command, and simply replied, "Sir, it would take a greater lord than you to make me rise up and walk."³

Unable to raise himself from his bed, the shoemaker's son was carried to prison by Morin's soldiers. Bartholomew's crippled condition did not exempt him from the customary harsh treatment received from Morin's hands, but the man bore his handling patiently and with astonishing fortitude. Remaining peacefully steadfast through all, he spent his final days encouraging his fellow-prisoners.

Bartholomew was condemned to be burned over a slow fire, a sentence that was carried out on the 13th of November, 1534.⁴ Carried past his father's workshop on the way to his execution, his courage never faltered. As Jean Crespin noted, "The very enemies of the Truth were astonished at the steadfastness displayed by this admirable servant and witness of the Son of God—both in his life and in his death."⁵

The story of Bartholomew the shoemaker's son was only one of many. Jean Morin's zeal knew no bounds, and hundreds in Paris lived in terror for their lives. Any suspicion was sufficient to convict a man. Indeed, in those days anyone who "didn't bow the knee when the bells of the *Ave Maria* were heard, forgot to hail the statues of the saints, ate meat on a fast day, or

³ Jean Crespin, *Histoire des martyres* (Toulouse: Société des Livres Religieux, 1885–1889), 1:303. This and all following translations of French texts are my own.

⁴ Émile G. Léonard, *Histoire Générale du Protestantisme*, vol. 1, *La Réformation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 208; ET, *A History of Protestantism*, vol. 1, *The Reformation*, ed. H. H. Rowley, trans. Joyce M. H. Reid (London: Nelson, 1966), 234.

⁵ Crespin, *Histoire des martyres*, 1:303.

learned Greek and Hebrew,”⁶ was beyond doubt a heretic, and for many long months the fires of martyrdom lit the streets and countryside of France.

II. *Pierre Viret's Reaction*

News of this new wave of persecution sweeping over France was received with horror and dismay by the believers in neighboring Switzerland. Pierre Viret (1511–1571), a native pastor of the Pays de Vaud (a Canton of French Switzerland) and friend and associate of John Calvin, felt deeply the bloody trials and unspeakable affliction being endured by the Huguenots, his fellow-believers across the border. As a young man, Viret had left his native home in the Pays de Vaud and journeyed to Paris to study for the priesthood. While there he had been converted to the Protestant faith, and was forced to flee the city to save his life. Returning to his hometown of Orbe, at twenty-one years of age Viret was pressed into the ministry by William Farel, the man who would later call Calvin to the same task. In 1534 he journeyed to Geneva to assist Farel in bringing the Reformation to that city. Now, in the midst of his work at Geneva, Viret heard that persecutions had broken out afresh across the border in France, and listened with tears to the deplorable tales of refugees fleeing their native land in an attempt to save their lives from the cruel persecution and death awaiting them.

Deeply moved by the harrowing news of ever-increasing martyrdoms of men, women, and children, Viret bent all his energies to seek a means of relieving the suffering of his persecuted brethren. On August 4, 1535, he and his co-laborer Farel wrote to the churches of Germany and German Switzerland, requesting their aid both by prayer and advice for the believers in France, particularly the Vaudois or Waldensians of Provence. “The cause of the Vaudois is the cause of us all,” they declared, begging the assistance of their German brothers in behalf of the persecuted Huguenots.⁷ Appeals were also made to the Protestant lords of Bern, who remonstrated with Francis I on the cruel measures being employed against the Huguenots.

In God’s providence, the intercession of Viret and his fellow-ministers obtained its desired effects. Francis I, pressured by the Protestant magistrates of both Germany and Switzerland, published two edicts that moderated the Roman Catholic persecution of French Protestants.⁸

With the dawning of 1539, however, persecutions broke out anew in

⁶ Alexandre Crottet, *Petite Chronique Protestante de France* (Paris: A. Cherbuliez, 1846), 83.

⁷ A. L. Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les Pays de Langue Française* (Geneva: H. Georg, 1866–1897), 3:327.

⁸ Jean Barnaud, *Pierre Viret, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Saint-Amans: G. Carayol, 1911), 186.

France. Viret, writing from Lausanne and neighboring Geneva (where he was temporarily stationed after Calvin's expulsion from that city), wrote his fellow-Reformer in Strasbourg of the disturbing news the Huguenot refugees brought of the present state of France. Calvin replied to one of Viret's letters on the 19th of May, 1540:

Your letter was a very sad one to me, and all the more so because I can well imagine that cruel butchery to boil over without measure, as always happens whenever it has once burst forth, and there is no way of putting a stop to it. ... Wherefore, unless the Lord open up some new outlet, there is no other way of helping our unhappy brethren than by our prayers and exhortations.⁹

Writing Calvin again in February of 1541, Viret informed his brother of yet more heart-breaking tales brought to him by the Huguenot refugees:

Geneva, February 6, 1541

We have just had the unexpected arrival of Saunier's father-in-law (with his other son-in-law, who is also a refugee). They recounted to us how the Lord delivered them, as well as what terrors are still shaking the brethren. No respite has been given the captives; many have been tortured or put to death; those who are still alive live in greatest fear for their lives. You have heard, I think, of the Vaudois minister who, taken by his enemies, denounced a thousand four hundred families, who have all been delivered up to the slaughter.¹⁰

As the persecutions escalated in France, Viret offered assistance to the numerous refugees seeking asylum in Geneva and the surrounding towns. In July Viret and his associate André Zebédée journeyed to Bern to seek further aid for the suffering Huguenots. Appearing before the lords on the 17th of that month, Viret presented his petition, asking the Bernese lords to again request of Francis I an abatement of the present persecution. The records of the Council of Bern note:

Regarding the request made by Pierre Viret and Zebédée in the name of the other [ministers] their brothers regarding the persecution of the Protestants in France, my lords are of the opinion that, for the moment, it is not expedient to importune the King, seeing that he has written to my lords requesting them to leave him in peace.¹¹

Finding further petitions to the magistrates unavailing, Viret returned home with a heavy heart. Burning with a desire to aid his afflicted, suffering brethren, he was troubled at finding his endeavors to assist them apparently

⁹ Jules Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), 1:187.

¹⁰ Pierre Viret to John Calvin, February 6, 1541, quoted in Charles Schnetzler et al., eds., *Pierre Viret d'après lui-même* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1911), 47.

¹¹ Quoted in Herminjard, *Correspondance*, 5:371.

fruitless. But, as he later wrote, “[God] has not particularly declared that he will aid us by this or that means, or by this or that person. . . . He holds these matters in his secret counsel.”¹² He therefore did not despair at the refusal of the civil magistrates.

III. *Letters of Comfort*

Knowing that God employs whatever means please him, Viret turned to yet another method of providing assistance and comfort to the persecuted Huguenots: the use of his pen. During the difficult days of 1541, he published his *Epistre Consolatoire envoyée aux fideles qui souffrent persecution pour le Nom de Jesus et Verité evangelique* (A letter of consolation to the French Protestants suffering persecution for the name of Christ). Within this work, Viret’s pastoral heart is clearly seen in his ardent desire to comfort and console the Huguenot believers.

Beginning his letter with a reminder to the persecuted believers that they were united to Christ and thus of one body with him, Viret called to mind Peter’s advice: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Pet 4:12 KJV).

My dear brethren, seeing that we are members of Jesus, we must not be surprised or astonished if we are partakers of His cross and suffering. For if we desire to reign with Him we must likewise suffer with Him (2 Tim 2:12). Seeing that He is our Head and we His members, the Head cannot travel by one road and the members by another, but the entire body and all its members must follow the head which guides and governs it.

If then our Head was crowned with thorns, we cannot be a member of His body if we do not feel their pricks and if their pain does not pierce our heart. If our King and sovereign Master was naked and bloodied, covered with reproaches, disgrace, and blasphemies, and nailed to and hanged upon the cross, we must not expect to slumber ever at our ease in this world.¹³

Recognizing that the path of persecution is a way of thorns, Viret reminded his readers that this painful path is also a training ground that will yield much fruit. Though trials and suffering appear grievous and horror-filled for the moment, they are indeed a blessing in disguise, he declared, for they draw the believer to a greater understanding of Christ:

¹² Pierre Viret, *Epistres aus fideles, pour les instruire et les admonester et exhorter touchant leur of-fice, et pour les consoler en leurs tribulations* (Geneva: Jean Rivery, 1559), 164.

¹³ Pierre Viret, *Epistre Consolatoire envoyée aux fideles qui souffrent persecution pour le Nom de Jesus et Verité evangelique* (Geneva, 1541), 3–4.

In reading the Scriptures we learn the theoretical, but we are never good theologians until we practice our theology in divine letters, and never shall we comprehend it well without being exercised in it by various trials, by which we come to the true understanding and knowledge of the matters we read of, and taste the goodness and assistance, help, and favor of God. By this we see how blessed they are who trust in Him who shall never forsake them. For apart from this we speak only of the Holy Scriptures as armchair generals, and as those who discuss the war or other matters after only hearing of it, with no understanding or experience of it whatever.

My brethren, let us thus regard the afflictions and persecutions that we endure in this valley of misery, for they are great blessings of God to instruct us how to mortify our flesh, to crucify and put off the old man in order that the new might be endued with greater vigor, and to humble our sensual and carnal flesh—so prideful and rebellious against the will of God—that we might be made obedient and subject to the Spirit (2 Cor 5:1–5, 14–15).¹⁴

Persecutions are one of God's special blessings, according to Viret, who assured the troubled Huguenots that all they were experiencing was for their good. For, as he noted, if afflictions were not for the good of the saints, God could not be a good God:

Indeed, if persecution were not a singular blessing of God, we would be constrained to look upon God our Father as bitter, harsh, and severe toward His children because He allowed His servants the prophets, apostles, and martyrs—indeed, even His own Son Jesus Christ the King and Ruler of all—to be thus treated by wicked and unbelieving men.¹⁵

To the contrary, God's goodness and mercy are openly displayed in the persecutions he brings upon his children, by which he seals them as his own:

The sorrow of the children of God is always turned into a joy and jubilation which shall have no end. They shall laugh when the wicked weep and gnash their teeth (John 16:20–22). It is fitting that each of us drink a part of the cup which the Lord drank, each one his portion. But the wicked and reprobate drink down and swallow the dregs, which shall be terrifyingly bitter. Let us rejoice in our tribulations, and sing praises to the Lord with the disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 5:41), being assured that the Lord shall never forsake us, but to the contrary, just as He delivered Noah with his ark from the depths and torrents of the flood and delivered the children of Israel from the hard bondage of Egypt, spoiling the wicked persecutors who afflicted His people, so also He shall now be merciful to His Church (Gen 7:1, 17–23; Exod 14:30).¹⁶

As persecutions increased, Viret knew that the temptation to abandon Christ (or at least to conceal one's adherence to him) would become strong. He knew also that many of those who had openly professed Christ in times of safety would now return to the apostate church and denounce those who suffered for the sake of the gospel. Writing to the Huguenots on a later

¹⁴ Viret, *Epistre Consolatoire*, 7–8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

occasion, Viret warned them of the dangers of following those who sought to worship God without taking up their cross to follow him:

Let us not be like those who said to Jesus Christ, “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross,” and then we shall believe in Thee. And, “He saved others; let him save himself” (Matt 27:40; Mark 15:29–30; Luke 23:35). There are today many who say the same, and who are quite ready to believe in Jesus Christ as long as they need not be crucified, and as long as they never see the cross and are never betrayed by their enemies as thieves and murderers. All those who desire the Gospel without the cross, without tribulations and persecutions, are Christians such as these. ...

Therefore beware of ever following the advice and counsel of such persons. But follow God—and Him alone. Follow him who said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal 6:14). And also, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” This is “unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks [or the wise of this world] foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 2:2; 1:23–24). And therefore this same apostle says in another place, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16). So also you have no cause for shame.¹⁷

Throughout the decades of the sixteenth century, persecutions in France continued. In August of 1553, Viret wrote Rudolph Gwalther, a pastor of Zurich, “In France the enemies of Christ ruthlessly hold sway with their accustomed ferocity, ... Our times are most certainly evil indeed, and I know of no comfort remaining but prayer.”¹⁸

Though much concern, compassion, and pity for the physical suffering and torments of the Huguenots filled Viret’s heart, he was nevertheless more concerned with the state of their soul than their physical wellbeing. In the midst of persecution, he explained that it was not enough to merely suffer patiently; an inward examination must also be made. Writing to the persecuted Frenchmen, Viret begged them to examine themselves by the light of the Word of God to ensure that they were standing in his path and walking according to his commands. As Viret so aptly noted, true comfort requires a right view of God. Apart from this, all suffering will inevitably lead to deception or despair.¹⁹

Recognizing that lying spirits and wily seducers always prey upon the afflicted church, Viret called the troubled Huguenots to guard themselves against any who sought to draw them from the path of righteousness (and persecution) to walk in an easier, safer way:

¹⁷ Viret, *Epistres aus fideles*, 117–18.

¹⁸ Schnetzler et al., *Pierre Viret*, 116.

¹⁹ Viret, *Epistres aus fideles*, 11–16.

And above all things beware lest you fall prey to seducers and false prophets, who alter the path and turn you from the right way. Take heed that they do not hinder your course, and that by this means they be the cause of you losing your prize and crown of glory which is prepared by the just Judge for all who can say in truth with the holy apostle: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7). For not all those who run and fight shall receive the prize, but only those who run and fight as it has been commanded them (1 Cor 9:24–27; 2 Tim 2:4–5).²⁰

To merely run the race is not sufficient. In his letters, Viret warned that a man's patient endurance under trials would avail him nothing if he were not running the race as God had prescribed for him.

But how was a believer to know that he was walking in the course which God had laid? Viret's answer was simple: there is only one way available by which to know God rightly:

The way we are to inquire at the mouth of the Lord and request counsel of Him to be informed of His will and to have a conscience well assured, is by His Word, by which alone He reveals Himself and communicates Himself to us. Therefore we cannot have a true understanding of His will, nor do anything which might be pleasing and acceptable to Him and which would not be a sin worthy of death and damnation, except as much as we follow the rule He has given us in His Word. For this is the light, the torch, and the guide which directs our steps, which is more necessary to us than the sun is to the world (Pss 17:4–5; 119:105).

For without it, what path would we take? What could we do except stray from the path of life into the path which leads to the depths of hell? Therefore take most careful heed that you never abandon this Guide. For as soon as you turn from it, you shall be lost. You will walk in the night and be enveloped in darkness. ... Take firm hold upon this divine Word. Keep it as your shield, your staff, sword, armor, and weapons (Prov 30:5; Eph 6:13–17). For while you are thus accoutered, you shall be invincible. You shall vanquish and overcome all.²¹

The Word of God is full of promises of comfort for the afflicted Christian, but Viret warned the persecuted believers that these marvelous promises were available only to those who walked according to its rule. As he strove to console the troubled and suffering Huguenots, Viret was poignantly aware of the danger of false assurance, and therefore in his letters called the believers time and again to examine themselves to be certain that they were in the faith. "If you are well established in true doctrine," he wrote, "persevere in the good until the end, for salvation is only promised to those who persevere, and to no others."²²

Therefore,

²⁰ Pierre Viret, *Letters of Comfort to the Persecuted Church*, trans. Rebekah A. Sheats (Monticello, FL: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2015), 39–40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

²² Viret, *Epistres aus fideles*, 12.

It is necessary first of all that you pay diligent heed to what teaching you follow, and why, and in whose name you receive it, in order that before all things you might lay a sure foundation, and that your beginning might be in the name of God and by His Spirit, as I am assured that it is. For if your foundation is in Jesus Christ and in His Word, and your commencement is in God, you are assured that He who began His work in you shall complete it until the day of the Lord.

And if it please God that you suffer for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you have this comfort at least (which is indeed not small), that you are assured in your heart that you suffer neither for heresy nor false doctrine, nor as an evildoer, but for a good cause—for the Truth, and for righteousness and the glory of God (1 Pet 4:14–16). Therefore you are certain that you shall be partakers of the blessing and bliss promised by Jesus Christ to those who suffer for His name, and that your sorrow shall be turned to joy, and your temporal afflictions shall be exchanged for eternal and everlasting comfort and joy (Matt 5:10; Luke 6:20–23; John 16:20–22).

But if we are not well assured of the doctrine we follow, and are not well-founded in the certainty of the Word of God, we are deprived of this great comfort and of all consolation. Therefore this is the first and chief matter to which you must take heed and examine yourselves, that you beware of believing every spirit, but test them to see if they are of God, in order that it might not happen to you as it has to many poor people who have fallen into the hands of various dangerous spirits by which they were greatly led astray (1 John 4:1).²³

After dealing with the necessity of examining one's state before God by the light of the Word, Viret comforted his readers with the blessed assurance enjoyed by true believers:

Let us not fear that [Christ] will fail to give a good account of us to the Father. For He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11). Let us only take care that we are sheep, and then we can enjoy full assurance against the rage of the wolves, seeing that we have as our Shepherd the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29; Rev 5:6).²⁴

Indeed, suffering is a grace and an honor that God bestows upon his children:

I can say little to you beyond what Paul wrote, that is, that God has given you the grace “not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29).

This holy apostle here touches upon a point which is truly worth noting. For he instructs us in a knowledge and a secret which is unknown to the world, and is neither known nor understood by any but the sons of God. For the sons of this world who are Christians only in name and appearance experience nothing but great horror when they suffer, and above all when they suffer for Jesus Christ. Yet they meanwhile appear to bear a great affection for the cross of Jesus Christ which is quite marvelous. In witness to this they adorn themselves with crosses, and honor and reverence them as if they had Jesus Christ within their arms. And yet there is nothing in the world for which they have a greater hatred or abhorrence than the cross of Jesus Christ. For if they must suffer the

²³ Ibid., 22–23.

²⁴ Viret, *Letters of Comfort*, 71.

least thing of the world for it, they think themselves lost. They despair. They are prepared to renounce Jesus Christ a thousand times rather than lose even one of their fingernails for Him, or bear His cross even a short distance. Thus God has not given them the grace to suffer for Him. For this is a great honor that He bestows upon us, to make us companions of Jesus Christ His Son, and causes us to suffer with Him, that we might also reign with Him (Rom 8:18; 1 Pet 3:13–17; Acts 5:41).²⁵

With true assurance of being a child of God, no persecution is to be feared. As Viret wrote in August of 1553, no matter how violent or ruthless the enemies of Christ may be, “that which ever prevails over the fury of the tyrants is the steadfastness and courage of the martyrs of Christ.”²⁶ This steadfastness and courage is found in the understanding that every believer is held and upheld by God himself.

To illustrate this point, Viret reminded the Huguenots that God, like a father, holds each of his children within his arms. From such a position of security, what harm could ever befall them? If a man is truly in Christ, he need fear his enemies no more than the imaginary monsters a child fears in his closet:

Satan, as a magician, seduces and deceives us by his delusions, and it appears to us that he has monsters and horrible and terrifying giants where there is truly nothing but straw and stubble, which the fire of God’s wrath and indignation shall devour in a moment. Let us not fear and let us not be troubled, seeing that we have a Lord, a Captain, and a Father who knows, sees, and understands all the schemes, counsels, and machinations of our enemies, without whose permission they cannot even move or breathe.

They must first receive His permission before they can work any evil against His servants, even as Satan their ruler and lord, who did not dare lay a hand upon Job before asking permission (Job 1:8–12). Indeed, so limited is his power that he did not even possess the boldness to enter a herd of swine without first asking Jesus Christ’s permission (Matt 8:30–31). Now consider that if the prince of this world, the king of the sons of perdition and of all the wicked and reprobate, does not even possess power and dominion over a single hog, how can his vassals, pages, valets, and courtiers possess any greater power?²⁷

So powerful is God’s protection of believers and so great are the chains he places upon his enemies that Satan himself cannot stir without first asking permission. The Christian’s adversary has already been defeated, and must not be feared. Viret wrote:

We know that we are fighting against enemies who are already beaten and defeated—though they still put up a little fight—who are unable to harm us in any way that we ought to fear. It is the same with them as it is with a snake whose head is crushed, who can no

²⁵ Viret, *Epistres aus fideles*, 130–31.

²⁶ Schnetzler et al., *Pierre Viret*, 116.

²⁷ Viret, *Letters of Comfort*, 26.

longer strike, but still twitches in death. Therefore Paul spoke with assurance: “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20). And John said, “young men ... ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:14).

Although those to whom John wrote were still in battle, he nevertheless wrote as if they had already attained the victory, because they were fully assured of obtaining it. And he at the same time declared to them where their power proceeded from, by which they were assured of gaining the victory. For if the Word of God is in them, they do not fight without God, whose word it is, and without faith in Him, which is our victory which overcomes the world, as this same apostle testifies (1 John 5:4). Therefore rest assured in these promises, knowing that the Lord who gave them is faithful.²⁸

Though the rage and power of their enemies might appear invincible, Viret assured the Huguenots that Christ’s power had not waned. Despite all appearances, the Lord still held sway over the Catholic hosts. As in the Garden of Gethsemane, he ruled all according to his good pleasure, no matter how dark the hour appeared:

You can know by this that the Lord holds the bridle of this great murderer and this red dragon, and that He has bound the hands of all your adversaries, just as He bound His enemies in the garden in which He was taken. For though He allowed Himself to be taken by them, nevertheless He so terrified them by His word alone, and so removed from them all power of harm as much as it pleased Him, that not only did He make every one of them fall flat on their faces, but He also bound their hands so tightly that all of them together had not the power to touch a single hair of the head of any of His disciples. For as He said to them, “I am he [whom you seek]: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way” (John 18:8). This word held the same power as an express command, which all His enemies were constrained to obey whether they liked it or not.

Now, if Jesus Christ had such power against His enemies—indeed, in the very hour when He gave Himself up to die by their hands—we can easily judge whether He possesses any power now (while He is reigning at the right hand of God His Father) to hold in check the rage of His present enemies, and to guard His disciples in the midst of them, while such is His pleasure.²⁹

With the power of Christ holding sway over his enemies, Viret assured the Huguenots that Christ’s church shall never perish. No matter how many martyrs meet their end at the hands of the apostate church and the haters of God, the believer can rest in the assurance that God remains the same, and his promises will not fail. Evil may momentarily appear to triumph over the truth, but this is no cause for fear. Calling to mind examples of God’s dealings with man throughout history, Viret assured the afflicted believers that God will triumph in the end:

²⁸ Ibid., 97–98.

²⁹ Viret, *Epistres aus fideles*, 173.

Though Herod killed the children, he did not kill Jesus whom he sought. Though Herod killed James, Peter still escaped until his hour was come, and the cruel tyrant finished his days miserably among worms, lice, and vermin which ate away his flesh, soul, and conscience before he was even laid in the grave (Acts 12:23). Though Jesus was crucified and buried, He did not remain in the place of the dead, nor could Truth remain entombed. Though King Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem after having laid waste the land of Judah, yet he never entered within the city's gates, but was miserably defeated at what he thought to be his greatest hour (2 Kgs 19:35–37). Pharaoh afflicted Israel in Egypt, but he could not hold them forever, and when he chased after them to bring them back, he and his army were drowned in the sea, which opened itself before the children of God.

Let us then be as Moses, placing our trust in the Lord—not fearing the Egyptians at all—and the Lord shall fight for us, and we shall see the wonders of God. And, though we may suffer for a time, in His time the Lord will raise us up and shall not allow His people to wholly perish.³⁰

With the assurance of being called of God to the suffering prepared for them, and of being protected and preserved by God in the midst of such persecutions, how then are believers to respond to such persecution and suffering? Viret's answer again is simple: rest in God. Call to mind his past goodness and mercies, and rehearse his faithfulness of old:

Recall to mind the victories He has already fought for you and the battles He has won up till now. Consider David's example: David, coming to fight that great giant Goliath, recalled to mind the victory God had already given him over the lion and the bear he killed when he was a shepherd. And from this he drew great hope that God, who gave him the strength to overcome these savage beasts, would not forsake him in the present battle He called David to fight.³¹

These mighty battles of the past and great Ebenezers of history remind the believer that God has not changed, and that he shall always triumph over his enemies, for it is he himself who fights for his people:

This war being waged in God's name is different from those waged humanly. In wars which are humanly waged, there can be no shout of triumph before the victory is won, for the outcome of such wars is doubtful and uncertain. But it is not so here. We are assured of the victory from the moment our Captain sends us into the battle. For He does not place us there to leave us alone, but He is ever with us, and it is He who fights for us. This is well displayed in Stephen, when the heavens were opened before him and Christ was seen at the right hand of the power of God (Acts 7:55–56). And, though we do not see as Stephen saw, it is no less true because of this, seeing that we defend the same cause. This is why Christ willed to appear to this holy martyr, who was the first after the ascension of Jesus Christ to taste death for the testimony of the Gospel. The Lord Jesus did this to testify that thus He is also toward all others who are called into the same combat.

³⁰ Viret, *Letters of Comfort*, 25.

³¹ Viret, *Epistres aus fideles*, 166–67.

Seeing that it is so, we are thus assured that He will not lose the battle. For He it is who said, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).³²

Possessing such assurance of victory, the soul needs not fear any danger, Viret exclaimed. No torment need concern the believer, for all proceeds directly from the merciful, powerful, and victorious hand of a loving Father:

But He also later said, “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt 10:30). “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matt 10:29). Seeing then that this is the Lord who sends us, who holds us in His keeping, and who cares for us—even to the very hairs of our head—let us deliver ourselves wholly into His hands, commending ourselves to Him. And then let us await what it pleases Him to send us. For we are quite assured that if we trust in Him, He will send us nothing except what will be to our profit, and nothing shall ever come upon us except such as shall serve to His glory and our good.

For if He cares for the little sparrows and other brute beasts (no matter how little they may be esteemed of men), how much more will He care for His own children, redeemed with the precious blood of His own Son? Did He not say by His prophet that He would give His angels charge over us, to keep us from all harm, and that they would encamp around His own as an army to guard us? (Pss 91:11; 34:7). Therefore you can rest assured in the statement of Paul—that is, that God, who is faithful and true, shall keep all men, particularly those who believe (1 Cor 10:13).

Trust then in these holy promises, pursuing the calling in which the Lord has called you, and fearing more to offend Him than anything else in the world (1 Tim 2:2–3). It must suffice us to be always in the hand of our Father, in whom we can never perish, and that He gave His own Son as our Shepherd, to whom I pray that He shall increase your faith and all His other gifts and graces ever more and more, that you might persevere in His calling unto the end.³³

Thus, though torments and sufferings afflict the soul, Viret assured the Huguenots that as believers they could meet these trials with joy and peace, knowing that all was for their eternal good and the glorification of God’s name. And, though a believer might never fully understand the purpose of his individual trials, Viret called each believer to remember the instruction Christ gave to Peter:

Jesus Christ said to Peter, “When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not” (John 21:18). John explains that Jesus Christ said this to signify by what death Peter would glorify God. Peter, having heard this statement from the mouth of his Master, had the boldness to ask Jesus Christ what would become of John his companion who was then present. At this Jesus Christ responded, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is *that* to thee? follow thou me” (John 21:22). By these words our Lord Jesus supplies us with much sound doctrine:

³² Viret, *Letters of Comfort*, 96–97.

³³ Viret, *Epistres aus fideles*, 150–51.

First, God is glorified in our death and in all that we suffer for His name.

Second, our good Father spares us when it pleases Him.

Third, it has already been ordained what we will suffer, and what death we will die to glorify Him.

Fourth, we must be prepared and fully willing to suffer when it pleases Him.

Fifth, we must not be envious of others if He spares them while we suffer. For our sole concern must be to obey God in all things that it pleases Him to bring upon us, and leave all others in His hands. For He knows well what He wills to do.³⁴

“Leave all in his hands,” Viret counseled. Despite all appearances to the contrary, the Christian life is truly a life of utmost simplicity: fear God, honor him, and rest in his promises. This is the essence of true consolation.

Writing to a young man who was soon to suffer martyrdom for his testimony to Christ, Viret concluded his counsel and comfort by rehearsing the true biblical simplicity of resting and trusting in a wise and righteous God:

The Lord does what He wills with you, and what pleases Him. If He desires to be glorified in your life, He is quite powerful enough to preserve it despite all your enemies. If He desires to be glorified by your death, your death shall not be death, but true life. And the Lord whom you serve shall give you the power, strength, and consolation required for such a combat and battle. For you have the promise of Him who never disappoints the hope of those who wait upon Him. Therefore you need never doubt that He shall perfect the work which He has begun in you.

You must then be prepared, as true and valiant soldiers who go to war to maintain the cause of their ruler and fight valiantly for him, be it by life or by death. But you have an assurance and a consolation more than these; for whether you live or die, you live and die to God, and are assured of the victory if you persevere in this confidence and hope you have in Him, as I trust He shall give you the grace. If it please Him that you die, your death shall be a testimony to the Church of God of the steadfastness and victory of your faith and heart, which can never be vanquished. Though the body may be forced by the violence of your adversaries, they have no power over your heart, your faith, or your hope.³⁵

Whether a believer was facing the loss of goods, reputation, or even his very life, Viret's advice remained the same: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee” (Ps 55:22 KJV). With a right knowledge and understanding of God and a true trust in his lovingkindness and wisdom, every affliction is a blessing, and can be received as one, to the glory of God.

IV. Conclusion

Thus by word, prayer, and pen Viret offered consolation, instruction, and encouragement to the faithful Huguenots suffering persecution for the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 183–84.

³⁵ Jean Crespin, *Des cinq escoliers sortis de Lausanne, bruslez à Lyon* (Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1878), 147–48.

sake of their Lord. Writing to those whom he had never met, and whose very names were often unknown to him, Viret's letters express the heart of a true pastor who calls sheep to look to the true and trustworthy Shepherd of their souls.

In concluding his letter to the young Frenchman about to suffer martyrdom for his adherence to Christ, the words of Viret—words that ring true throughout every age of history—capture the heart of genuine Christian love, as well as the comfort and consolation reserved for the believer who knows that persecution is only one more way by which God is perfecting his work:

I have [written you] in order to show that I have not forgotten you, and that I wish to spare nothing for you, whatever other affairs I may have; for nothing is so urgent that I cannot easily lay it aside for you and your companions, considering the combat in which you are engaged, by which the Lord desires to strengthen you by His grace. To Him I commend you. ... [Know that] God shall assist, confirm, and preserve you by His grace, and that He shall perfect the work which He has begun in you until the day of our Lord Jesus, to whom alone be honor and glory forever. Amen.³⁶

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

A Teachable Death: Doctrine and Death in Marten Micron's Martyrology

HERMAN J. SELDERHUIS

Abstract

In the context of renewed interest in sixteenth-century martyrologies, this article considers a lesser known Dutch work, *The True Story of Hostes van der Katlyne*, by Marten Micron. After dealing with introductory questions of bibliography and authorship, the article proceeds to analyze the work. Micron recounts Hostes's life leading to his martyrdom and inserts into the narratives theological treatises showing Hostes's teaching on the human nature of Christ and the Lord's Supper. Micron uses Scripture to depict Hostes as an exemplary Christian, but the primary focus is on the doctrine Hostes taught. In contrast to Catholic martyrologies, there is no place for post-mortem merits of the Protestant saints. The article notes too that the work has both edificatory and apologetic functions.

I. Calvinist Martyrology

Although it seems a contradiction, Calvinism has produced a series of quite extensive martyrologies. The contradiction is that Calvinism, even more so than other versions of Protestantism, wanted to move away from any kind of adoration of saints or other “holy” persons. Yet, these martyrologies did

present the story of the life and death of the Christians described in such a way that it might give rise to the impression that the focus was more on the Christian than on the Christ they wished to serve and for whom they wanted to die. The intention of the authors, however, was the other way around, i.e., to let the biographies and martyrologies be witnesses of the gospel of Christ.

Over the last few decades, research has demonstrated renewed interest in sixteenth-century Protestant martyrology¹ but mainly focused on the well-known martyrologies by Jean Crespin,² John Foxe, Adriaen van Haemstede,³ and, to a lesser extent, the ones written by Antoine de la Roche⁴ and Antoine de Chandieu.⁵ One of the smaller works focusing on only one martyr is *The True Story of Hostes van der Katelyne*,⁶ written by the Dutch theologian Marten Micron. This martyrology is the topic of this article. The conclusion of my analysis is that although Micron says that Hostes's attitude is an example for other believers, his intention was not to present his martyr as an example for other believers, and even less as a saint with extraordinary spiritual qualities, but to use the story of Hostes to give encouragement to persecuted fellow-believers, and, above all, to communicate to his readership the essentials of the theology of the Reformation. He also intended to warn his readers against the unbiblical practices and convictions within Catholicism. Micron's martyrology is not exemplary, but doctrinal, and Hostes is presented not as a Calvinist saint, but as a teacher of Calvinism.

¹ John Exalto, *Gereformeerde Heiligen: De religieuze exemplartraditie in vroegmodern Nederland* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2005); Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

² Pierre Cameron, "Le martyrologe de Jean Crespin, étude de ses éditions au XVIe siècle" (PhD diss., Université de Montréal, 1995).

³ A. J. Jelsma, *Adriaan van Haemstede en zijn martelaarsboek* ('s Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1970).

⁴ Antoine de la Roche de Chandieu, *Histoire des persécutions et martyrs de l'église de Paris: depuis l'an 1557 jusques au temps du roy Charles neuvième* (Lyon: Duplain, 1563).

⁵ Sara K. Barker, *Protestantism, Poetry and Protest: The Vernacular Writings of Antoine de Chandieu, c. 1534–1591*, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 161–85.

⁶ *Een waerachtighe Historie, van Hostes (gheseyt Jooris) vander Katelyne, te Ghendt om het vrij opentlick straffen der Afgodischer Leere, ghebrandt ten grooten nutte ende vertroostinghe aller Christenen gheschreven. Waer in wt oorsake van dien, claerlick gehandelt werdt van vele stichtelicke ende nootweteghe stucken, in sonderheyt van der Misse, van het recht verstandt der worden Christi, DIT IS MIJN LICHAAM: ende van den waerachteghen ende valschen Christo: tot de ontschuldunge aller Christene, die nu dagelicxs om de rechte leere des Nachtsmaels Christi ghedoodt werden, met een vermannighe tot de overheyt. Doer Marten Microen. 1 Pet. 4 So yemandt lijdt, als een christen, die sy niet beschaemt, maer pryse God in dit stuck. Want oock tijdt is, dat het gherichte van t'huys Gods beghinne.* Quotations are from the edition of this work in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica* ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1910), 7:177–253, abbreviated as *BRN*.

II. *Bibliographical Details*

The True Story of Hostes van der Katelyne was first published by Marten Micron in 1555 and was reprinted in various forms in some other early modern martyrologies.⁷ The work mentions no date nor a place of printing, but the introduction by the author is dated June 26, 1555. The 1564 edition of Crespin's martyrology includes this story of Hostes, and from then on it is part of all subsequent editions. In 1557, Ludwig Rabus had already given a German version of the text in volume 7 of his history of martyrs.⁸ In the famous martyrology of Adriaen van Haemstede, this work of Micron was also taken up, but added to Haemstede's versions is a report on Hostes's examination⁹ and a summary of "his handwritten confession."¹⁰ Both of these are missing in Micron's edition. In 1570, Micron's martyrology was placed on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, the list of forbidden books.¹¹

So far, although it contributes to a better understanding of the function of Calvinist martyrologies, the content of this work has received no separate treatment.¹² The work itself—thus not its content—was treated elaborately in the *Bibliographie des Martyrologes Protestants Néerlandais*, the extensive bibliography of the Protestant martyrologies that were published in the Netherlands.¹³ A large part of the text was printed in a modernized Dutch version in the overview of Gent martyrs published by A. L. E. Verheyden.¹⁴

III. *The Author*

Marten Micron was born in 1523 in Gent (Flanders in present day Belgium).¹⁵

⁷ The *Bibliographie des Martyrologes* suggests 1556 as the date and Gilles vander Erven in Emden as printer of the work (*Bibliographie des Martyrologes Protestants Néerlandais: I. Monographies* [La Haye: Nijhoff, 1890], 215, abbreviated as *BMPN*).

⁸ Ludwig Rabus, *Historien der Heyligen Außervölten Gottes Zeügen, Bekemern vnd Martyrern, so in Angehender ersten Kirchen, Altes und Neüwes Testaments, zuo jeder zeyt gewesen seind : Auß H. Götlicher, vnd der Alten Lehrer Glaubwürdigen Schrifften, Zuo gemeyner Auffbauzung vnnnd Besserung der Angefochtenen Kirchen Teütscher Nation, warhafftig beschryben*, vol. 7 (Strasburg: Emmel, 1557), 234a–245a. According to Pijper, this is the German translation of a Latin summary of Micron's work. See F. Pijper, *Martelaarsboeken* ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1924), 126.

⁹ "Mijn examinacie op den Witten Donderdach."

¹⁰ "... syne belijdenisse oock van zijn eyghen hant gheschreven."

¹¹ *BMPN*, 224.

¹² Gerretsen, in his biography of Micron, gives a brief overview by mentioning the various chapters in this work. See Jan H. Gerretsen, *Micronius: Zijn leven, zijn geschriften, zijn geestesrichting* (Nijmegen: H. ten Hoet, 1895), 86–89.

¹³ *BMPN*, 215–32.

¹⁴ A. L. E. Verheyden, *Het Gentsche Martyrologium, 1530–1595* (Brugge: De Tempel, 1945), 89–97.

¹⁵ *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme* (Kampen: Kok, 1978), 2:327–30.

After having studied in Basel and Zurich, he served as pastor of the Dutch refugees in their church in London (1550–1553). After Mary Tudor ascended the English throne, Micron, together with 175 church members, fled and, after some wanderings, ended up in Emden (Ostfriesland, Germany). While there, he took a leading part in a major public dispute with Menno Simons, the leader of the Anabaptists, on the incarnation of Christ, a dispute in which Micron defended the classic doctrine of Christ's humanity. Soon after, in 1554, Micron became pastor of the Reformed church in Norden (Germany), where he died in 1559. Micron wrote many works and became influential through his writings on liturgy, church order,¹⁶ and catechism. As to his martyrology of Hostes van der Katelyne, he writes that “brothers in the faith” encouraged him to write down this story, which he was happy to do, although there were many other things on his agenda. Some scholars doubt whether the author is indeed the well-known Micron and suggest a cousin with the same name to be the man behind this martyrology.¹⁷ There are, however, no arguments for this thesis, whereas the theological topics dealt with in this work are exactly those that Marten Micron focuses on in his other works, namely the humanity of Christ, which is the issue in his discussion with Anabaptists, and the rejection of the mass in his discussion with Roman Catholic opponents.

IV. *The Work*

1. *Structure and Summary*

The book is a combination of history and theology. The first 26 pages of the work are of a historical nature and deal with Hostes's trial, his suffering, witness and death. The next 32 pages are strictly theological and contain an apology of Protestant standpoints as well as an attack on Catholic and Anabaptist positions. At the end of the work, there are some final pages where the faithful are exhorted to stand firm. It is quite clear that the historical element is instrumental for the theological focus, which means that Micron makes use of the history of the suffering and death of Hostes in order to once again—i.e., in addition to his other works—expound some theological issues. His own explanation of this combination of history and theology is that he wants to show that Hostes did die for the good cause. Thus, Micron describes how he thinks; the Bible speaks about the natures of Christ and

¹⁶ See the introduction by W. F. Dankbaar to his “Christian Ordinances,” in Marten Micron, *De Christelike Ordinancien der Nederlantscher Ghemeinten te Londen, 1554: Opnieuw uitgegeven en van een inleiding voorzien door Dr. W. F. Dankbaar*, *Kerkhistorische Studiën* 7 ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1956), 1–30.

¹⁷ *BMPN*, 218.

about the celebration and the content of the Lord's supper. He then says that this was also the position Hostes took and that it was for this theological position that he was condemned and sentenced. This leads to the conclusion that Hostes died for no other reason than that of defending biblical truth.

2. *Micron's Introduction*

In his introduction, Micron writes that the murders of the Protestant martyrs, as they are daily executed by the Roman Catholic Church, represent the most scandalous way of dying. "For not only are they under much pain being burnt with fire, and afterwards hung on the gallows as if they were robbers, but—and this is even more burdensome—they must die as the most godless enemies of Jesus Christ, as slanderers of his holy church, as desecrators of the sacrament and as despisers of every piety."¹⁸ However, from a biblical perspective, their death according to Micron is "honorable, happy, and holy." As martyrs, they are a well-pleasing offering to God, which is a reference to Philippians 4:18; and they will, according to God's promise, receive a great reward in heaven, which refers to Matthew 5:12. Here Micron brings in the reason for his writing the story of Hostes. Since through the death of martyrs the name of God is glorified and the church receives encouragement to patience, piety, and mortification of the flesh, it has been customary since apostolic times to write down the suffering and death of these witnesses of Christ. Micron quotes the famous phrase attributed to church father Cyprian, saying that the blood of the believers is the seed of the church, and concludes that writing down the story of this blood will bring forth fruit for believers of today. He expressly states that the story of Hostes is an example to be followed.¹⁹

After this introduction, Micron starts with a short biography of Hostes and informs the reader that he was born in Gent but moved as a young man to London, where he worked in the cloth industry.²⁰ In England, his boss gave him the name Joris, as his original name in English meant inn-keeper. Hostes kept this new name even after he left England. He was a catholic but became a member of the Dutch church in London and started to study the Scriptures, and he regularly attended the sermons and the prophecies, the weekly Bible study meetings where members of the congregation could ask questions to the pastors in order to get a better insight into the Scriptures.

¹⁸ *BRN*, 190.

¹⁹ "D'welck christelick exempel wy nu in dese onse laetste tyden. ... wel behoorden na te volgen: op dat der ghelooveghen bloedt, d'welck een saet der Ghemeynte Christi is, meerder vruchten over al, oock by onse nacomminghen voortbringhen mochte" (*BRN*, 191).

²⁰ "Syn hantweerck is geweest Damaskynen" (*BRN*, 193).

This—together with a life of intensive prayer—brought Hostes to “the real knowledge of God’s dear Son Jesus Christ” and helped him to move away from the Roman-Catholic superstitions to sound Christian doctrine. Here already Micron inserts in brackets what the essence of this doctrine is, namely, salvation through Christ alone. Micron adds that Hostes more than once told him personally about this conversion experience and presents Hostes as an eager Christian wanting to grow in knowledge and faith. Hostes even read the books of the Anabaptists in order to be able to discuss certain topics with them, which resulted in his starting to write against those that denied either the human or the divine nature of Christ. Micron addresses the supposition of some who doubted Hostes’s orthodoxy by including in the martyrology one of his writings on the incarnation of Christ. The twenty pages that follow include this text. So, even before Micron writes about his actual topic, i.e., the suffering and death of Hostes, he confronts the reader with a doctrinal tract defending the true human nature of Christ. After these twenty pages, Micron picks up the biography and continues to portray Hostes with qualifications directly from biblical verses indicating how a true Christian should live.

After this apparently complete inclusion of the pamphlet, Micron says that he has included this text in order to show how Hostes had, in a short time, grown into the right understanding of the pure doctrine. As to his Christian life, Micron once again describes Hostes with all the qualifications the Bible gives of a good Christian, citing biblical texts to depict Hostes as an exemplary believer. Then Micron picks up the biographical thread again and writes that after the death of King Edward and the ascension of Mary Tudor in 1553, Hostes gave up his job and fled with his pregnant wife and many other Dutch refugees, finally ending up in Norden, in northern Germany. From there, Hostes wrote a letter of comfort to Micron after he had heard that Micron was in deep sorrow caused by the persecution of one of his former parishioners. Having mentioned this letter,²¹ Micron quotes it in full to demonstrate Hostes’s “divine insight and his upright ardor.”²² Then Micron continues with the biography again and tells the reader that, after a little more than four years in Norden, Hostes had for some reason to travel to the city of Gent, in Flanders. His peers warned him that Gent was a dangerous place for Protestants, but Hostes replied—and Micron quotes Hostes—that he would be careful in what he would say but that he could

²¹ This letter was also printed by Ludwig Rabus in his martyrology, see *Historien der Heyligen Außervölten Gottes Zeügen, Bekennern vnd Martyrern*, 7:234ff.

²² *BRN*, 210.

not keep silent if he were to hear the name of God or Jesus slandered. Micron reports that the ship that Hostes took was caught in a severe storm but that Hostes had stood up to comfort and reassure all those on board, who were afraid to die in the storm. Once safe on the shores, he admonished them to be thankful and fear the Lord. It is evident that Micron here depicts Hostes as a good follower of the apostle Paul, since he acted the same way in and after a storm as the apostle had done in Malta. This confirms the status of Hostes as someone teaching and acting with authority.

3. *Hostes's Witness and Imprisonment*

Micron informs his readers that he will now report on the cause of Hostes's imprisonment and his subsequent death but that it is for him impossible to describe "everything that happened except the things that happened in public and thus are known to us for certain."²³ With this introductory remark, Micron wants to give proof of the historical reliability of his report.

To begin, Micron says that the only reason for Hostes's capture and death was "a burning love for the truth of Jesus Christ" as he stood up against idolatry and proclaimed God's Word in spite of the physical dangers that would threaten him. In fact, as Hostes arrived in Gent, he heard from many sides that there was a monk in town who confessed "the truth in Jesus Christ" and drew large crowds every time he preached. From the archives of the city of Gent it becomes clear that the name of the monk was Pieter de Backere.²⁴ Of course, Hostes was attracted by this rumor and, "on the Thursday before Easter, he went to the St. Michaels Temple and positioned himself directly in front of the pulpit so that he could hear and understand all things better."²⁵ It was a great disappointment, as the message was completely other than expected.²⁶ The named monk dealt in his sermon with the "sacrament of the table of our Lord Jesus Christ," and extensively taught that through the speaking of the five words by the priest the bread is transformed into the true body of Christ Jesus with the consequence that we should honor, eat, and pray to Christ, who is present in that bread. Hostes was shocked and saddened that the people there were so seduced, and Micron reports that

²³ *BRN*, 210.

²⁴ The full report in the *Memorieboek der stad Ghent* is: "Up den Witten Donderdach, also in Ste. Mechielskercke preectede Pieter de Backere van den Heleghen Sacraments, zo was daer eenen Hostes van de Catelyne, die hem bestondt te segghen overluydt dat al valsch was datter ghepreeckt was, waer om hy vervolcht was by den procureur general ende ghevanghen, ende den xxvij-en April daer naer op de Verelplaetse verberrent." Quoted in *BPMN*, 220–21.

²⁵ *BRN*, 211.

²⁶ "Maer siet, vant voor goudt, koper, ende voor ghesonde spyse fenijn" (*BRN*, 211).

one could see on Hostes's face what impact this all had on him.²⁷ Hostes would have loved to speak out against this preacher, but he restrained himself and let the monk finish his sermon. But just as the preacher was about to leave the pulpit, Hostes stood up, took his hat off, and raised his voice as he spoke loudly: "Hear my friend. All that you have preached is completely contrary to all of Scripture, so if you allow me I will publicly and right from the Scripture explain to the congregation that you have taught wrongly and falsely."²⁸ Not surprisingly, it was now the monk's time to be shocked. He denied him Hostes's request and wanted to leave, but Hostes followed him and once again publicly and vehemently told him that, "the bread which you say is God, is only a remembrance of the body of Christ that was broken for us."²⁹

"On April 27th of the aforementioned year, Hostes, a man of some 30 years, was sentenced to death, and in the afternoon he was publicly displayed on a scaffold (on which was built a little wooden house in which he should be burnt), and there he was whipped as an innocent sheep."³⁰ In these words, Micron introduces the reader to the short report on Hostes's death.³¹ He continues to write that Hostes wished to speak to the gathered crowd but that the public prosecutor (*procureur*) would not let him, but told the hangman to just do his job. However, Hostes took action and told the official that he would forgive him now that he was about to shed innocent blood. Apparently, this had an effect because, according to Micron, the official responded with a twofold "amen." Hostes used this moment to address the people, telling them that he still had many things to say but that the official would not allow him to do so. In Micron's report, Hostes quoted Jesus as he was

²⁷ "Door welcke ende dergelijcke worden meer, is Hostes in synen gheest, de verleydinge des aermen volcks aansiede, grootelix bedroeft ende beroert gheworden so datmen een groete veranderinge in syn anschyn gesien heeft" (*BRN*, 211).

²⁸ *BRN*, 211.

²⁹ "... d'welcke maer een ghedachtenisse is, van het ghebroken lichame Christi voor ons, etc." (*BRN*, 212). This formulation is typical of a Zwinglian view of the Lord's Supper.

³⁰ *BRN*, 213.

³¹ The official sentence from the records in the state archives is published (in Dutch) in *BNMP*, 221. In translation, the text is as follows: "For the cause that you Hostes vander Catharine has undertaken publicly in the Church of St. Michael in this city of Gent, to reprimand during the sermon on last Maundy Thursday, the preacher as he was preaching on the holy sacrament of the altar, and to say that he had spoken badly and against the truth. And that besides this fact of which you are accused, you also persist in other errors contrary to the Catholic Faith of the Holy Church, and you stick to your own opinion. It has become clear to the court that you are well of mind and can be judged according to law. Therefore, this court, declaring that you have been found guilty against the law on heresy as proclaimed by the imperial majesty, sentences you to be put to death alive and with fire and that your books be burnt, and that afterwards your body will be put outside of town on a stake. Further declaring that all your belongings, whether loan, inheritance or furniture where it may be, is confiscated by the Emperor. Pronounced April 28th, 1555."

speaking to the crowd and said: "I have much more to say to you ..." (John 16:12). Then the hangman fell on his knees to beg for forgiveness, which Micron says was a custom in Flanders.³² Hostes heard the request of the hangman, kissed him without animosity and told him that he would forgive him. Then Hostes again took his chance, fell on his knees and started to pray aloud to God asking for forgiveness of his own sins. Directly after this prayer, he addressed himself to the crowd again to encourage the people to pray for him. Then it was the official's turn to take action again as he once again called out to the hangman, "Away with him."³³ Hostes then stood up and "willingly placed himself at the stake to be strangled and burnt for the name of his Lord Jesus Christ."³⁴ But even then, Hostes managed to say a few things, warning the crowd against false prophets and ending with the words: "O dear Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,"³⁵ again using Christ's last words (Luke 23:46). Micron picks up this identification with Christ as he writes: "After this he was strangled, his body burnt and afterwards it was hung together with the criminals."³⁶ Here Micron uses phraseology from Scripture where Luke 22:36 quotes Isaiah 53:12 and says that Christ "was numbered with the transgressors." Once again, this phraseology adds to the status of Hostes as a martyr with authority in what he said and did.

Micron concludes it is certain that as Hostes stood firm in the faith, God would—according to his promises—surely have taken him up into heaven and would raise him again on the day of Christ's return.³⁷ On that day, all of Christ's enemies will see what great wrong they have done to Hostes and to other witnesses of Jesus, and they will have to confess all their evildoings.

4. Hostes's View of the Lord's Supper

Micron continues his report by stating that in his opinion many among the political authorities are not aware that they shed innocent blood. They are guilty of a sin that might bring eternal damnation, but they sinned unknowingly, as they were convinced that Hostes was justly sentenced, for two reasons. First, that he was a *Sacramentschender*, which means that he had offended the sacrament by saying that he did not believe in transubstantiation, and secondly, that he was a revolutionary, as he publicly stood up and spoke against a monk.

³² "So is de scherp Richter (na des lands wyse) voor hem neder ghevalen" (BRN, 213).

³³ "Doet wech doet wech" (BRN, 214).

³⁴ BRN, 213.

³⁵ "O hemelsche Vader in uwen handen bevele ick mynen gheest" (BRN, 214).

³⁶ BRN, 214.

³⁷ "... sonder eenich twyfel ..." (BRN, 214).

Now, although Hostes in his trials and in his disputation in prison would have sufficiently convinced all that he was not an offender of the sacrament, still Micron thinks it necessary to include a small tract Hostes wrote on the Lord's Supper in comparison to the mass. Thus—if only the Christian reader will read it impartially and with a longing for truth—he will see, “that Hostes never thought differently about the sacrament than we in our Christian congregation have always taught and held according to Holy Scripture.”³⁸

The treatise that follows is not as small as Micron suggests, for it totals thirty pages in the edition of the *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica* and consists of five chapters. The first part is “A simple explanation of the sacrament of the Last Supper of Jesus Christ; of the mass, and of the right understanding of the words of Christ.”³⁹ Here Hostes gives a more Calvinistic interpretation of the sacrament, for he defines it as a sign and a seal of God's promise⁴⁰ and rejects the idea that it is just an outward and general sign.⁴¹ Whereas earlier in Micron's work Hostes said it was just a symbol, here it is clear that Hostes regards the sacrament as more than that.⁴² This sacrament was meant by Christ to inform the conscience that he gave his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.⁴³ This was the doctrine of the church for a thousand years, but since then this false doctrine of the mass has entered the church. This makes a second chapter necessary, in which Hostes explains why Christians should stay away from the mass. He gives a list of things that are not in the mass, although according to the Bible they should be, as well as a list of superstitious and idolatrous additions that Scripture does not say anything about. The third chapter informs the reader that additional warrant for rejecting the mass is that it is presented as a good work and that believers receive grace by simply making use of the bread and wine. Chapter four continues on this track and explains “Why the words of Christ ‘This is my body’ should not be taken literally.”⁴⁴ Not only does Hostes try to convince his readers that the doctrine of transubstantiation is unscriptural but also that it is a danger for true Christian

³⁸ *BRN*, 216.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *BRN*, 218.

⁴¹ “... dat wy dit Sacrament, gheensins verachten, als oft maer een ydel, bloodt, ghemeyn teeken ende een buyckspyse ware ...” (*BRN*, 216).

⁴² This is in line with Micron's own view on the Lord's Supper, which Gerretsen calls Zwinglian, but with the conviction that it is more than a *signum*. Gerretsen, *Micronius*, 110–11.

⁴³ “... inde consciencie versekert synde dat syn lichaem eens voor onse sonden so seckerlick opgheoffert is, ended at wy doer de heylighe ghemeynschap syns lichaems, so waerachtelick dat ewewich leven hebben, als wy des Heeren broot na synen bevelen nemen ende eten” (*BRN*, 217).

⁴⁴ *BRN*, 226.

faith.⁴⁵ The final chapter in a way summarizes what so far has been said and opposes in 75 antitheses the “true Christ” and “the Christ of the mass.”⁴⁶

This “reprint” of Hostes’s treatise ends rather abruptly as Micron concludes that now everyone can read for what doctrine on the Lord’s Supper Hostes was put to death, that he was not a heretic, and that he was killed as an innocent man. This also means that those who condemned him will have to account for this on the day of God’s judgment, which is also a warning against all who persecute and put so-called heretics to death. Once again Micron takes Hostes’s martyrdom not only as a comfort and encouragement for Protestant believers but also as a serious warning to Catholic prosecutors.

5. Hostes and the Preaching Monk

In a final section, Micron deals with the other ground for Hostes’s condemnation, namely his public reproach of the preaching monk, Pieter de Backere. Micron admits that at first glance it looks as if Hostes acted unwisely and rebelliously, but if we take a closer look it becomes clear that the opposite is the case.⁴⁷ “It was not lightheartedness, even less impious rebelliousness, but far more a special working of God in him that forced him to speak for many reasons and out of godly zeal and ardor for the truth in Christ.”⁴⁸ Hostes has done just what the apostles tell us to do, and that serves to warn the church against false and idolatrous doctrines. This, according to Micron, does not mean that anyone at anytime can speak up against a preacher, for in a Christian church there is the rule that we should let all things happen in an orderly way, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14. This, however, does not apply to “dealing with the ‘Roman church’ for therein bishops, priests, and monks reign oppressively over the faith and the conscience of the congregation, against God’s Word; like all false prophets, they submit the people with sword, fire, and gallows to their horrible idolatries.”⁴⁹ Yet, however much it is lawful to speak up against these practices, Micron does use Hostes’s action to warn against spontaneous and—as he calls them—inconsiderate initiatives. Micron thus on the one hand accuses the authorities of shedding innocent blood and at the same time urges Protestant believers not to act in such a way that authorities might take believers to be

⁴⁵ “Ten anderen so is de letterlicke wtlegginghe niet alleyn teghen de nature aller sacramenten, ghelyck als vooren gheseght is, maer oock tehen den waeren Christelicken geloove” (*BRN*, 229).

⁴⁶ “Antitheses oft Teghensettinghen des waren Christi, ende des valschen Mischristi” (*BRN*, 235).

⁴⁷ “... als of Hostes niet alleene onwyselick, maer oock oproerelick hierinne ghedaen hadde: ende daeromme ten rechten soude ghedoot wesen” (*BRN*, 246).

⁴⁸ *BRN*, 246.

⁴⁹ *BRN*, 248–49.

revolutionaries. Micron appeals explicitly to authorities not to make the same mistake as Pontius Pilate did and shed innocent blood. “Therefore, O thy kings, just as King David in the second Psalm admonishes you: Be wise you judges of the earth; let yourself be taught!”⁵⁰

Micron ends his treatise with a brief summary, once again stating the innocence of Hostes, the cruel persecutions of the Roman Church, and the grief Hostes’s death caused the congregation. Yet, for Hostes himself it was a liberation, and thus we should not mourn but rejoice on his behalf. Also, he has left us a fine example of piety and Christian life.⁵¹ Therefore, Micron admonishes his readers to pray to God that he will help them to be, in life and death, steadfast “in the true apostolic faith.”⁵²

V. *Doctrinal vs. Exemplary*

The style of Micron’s account of the trial and death of Hostes is in line with the approach of many Protestant martyrologies, focusing on an individual or a small group of martyrs, and as such these martyrologies are different from traditional and Catholic martyrologies in focusing not so much on the person but more on the faith of the martyr.⁵³ This new so-called “Reformed” style still includes a description of the martyr, drawing upon the biblical imagery of Christ and the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles of the Old and New Testaments, and at the same time describing in detail the faith that caused the penalty. The result is that Micron’s story of Hostes, like other Protestant martyrologies, has more of a doctrinal than an exemplary function. The martyr should not so much be followed, let alone be revered, but should be listened to as a teacher of the church. And this fact is not so much related to a death in full assurance and godly assistance but indicates that we deal here not with a special believer, but with a situation in which the stake is turned into a pulpit at which the martyr for a last time stands against idolatry and appeals, first, to evangelical bystanders to stand fast in the evangelical faith and, second, to Catholic ones to convert to Protestantism. That is why Micron also uses the martyrology of Hostes to appeal to the political authorities. The appeal to the judgment seat of God, the elaborate description of Protestant doctrine as biblical and in line with the early

⁵⁰ *BRN*, 252.

⁵¹ “In sonderheyt om dat hy by alle christenen so costelick eenen rueck ende eerelick exempel der godsalicheyt ende des christelicken levendts achterghelaten heeft” (*BRN*, 253).

⁵² *BRN*, 253.

⁵³ Gregory speaks about, “the powerful combination of evangelical doctrines and martyr’s deaths.” See Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 142.

church, is meant to move the authorities to a confessional change or at least to a more tolerant approach towards Protestants.

These were also the motivations for the publication of other Calvinist martyrologies. They were catechetical, pastoral, but also apologetic and missionary documents. This means that the early modern Protestant martyrologies aimed at moving away from any form of hagiography. The city council of Geneva allowed Crespin to have his work printed there on the condition that he would not use the words “saint” and “martire.” And the preface to his massive overview explicitly warns that it is not the ashes or the bones but the testimonies of the martyrs that should be conserved.⁵⁴ According to John Exalto, who investigated the testimonies of the early modern Dutch martyrs, the example-function became so important that these martyrs can be called Protestant saints.⁵⁵ I think this can also be said of Hostes as an example, but only if “saint” is taken in the original sense of the word. In spite of the similarities between Catholic and Protestant saints as they are observed in the various martyrologies, the essential difference is the post-mortem function of the saint. In Protestant martyrologies, it is the message of the saint and his or her exemplary life that remains, but in Catholic martyrology the saint can—because of his or her merits—be a help in the present life and in the life hereafter. Micron’s martyrology has exemplary notions and thus was more than propaganda, even if it also functioned as a vehicle for doctrinal and apologetic material.⁵⁶ We may follow Hostes van der Katelyne as an example of faith, but, much more, we need to accept and apply his teachings in order to live and die well.

⁵⁴ Jelsma, *Haemstede*, 245.

⁵⁵ Exalto, *Gereformeerde Heiligen*, 104.

⁵⁶ Barker concludes that the martyrology that Antoine de Chandieu produced was not so much for propaganda but for offering the French Reformed examples as to how to lead a Christian life. Barker, *Protestantism, Poetry and Protest*, 162.

The Guanabara Confession of Faith

ALDERI S. MATOS

The Guanabara Confession, an early statement of the Reformed faith, was written in “Antarctic France,” a sixteenth-century French colony in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After the discovery of Brazil in 1500, Portugal was slow to protect and settle its new territory. Only in 1549 did the Portuguese crown take direct control of its South American domains by appointing the first governor general. For decades other European nations had set their eyes upon the new land and its natural resources. Among those nations was France, whose ships came continuously to the Brazilian coast in order to smuggle dyewood and other products.

In the 1550s, Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon, a well-known soldier and adventurer, conceived the idea of establishing a French colony in the bay of Guanabara, the site of the future city of Rio de Janeiro. With the support of Admiral Gaspard de Coligny and King Henry II, he led an expedition that arrived in Rio in November of 1555. Admiral Coligny was a sympathizer of the Reformation and soon would become the leader of the French Protestants. It seems that, besides the economic and political interests, one of the purposes of the new colony was to provide a haven for persecuted Protestants at a time of increasing religious intolerance in France.

Villegaignon built the small Fort Coligny on an island near the entrance of the Guanabara Bay. For some time things went well with the newly-founded Antarctic France. Then several conflicts arose between the colonists and the hot-tempered commander. Being concerned with the improvement of the moral and spiritual conditions of the colony and showing at that time some interest in the Protestant faith, he wrote letters to John Calvin and the Genevan Reformed Church requesting that evangelical colonists be

sent to Brazil. Geneva responded promptly and assembled a small group of volunteers that included two Reformed pastors, Pierre Richier and Guillaume Chartier.

A second expedition, that included the fourteen Huguenots, arrived in Rio de Janeiro in March of 1557. On the 10th of that month, the ministers led what is known as the first Protestant worship service in the Americas. The group sang Psalm 5 from the Huguenot Psalter, and pastor Richier preached on Psalm 27:4. The goal of the Calvinists was twofold: to start a church among the colonists and to evangelize the natives. Unfortunately, soon after Villegaignon started to disagree with the Huguenots regarding liturgical and other issues. Reverting to his Catholic beliefs, he criticized the simplicity of the Reformed Eucharistic rite. Finally, he expelled the small band to the continent nearby.

Among the Calvinists was a humble shoemaker by the name of Jean de Léry, who later recounted these incidents in his book *Histoire d'un Voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (*History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 1578). Besides providing a detailed account of the sad events in the French colony, this famous classic also preserved invaluable information regarding the culture, customs, and language of the native Brazilians.

Frustrated in their purposes in Brazil, the Calvinists decided to go back to their homeland. They boarded a small French ship carrying dyewood, exotic animals, and other goods. As soon as they departed, the captain warned them that the provisions on board would not be sufficient for the long trip. He asked if someone would volunteer to go back to the mainland. Five of them did. They finally made their way back to Antarctic France. Villegaignon welcomed them with sympathy, but a few days later had them arrested under the accusation of being traitors and spies. Looking for an excuse to execute them, he handed them a theological questionnaire and gave them a few hours to answer in writing.

Those simple laymen, having no books of theology, only a copy of the Scriptures, produced in the short time allotted to them a profound and eloquent affirmation of their faith, later known as the Guanabara Confession of Faith. With their statement in hand, Villegaignon found them guilty of heresy and condemned them to death. On February 9, 1558, three of the Huguenots were strangled and thrown into the ocean—Jean du Bourdel (the main author of the document), Matthieu Verneuil, and Pierre Bourdon. Another, André Lafon, the only tailor in the colony, was reluctant to reaffirm his faith and was spared. The fifth man, Jacques Le Balleur, managed to escape and preached his convictions elsewhere in Brazil.

Strictly speaking, this confession of faith is a creed, since most of its

articles begin with the phrase “we believe.” However, its extension and the variety of its themes place it among the confessions of faith which were common at the time of the Reformation. In fact, it is one of the earliest Reformed confessional documents. The Gallican Confession (1559), the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648) were all written at a later date. The introduction makes a lovely application of 1 Peter 3:15. The confession itself is made up of 17 paragraphs that deal with 6 topics.

Paragraphs 1 to 4 address the doctrine of the Trinity, in particular the person of Christ with his divine and human natures. Paragraphs 5 to 9 deal with the doctrine of the sacraments, the Lord’s Supper being discussed in four articles, and baptism in one. Paragraph 10 speaks about free will. Paragraphs 11 and 12 address the ministers’ authority to forgive sins and lay on hands. Paragraphs 13 to 15 discuss divorce, the marriage of bishops, and vows of chastity. Finally, paragraphs 16 and 17 address the intercession of the saints and prayers for the dead.

The document makes reference to the councils of the early church and to several church fathers. As such, it shows its authors’ historical knowledge. Paragraphs 1 to 4 use concepts taken from the Nicene Creed (381) and the Definition of Chalcedon (451). The expressions “the Son, eternally begotten by the Father” and “the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son” (*Filioque*) are well-known in the history of theology. Paragraph 3 refers to the “symbol,” that is, the Apostles’ Creed or some other of the ancient creeds. Paragraph 5 refers explicitly to the Council of Nicea (325).

The Brazilian confession of faith also mentions four church fathers or early church writers: Tertullian (*ca.* 160–*ca.* 220) in paragraph 5; Cyprian (*ca.* 200–258) in paragraphs 11 and 15; Ambrose (*ca.* 339–397) in paragraphs 11 and 13; and especially Augustine (354–430), mentioned three times in paragraphs 7, 11, and 17.¹ There are also references to many biblical passages, mainly in the second half of the document.

Considered as a whole, the Guanabara Confession of Faith reveals three characteristics: (a) it is a biblical confession, abounding in references and arguments taken directly from Scripture; (b) it is a Christian confession: it expresses convictions and concepts inherited from the first centuries of the church; (c) it is a Reformed confession: it contains several key emphases of Calvinism such as the centrality of Scripture, the symbolic nature of the

¹ The appeal to the church fathers is certainly related to the apologetic emphasis of the document. Since the authors wrote in response to the Roman Catholic views espoused by Villegaignon, they wisely showed how some of the greatest patristic theologians could be called upon to support the Protestant and Reformed doctrines.

sacraments, the supremacy of Christ, the importance of faith, infant baptism, and election, among others.

After five months of a dangerous voyage, the ship boarded by the Huguenots in Rio de Janeiro arrived in France at the end of May 1558. Some of those who returned months later from the Antarctic France told that they had witnessed the executions. They brought the Confession of Faith as well as the proceedings against the Calvinists. Those documents eventually were obtained by Jean de Léry, who, being interested in their preservation, handed them to the editor Jean Crespin so he could insert them “in the book of those in our day who were martyred in the defense of the gospel” (*Actes des martyrs*, 1564).

The Guanabara Confession was first translated into Portuguese in 1907, by Erasmo Braga, the young dean of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Campinas. He wrote in his introduction to the translation, “This is a Calvinist confession, the confession of our great men; it answers in particular to the heresies of Rome. It is the first confession written in the Americas, in the first church in Brazil. And it was sealed with blood.”²

Braga’s words highlight the significance of this document for the Brazilian church today. It was the first Protestant confessional statement in the history of the country. It marks the early presence of the Reformed faith in what would become one of the largest Christian nations in the world. The confession brings together some of the most meaningful emphases of the Calvinistic tradition: solid biblical content, the appeal to church history, the relevance of theological reflection, and the need to confess the faith. Additionally, it shows the Christian integrity and courage of the authors, who, writing under strong pressure and fully aware of the possibility of martyrdom, gave a bold testimony of their most treasured convictions.

FOR FURTHER READING

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² See Jean Crespin, *A tragédia da Guanabara*, trans. Domingos Ribeiro (São Paulo: Cultura Cristã, 2007), 72.

The Confession

According to the doctrine of St. Peter, the apostle, in his first epistle, all Christians must always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15); and to do this in all gentleness and kindness.³ We the undersigned, Seigneur Villegaignon, have unanimously (according to the measure of grace which our Lord has granted to us) given a reason for each point as we have been directed and commanded⁴—beginning with ...

ARTICLE 1. We believe in one God, immortal and invisible, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible as well as invisible; who is distinguished in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; who, nevertheless, are of the same substance, eternal in essence, and who are of the same will. The Father is the source and beginning of all good; the Son, eternally begotten by the Father, who, the fullness of time being achieved, made himself known to the world in the flesh, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, made under the law to redeem those who lived under the law, so that we might receive the adoption befitting sons. [We believe] in the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and from the Son, teacher of all truth, who spoke through the mouth of the prophets, and who inspired all things which have been spoken to the apostles by our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our only comforter in affliction, bestowing steadfastness and perseverance in every good thing.

We believe that it is necessary solely or particularly to worship and perfectly love, pray, and call upon the majesty of God in faith.

ARTICLE 2. Worshiping our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not separate one nature from the other, confessing that the two natures, namely the divine and the human, are inseparable in Him.

³ The text of the translation of the “Guanabara Confession” as translated by James T. Dennison Jr. is reproduced with slight modifications and additional notes from *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Century in English Translation*, Volume 2, 1552–1566, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 118–24. We are grateful to Reformation Heritage Books for granting us the permission to reproduce this text. The translation was made from the French version found in Jean Crespin, *Histoire des vrais tesmoins de la vérité de l'Évangile* (1570; repr., Liège: Centre National de Recherches d'Histoire Religieuse, 1964), 460–63. For a critical edition of the French text, see Hans Helmut Eßer, “48. La confession de foi Brésilienne de 1557 (1558),” in *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften*, 1:3, 1550–1558, ed. Heiner Faulenbach and Eberhard Busch (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007), 379–98. The Portuguese translations can be found in Domingos Ribeiro, *Origens do evangelismo brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Est. Graf. “Apollo,” 1937), 38–47, and online at http://www.monergismo.com/textos/credos/confissao_guanabara.htm.

⁴ Alderi S. Matos: It is quite evident that the authors of the confession are answering a doctrinal questionnaire that was submitted to them by the French commander.

ARTICLE 3. Concerning the Son of God and the Holy Spirit, we believe what the Word of God and the apostolic doctrine, and the Symbol [Apostles' Creed] teach us.⁵

ARTICLE 4. We believe that our Lord Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead, in a visible and human form, just as He ascended into heaven, executing that judgment in the manner which He has foretold us in St. Matthew 25; having all power to judge, given to Him by the Father, since He is a man. And when we say in our prayers that the Father will appear in judgment in the person of the Son, we understand by this that the power of the Father given to the Son will be demonstrated in open judgment; however, not that we wish to confound the persons, inasmuch as they are really distinct one from the other.

ARTICLE 5. We believe that in the holy sacrament of the Supper, with the material signs of bread and wine, faithful souls are really and actually nourished with the proper substance of our Lord Jesus, just as our bodies are nourished with food.⁶ And so we are not intending to say, nor do we believe, that the bread and the wine are transformed or transubstantiated into His body and blood, because the bread continues in its nature and substance, equally with the wine; and there is no change or alteration. However, we distinguish the aforesaid bread and wine from the other bread which is dedicated to common use; since it is a sacramental sign to us under which the truth is infallibly received.

Now this confession⁷ is made only by means of faith. And it is not fitting to imagine anything carnal, nor to prepare the teeth to eat, as St. Augustine teaches us saying, "Why do you prepare the teeth and the belly? Believe, and you have eaten it!"⁸ Thus, the sign itself does not give us the truth, nor the thing signified; rather our Lord Jesus Christ, by His power, virtue, and goodness, nourishes and maintains our souls, making them participants of His flesh and of His blood, and in all of His benefits. *Interpretation of the Words: This Is My Body.* Coming to the interpretation of the words of Jesus Christ, "This bread is My body" [Luke 22:19]. Tertullian, in his fourth book against

⁵ Matos: Besides the Apostles' Creed, the authors demonstrate their familiarity with the other creeds of the ancient church (Nicene Creed, Niceno-Constantinople Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon).

⁶ Matos: This paragraph starts the largest portion of the confession dealing with a single subject, namely, the Lord's Supper. This is due not only to the fact that this doctrine was one of the main controversies of the Reformation, but also to the fact that it reflects the difficulties that the Huguenots had with Villegaignon regarding this issue since they arrived in Brazil.

⁷ Ed. note: other versions read "communication" here.

⁸ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 25.11 (on John 6:29; PL 35:1602; ET, *NPNF*¹ 7:164).

Marcion, explains these words thus: “This is the sign and figure of my body.”⁹ St. Augustine says, “Without a doubt, the Lord made the point saying, ‘This is my body’ [Matt 26:26] when He gave only the symbol of His body.”¹⁰ As was commanded in the first canon of the Council of Nicaea, in this holy sacrament we must not imagine anything carnal, and not distract ourselves either with the bread nor with the wine (which are in themselves offered to us as signs), but to lift our spirits to heaven, to contemplate by faith the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, sitting at the right hand of God His Father.¹¹ In this respect, we could join the article concerning the ascension with many other sentences from St. Augustine, which we are omitting, fearing to be long.

ARTICLE 6. *Mixing the Water with the Wine.* We believe that if it were necessary to mix water with the wine, neither the gospels nor St. Paul himself would have omitted telling us a thing of such great consequence. And as for the ancient teachers who observed it (basing it on the blood mixed with the water which flowed from the side of Jesus Christ [John 19:34]), especially as such a practice has no foundation in the Word of God, being an event which occurred after the institution of the holy Supper; we are not able to allow it necessarily today.¹²

ARTICLE 7. We believe that there is no other consecration than that which is made by the minister when the Supper is celebrated. The aforesaid minister rehearses to the people in a known language the institution of this Supper, joined with the form prescribed to us by our Lord Jesus, admonishing the aforesaid people of the death and passion of our Lord. And St. Augustine says the same thing: the consecration is the word of faith which is preached and received in faith.¹³ Therefore it follows that the words secretly pronounced over the signs cannot be the consecration, as appears from the institution which our Lord Jesus Christ left to His apostles, addressing His words to His disciples present then, whom He commanded to take and eat.

ARTICLE 8. The holy sacrament of the Supper is not a food for the body, but for souls (because we are not to imagine anything carnal, as we have declared in the fifth article) receiving the same by faith which is not carnal.

⁹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.40 (PL 2:491; ET, *ANF* 3:418).

¹⁰ Augustine, *Against Adimantus* 12.3 (CSEL 25/1.140; ET, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, I/19, *The Manichean Debate* [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006], 192); cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.28.

¹¹ Perhaps this is a reference to the Council of Nicaea (325), canon 20 (Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1894], 434); cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.36.

¹² Matos: This is a fine example of the priority given to Scripture. The authors appeal frequently to the church fathers, but when their teaching conflicts with God’s Word, it cannot be accepted.

¹³ Cf. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 80.3 (on John 15:3 with Rom 10:10; PL 35:1840; ET, *NPNF*¹ 7:344) together with Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.4.

ARTICLE 9. We believe that baptism is a sacrament of penitence, and is like an entrance into the church of God in order to be incorporated into the body of Jesus Christ. This represents to us the remission of our sins past and future, which is completely acquired only by the death of our Lord Jesus. Moreover, the mortification of our flesh is signified to us, and washing represented by the water poured upon the child, which is a sign and seal¹⁴ of the blood of our Lord Jesus, who is the true cleansing of our souls. This institution is taught us in the Word of God, which was observed by the holy apostles, taking water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. As for exorcisms, the adjuration of Satan, consecrated oil, spittle, and salt, we reject these as traditions of men. We are content solely with the form and institution left by our Lord Jesus.

ARTICLE 10. As for free will, we believe that since the first man was created in the image of God, he had liberty and will as much to good as to evil, and only he understood the nature of free will, standing in his integrity. Now, he failed to guard this gift of God, but was deprived of it by his sin, with all those who are descended from him, so that not one of the seed of Adam has anything¹⁵ of good in him. For this reason, St. Paul says that the carnal (*sensuel*) man does not understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). And Hosea cries to the children of Israel: “Your destruction is of yourselves, O Israel!” (13:9). Now we understand this of the man who has not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God. As for the Christian man, baptized in the blood of Jesus Christ, walking in newness of life, our Lord Jesus restores a free will in him and reforms his will to all good works; not, however, in perfection because the performance of a good will is not in his power, but comes from God. As the holy apostle amply declares in the seventh chapter of Romans, “I have the desire, but in me is not found the performance” (7:18). The man predestined to eternal life, although he sins through human weakness, nevertheless cannot fall into an impenitent state. This is why St. John says that he does not sin because election remains within him [cf. 1 John 5:18].

ARTICLE 11. We believe that forgiveness of sins belongs only to the Word of God, of which, as St. Ambrose says, man is only a minister. If he condemns or absolves, it is not of him, but the Word of God which he declares.¹⁶ In this regard, St. Augustine says that it is not by the merit of men that sins are

¹⁴ Lit., “a sign and mark.”

¹⁵ Lit., “any spark [*esteincelle*].”

¹⁶ Ambrose, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* 10.180 (CSEL 32/4:526; ET, Saint Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson, 2nd ed. [Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2003], 452); cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.11.1.

forgiven, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. For the Lord has said to His apostles, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22); later He added, “If you forgive anyone his sins, they shall be forgiven” (v. 23).¹⁷ Cyprian said that the servant is not able to remit the offense committed against his master.¹⁸

ARTICLE 12. As for the laying on of hands, it served in its time, but there is no need to retain it now. For by the laying on of hands, one is not able to confer the Holy Spirit because it is by God alone. Regarding ecclesiastical order, we believe that which St. Paul wrote in the first epistle to Timothy and elsewhere.

ARTICLE 13. The separation of a man and a woman lawfully united by marriage may not occur except in the case of fornication, as our Lord Jesus taught us (Matt 5:32; 19:9). Not only may separation take place for the aforesaid fornication, but also the case being examined before the magistrate, should the innocent party not be able to contain himself, he may remarry; as St. Ambrose says in his commentary on chapter 7 of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.¹⁹ The magistrate, however, must proceed after mature consideration.

ARTICLE 14. St. Paul, teaching that a bishop ought to be the husband only of one wife (1 Tim 3:2), does not propose by this that after the death of his first wife, he is not allowed to remarry. Rather, the apostle disapproves of bigamy, to which men of that time were greatly inclined. However, we leave this to the judgment of those more versed in the Holy Scriptures. Our faith is not founded on this point.²⁰

ARTICLE 15. It is not permitted to make vows to God, save in what He permits. Thus, monastic vows tend only to corrupt the true service of God. It is also very reckless and presumptuous for a man to make vows which go beyond his vocation, in view of the fact that Holy Scripture teaches us that continence is a special gift (Matt 19 and 1 Cor 7). It follows that those who impose this necessity, renouncing marriage all their life, cannot be excused of extreme recklessness and presumptuous effrontery. By this means, they tempt God, since the aforesaid gift of continence is only temporary in some; and he who has it for a time may not have it for the rest of his life.

¹⁷ Cf. Augustine, “Sermon 49” (on Luke 7:39ff.; PL 38:600; ET, *NPNF*¹ 6:419) and Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 121.4 (on John 20:22–23; PL 35:1958; ET, *NPNF*¹ 7:438).

¹⁸ Cyprian, *The Lapsed* 17 (CSEL 3/1:249; ET, *ANF* 5:442).

¹⁹ Cf. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* 8.2, 8 (on Luke 16:18 with 1 Cor 7:15; CSEL 32/4:392, 395; ET, Ambrose, *Exposition*, trans. Tomkinson, 335, 337); or Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on the Pauline Epistles*, on 1 Cor 7:15 (PL 17:219; ET, Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians*, trans. Gerald L. Bray, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 151–52.

²⁰ Matos: This is quite a balanced statement. The authors mention the two basic interpretations of the passage, state their preference, but remain open to new light on the subject.

Thus, monks, priests, and other such persons, who obligate themselves and promise to live in chastity, make a false vow before God, because it is not within them to fulfill what they have promised. St. Cyprian, in the eleventh epistle, says: “If virgins dedicate themselves from a good heart to Christ, they persevere in chastity without sham; if they are thus strong and constant, they await the reward prepared for their virginity; if they do not care for or cannot persevere in their vows, it is better that they marry rather than to be hurled into the flames of lasciviousness through their pleasures and delights.”²¹ As for the passage of the apostle Paul, it is true that widows, chosen to serve the church, should agree not to remarry, as long as they are subject to the aforesaid responsibility. Not that in this, one repute them or attributes to them some kind of sanctity; it is simply that they could not carry out their assignments well, being married. And when they wish to marry, they should renounce the vocation to which God has called them, so much that they ought to accomplish that which they have promised in the church, in order not to violate the promise made at baptism, in which is contained this point—that everyone should serve God in the vocation to which he has been called [cf. 1 Cor 7:20]. Widows, then, do not take a vow of continence except in so far as marriage is recognized to be not suitable to the office to which they are presenting themselves, and have no other consideration than to fulfill it. They are not to be so far constrained as not to be permitted to marry rather than to burn and to fall into infamy and dishonesty. Moreover, in order to avoid such an unseemly thing, the apostle St. Paul, in the chapter already referred to, prescribes that such persons should not assume such vows unless first they are at least sixty years of age, which is an age, generally speaking, beyond unchastity. He adds that those elected should have been married only once so that they would already have demonstrated their chastity [cf. 1 Tim 5:9].

ARTICLE 16. We believe²² that Jesus Christ is our only mediator, intercessor, and advocate, through whom we have access to the Father, and that standing justified in His blood, we will be delivered from death, and by whom standing reconciled, we will obtain full victory over death. As for the saints who have departed, we say that they desire our salvation and the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, and that the number of the elect be completed. However, we do not need to address ourselves to them through intercession in order to obtain certain things; because this would be contravening the commandment of God. We who are alive, who are united as

²¹ Cyprian, *Epistles* 4.2 (CSEL 3/2:474; ET, *ANF* 5:357); cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.13.17.

²² Matos: Technically, this confession is also a creed, since ten of the seventeen articles start with the phrase “we believe.”

members of one body, ought to pray one for the other, as we are taught in many passages of Holy Scripture.

ARTICLE 17. As for the dead, St. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4, prohibits us from sorrowing for them because this is the behavior of pagans who are without any hope of the resurrection. The holy apostle does not command us or teach us to pray for them—which he would not have forgotten, if it were expedient. St. Augustine, on Psalm 48, declares that the spirits of the dead only receive what they have done during their life; that since they have done nothing while they were alive, they receive nothing when they are dead.²³

This is the answer we give to the articles you sent to us, according to the measure and portion of faith that God has given to us, and we pray that it may please Him that our faith not die until it produce fruits worthy of His children, such that give us an increase and perseverance in that faith. We give thanks and praise to Him forever. And so may it be.

Jean du Bourdel
Matthieu Verneuil
Pierre Bourdon
André La Fon

²³ Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 48.15 (on Psalm 49:11 MT; PL 36:554; ET, *NPNF*¹ 8:173).

The Captivity Epistles of the English Reformation

PHILIP E. HUGHES

Abstract

“The Captivity Epistles of the English Reformation” was originally part of Philip E. Hughes’s book, *Theology of the English Reformers*, a selection of texts with commentaries by sixteenth-century English Reformers. “The Captivity Epistles” concludes a chapter on sanctification, thus placing the subject of martyrdom in the context of the Christian life. This section documents, through letters and narratives, the last days and martyrdoms of John Hooper, John Bradford, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, and Thomas Cranmer. United with their Savior and in communion with other saints, these Reformers are examples of the grace of God exhibiting fruits such as joy, perseverance, trust, a sense of honor of suffering for Christ, and love for their persecutors.

No documents of the English Reformation are more moving, or more replete with the spirit of true Christian sanctity, than are the letters which were written by Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer, and their colleagues while they were in prison awaiting the time of their martyrdom. What more searching test of a Christian man’s sanctification could there be than to be called upon, as these and many others were at this time, to endure the squalor and solitude of prolonged imprisonment, with the expectation of a

This text is taken with slight modifications from Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 103–18; reprinted by permission of the publisher; all rights reserved.

cruel death at the end, because of the evangelical faith which he professes? The letters of these men show them to have been more than conquerors through Jesus Christ their Lord; for they are distinguished by a spirit not merely of equanimity but also of joy and wonder that their Master should have honoured them by permitting them to suffer in this way for His cause. There is no note of regret, no plea for deliverance. Here, then, is their testimony, freely given under these harsh circumstances.

“We are still involved in the greatest dangers, as we have been for almost the last eighteen months,” Bishop Hooper writes to the Swiss Reformer Henry Bullinger on December 11, 1554.

The enemies of the gospel are every day giving us more and more annoyance; we are imprisoned apart from each other, and treated with every degree of ignominy. They are daily threatening us with death, which we are quite indifferent about; in Christ Jesus we boldly despise the sword and the flames. We know in whom we have believed, and we are sure that we shall lay down our lives in a good cause. Meanwhile aid us with your prayers, that He who hath begun a good work in us will perform it even unto the end [Phil 1:6]. We are the Lord’s; let Him do what seemeth good in His eyes ... I have a most faithful guardian and defender of my salvation in our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, to whom I have wholly committed myself. To His faithfulness and protection I commend myself: if He shall prolong my days, may He cause it to be for the glory of His name; but if He wills that my short and evil life should be ended, I can say with equal complacency, His will be done!¹

To his wife, Anne Hooper, he writes (October 13, 1553) that, seeing “we live for this life amongst so many and great perils and dangers, we must be well assured by God’s Word how to bear them, and how patiently to take them, as they be sent to us from God,” and that “all troubles and adversity that chance to such as be of God by the will of the heavenly Father can be none other but gain and advantage.” In accordance with the apostolic injunction to the Colossians, as being risen with Christ, to “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1), he affirms that

the Christian man’s faith must be always upon the resurrection of Christ, when he is in trouble; and in that glorious resurrection he shall not only see continual and perpetual joy and consolation, but also the victory and triumph over all persecution, trouble, sin, death, hell, the devil, and all other persecutors and tyrants of Christ and of Christ’s people, the tears and weepings of the faithful dried up, their wounds healed, their bodies made immortal in joy, their souls for ever praising the Lord, and conjunction and society everlasting with the blessed company of God’s elect in perpetual joy.²

¹ John Hooper, *Original Letters relative to the English Reformation*, trans. and ed. Hastings Robinson, Parker Society 37 (1846; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 1:105–6.

² John Hooper, *Later Writings of Bishop Hooper*, Parker Society 27 (1852; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 580–81.

In another letter (undated) “to certain godly persons, professors, and lovers of the truth,” Hooper refers to the act of parliament, passed in November 1553, whereby the Reformed religion was outlawed, and tenderly advises them how they should conduct themselves now that “the wicked idol the mass is stablished again by law.” “We must give God thanks,” he says,

for that truth He hath opened in the time of His blessed servant King Edward the Sixth, and pray unto Him that we deny it not, nor dishonour it with idolatry, but that we may have strength and patience rather to die ten times than to deny Him once. Blessed shall we be if ever God make us worthy of that honour to shed our blood for His name’s sake ... Let us pray to our heavenly Father that we may know and love His blessed will and the glorious joy prepared for us in time to come, and that we may know and hate all things contrary to His blessed will and also the pain prepared for the wicked men in the world to come.³

On June 14, 1554, in a similarly addressed letter, he writes:

I do not care what extremity this world shall work or devise, praying you in the bowels of Him that shed His precious blood for you, to remember and follow the knowledge ye have learned of His truth. Be not ashamed nor afraid to follow Him; beware of this sentence, that it take no place in you: “No man (saith Christ) that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh backward is meet for the kingdom of God.”⁴ ... Seeing the price of truth in religion hath been always the displeasure and persecution of the world, let us bear it, and Christ will recompense the charges abundantly. It is no loss to lack the love of the world and to find the love of God, nor no harm to suffer the loss of worldly things and find eternal life. If man hate and God love, man kill the body [cf. Matt 10:28] and God bring both body and soul to eternal life, the exchange is good and profitable. For the love of God use singleness towards Him. Beware of this foolish and deceitful collusion, to think a man may serve God in spirit, secretly to his conscience, although outwardly with his body and bodily presence he cleave, for civil order, to such rites and ceremonies as now be used contrary to God and His Word.⁵

True to his Master’s example and instruction, Hooper does not neglect to pray for those who persecute and despitefully use him [cf. Matt 5:44]—who, in his own words, written in a letter dated September 2, 1554 to friends of his in London, “have taken all worldly goods and lands from me and spoiled me of all that I had, have imprisoned my body, and appointed not one-halfpenny to feed and relieve me withal. But I do forgive them,” he continues,

and pray for them daily in my poor prayer unto God, and from my heart I wish their salvation, and quietly and patiently bear their injuries, wishing no farther extremity to be

³ Hooper, *Later Writings*, 589.

⁴ Luke 9:62.

⁵ Hooper, *Later Writings*, 596.

used towards us. Yet, if it seem contrary best unto our heavenly Father, I have made my reckoning, and fully resolve myself to suffer the uttermost that they are able to do against me, yea, death itself, by the aid of Christ Jesus, who died the most vile death of the cross for us wretches and miserable sinners. But of this I am assured, that the wicked world, with all its force and power, shall not touch one of the hairs of our heads without leave and licence of our heavenly Father [cf. Matt 10:30], whose will be done in all things. If He will life, life be it; if He will death, death be it. Only we pray that our wills may be subject unto His will ... Dearly beloved, if we be contented to obey God's will, and for His commandment's sake to surrender our goods and ourselves to be at His pleasure, it maketh no matter whether we keep goods and life, or lose them. Nothing can hurt us that is taken from us for God's cause, and nothing can at length do us good that is preferred contrary unto God's commandment.⁶

On January 21, 1555, less than three weeks before his martyrdom, Hooper wrote a last letter to his friends, from which we take the following:

Now is the time of trial, to see whether we fear more God or man. It was an easy thing to hold with Christ while the prince and world held with Him: but now the world hateth Him, is the true trial who be His. Wherefore in the name, and in the virtue, strength, and power of His Holy Spirit, prepare yourselves in any case to adversity and constancy. Let us not run away when it is most time to fight ... Imprisonment is painful: but yet liberty upon evil conditions is more painful. The prisons stink; but yet not so much as sweet houses where the fear and true honour of God lacketh. I must be alone and solitary: it is better so to be, and have God with me, than to be in company with the wicked. Loss of goods is great; but loss of God's grace and favour is greater ... It is better to make answer before the pomp and pride of wicked men than to stand naked in the sight of all heaven and earth before the just God at the latter day. I shall die then by the hands of the cruel man: he is blessed that loseth his life full of mortal miseries and findeth the life full of eternal joys. It is a grief to depart from goods and friends; but yet not so much as to depart from grace and heaven itself. Wherefore there is neither felicity nor adversity of this world that can appear to be great, if it be weighed with the joys or pains in the world to come. I can do no more but pray for you; do the same for me for God's sake. For my part (I thank the heavenly Father) I have made my accounts, and appointed myself unto the will of the heavenly Father: as He will, so I will, by His grace.⁷

On February 9, having been taken from his prison in London, John Hooper was burnt at the stake in the cathedral city of Gloucester, where he had formerly been bishop.

On July 1, 1555 John Bradford was burned at Smithfield after a long period of imprisonment in the Tower of London. During the previous year he had sent from his cell a letter "to certain godly men" which concluded with the following sentiments:

O that we considered often and indeed what we have professed in baptism! Then the cross and we should be well acquainted together, for we are "baptized into Christ's

⁶ Hooper, *Later Writings*, 598.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 618–19.

death”⁸ ... O that we considered what we be, where we be, whither we are going, who calleth us, how He calleth us, to what felicity He calleth us, whereby He calleth us! ... O Lord God, “open Thou our eyes” that we may see the hope whereunto Thou hast called us. Give us eyes of seeing, ears of hearing, and hearts of understanding ... O dear Father, kindle in us an earnest desire to be with Thee in soul and body, to praise Thy name for ever, with all Thy saints, in Thy eternal glory. Amen.⁹

“Away with dainty niceness!” he says in his *Exhortation to the Brethren in England*, dated February 11, 1555.

Will ye think the Father of heaven will deal more gently with you in this age than He hath done with others, His dearest friends in other ages? What way, yea, what storms and tempests, what troubles and disquietness found Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and good Joseph! Which of these had so fair a life and restful times as we have had? Moses, Aaron, Samuel, David the king and all the good kings, priests, prophets in the Old Testament, at one time or other, if not throughout their life, did feel a thousand parts more misery than we have felt hitherto. As for the New Testament, Lord God! how great was the affliction of Mary, of Joseph, of Zacharias, of Elizabeth, of John the Baptist, of all the apostles and evangelists, yea, of Jesus Christ our Lord, the dear Son and darling of God! And, since the time of the apostles, how many and great are the number of martyrs, confessors, and such as have suffered the shedding of their blood in this life, rather than they would be stayed in their journey, or lodge in any of Satan’s inns, lest the storms or winds which fell in their travellings might have touched them! And, dearly beloved, let us think what we are, and how far unmeet to be matched with these; with whom yet we look to be placed in heaven ... Ye shall see in us, by God’s grace, that we preached no lies nor tales of tubs [that is, fairy tales] but even the very true Word of God, for the confirmation whereof we, by God’s grace and the help of your prayers, will willingly and joyfully give our blood to be shed, as already we have given our livings, goods, friends, and natural country: for now be we certain that we be in the highway to heaven’s bliss ... This wind will blow God’s children forwards and the devil’s darlings backward. Therefore like God’s children, let us go on forward apace: the wind is in our backs; hoist up the sails; “lift up your hearts and hands unto God”¹⁰ in prayer, and keep your anchor of faith to cast out in time of trouble on the rock of God’s Word and mercy in Christ by the cable of God’s verity ... Affliction, persecution, and trouble are no strange thing to God’s children, and therefore it should not dismay, discourage, or discomfort us; for it is none other thing than all God’s dear friends have tasted in their journey to heaven-wards.¹¹

Three days earlier Bradford had written to Archbishop Cranmer and Bishops Ridley and Latimer, with whom a year previously he had shared the same cell in the Tower of London for some weeks, and who were now imprisoned in Oxford:

⁸ Rom 6:3.

⁹ John Bradford, *The Writings of John Bradford*, Parker Society 5–6 (1848, 1853; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 1:384.

¹⁰ Lam 3:41.

¹¹ Bradford, *Writings*, 1:417–18.

Our dear brother Rogers hath broken the ice valiantly, and as this day, I think, or tomorrow at the uttermost, hearty Hooper, sincere Saunders, and trusty Taylor end their course and receive their crown. The next am I, who hourly look for the porter to open me the gates after them, to enter into the desired rest. God forgive me mine unthankfulness for this exceeding great mercy, that amongst so many thousands it pleaseth His mercy to choose me to be one in whom He will suffer ... O what am I, Lord, that Thou shouldest thus magnify me, so vile a man and miserable as always I have been! Is this Thy wont, to send for such a wretch and a hypocrite as I have been in a fiery chariot, as Thou didst for Elijah? ... For my farewell, therefore, I write and send this unto you, trusting shortly to see you where we shall never be separated.¹²

On June 24, 1555, one week before his martyrdom, John Bradford writes to his mother:

I die not, my good mother, as a thief, a murderer, an adulterer, etc., but I die as a witness of Christ, His gospel and verity [cf. 1 Pet 4:15–16], which hitherto I have confessed, I thank God as well by preaching as by imprisonment; and now, even presently, I shall most willingly confirm the same by fire. I acknowledge that God most justly might take me hence simply for my sins, which are many, great, and grievous: but the Lord, for His mercy in Christ, hath pardoned them all, I hope. But now, dear mother, He taketh me hence by this death, as a confessor and witness that the religion taught by Christ Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles, is God's truth. ... Therefore, my good and most dear mother, give thanks for me to God that He hath made the fruit of your womb to be a witness of His glory ... I confess to the whole world I die and depart this life in hope of a much better, which I look for at the hands of God my Father, through the merits of His dear Son Jesus Christ. Thus, my dear mother, I take my last farewell of you in this life, beseeching the almighty and eternal Father, by Christ, to grant us to meet in the life to come, where we shall give Him continual thanks and praise, for ever and ever.¹³

In these and the other letters of the martyrs there is no suggestion of self-pity or pessimism. Rather, we find that the sanctifying Spirit has brought them to the experience of that “good cheer” which accords with Christ's encouragement to His disciples: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!” (John 16:33). It is this spirit of Christian joy despite affliction that shines so clearly through these letters from prison. “Dearly beloved,” says Bradford in his *Exhortation to the Brethren in England*,

although to lose life and goods, or friends, for God's Gospel sake, it seem a bitter and sour thing; yet in that our “Physician” who cannot lie (Jesus Christ I mean) doth tell us that it is very wholesome, howsoever it be untoothsome, let us with good cheer take the cup at His hand and drink it merrily. If the cup seem unpleasant and the drink too bitter, let us put some sugar therein, even a piece of that which Moses cast into the bitter water,

¹² Bradford, *Writings*, 2:190–91.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2:249–51.

and made the same pleasant:¹⁴ I mean an ounce, yea, a dram of Christ's afflictions and cross which He suffered for us. If we call this to mind, and cast of them into our cup (considering what He was, what He suffered, of whom, for whom, to what end, and what came thereof) surely we cannot loathe our medicine, but wink, and drink it lustily.¹⁵

And this good cheer survived the final and most searching test of all. On the afternoon of Sunday June 30, the keeper's wife suddenly burst in, breathless and much distressed, and said (the scene is as recounted by Foxe):

"O Master Bradford, I come to bring you heavy news." "What is that?" said he. "Marry," quoth she, "tomorrow you must be burned, and your chain is now ready, and soon you must go to Newgate." With that Master Bradford put off his cap, and lifting up his eyes to heaven said: "I thank God for it; for I have looked for the same a long time, and therefore it cometh not now to me suddenly, but as a thing waited for every day and hour: the Lord make me worthy thereof"; and so, thanking her for her gentleness, departed up into his chamber.

The next day as the flames were kindled around him in the presence of a great concourse of onlookers he turned to the young apprentice, John Leaf, who was suffering with him and exclaimed: "Be of good comfort, brother; for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night!"¹⁶

Bradford had been chaplain to Ridley when the latter was Bishop of London, and when Ridley received the news of his sentence, he wrote to him as follows:

Oh, dear brother, seeing the time is now come when it pleaseth the heavenly Father, for Christ our Saviour His sake, to call upon you and to bid you come, happy are you that ever you were born, thus to be awake at the Lord's calling ... Where the martyrs for Christ's sake shed their blood and lost their lives, oh what wondrous things hath Christ afterward wrought to His glory and confirmation of their doctrine! If it be not the place that sanctified the man, but the holy man doth by Christ sanctify the place, brother Bradford, then happy and holy shall be that place wherein thou shalt suffer, and shall be with thy ashes in Christ's cause sprinkled over withal. All thy country may rejoice of thee that ever it brought forth such a one, who would render his life again in His cause of whom he had received it ... We do look now every day when we shall be called on, blessed be God! I ween I am the weakest many ways of our company; and yet I thank our Lord God and heavenly Father by Christ that since I heard of our dear brother Rogers' departing and stout confession of Christ and His truth even unto the death, my heart (blessed be God!) so rejoiced of it that since that time, I say, I never felt any lumpish heaviness in my heart, as I grant I have felt sometimes before. O good brother, blessed be God in thee, and blessed be the time that ever I knew thee! Farewell, farewell!¹⁷

¹⁴ Exod 15:23–25a.

¹⁵ Bradford, *Writings*, 1:431.

¹⁶ See *Ibid.*, 2:xxxix, xlii.

¹⁷ Nicholas Ridley, *The Works of Nicholas Ridley*, Parker Society 42 (1841; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 377–78.

Another letter written from his cell in the Bocardo, Oxford, was addressed by Ridley to “the brethren remaining in captivity of the flesh and dispersed abroad in sundry prisons, but knit together in unity of spirit and holy religion.” (The degree to which, as revealed in these letters composed by men appointed to die, the thoughts and concerns of the Reformers were turned, not inwards upon themselves and their own afflictions, but outwards to others, whether individuals or groups or the nation as a whole, is quite remarkable.) With complete conviction he affirms the rightness of their cause before God:

We never had a better or a more just cause either to contemn our life or shed our blood: we cannot take in hand the defence of a more certain, clear, and manifest truth. For it is not any ceremony for which we contend; but it toucheth the very substance of our whole religion, yea, even Christ Himself ... If any therefore would force upon us any other God besides Him whom Paul and the apostles have taught, let us not hear him, but let us fly from him and hold him accursed. Brethren, ye are not ignorant of the deep and profound subtleties of Satan; for he will not cease to rage about you, seeking by all means possible whom he may devour: but play ye the men [cf. Mart. Pol. 9.1], and be of good comfort in the Lord. And albeit your enemies and the adversaries of the truth, armed with all worldly force and power that may be, do set upon you, yet be not ye faint-hearted, and shrink not therefor: but trust unto your captain Christ, trust unto the Spirit of truth, and trust to the truth of your cause, which, as it may by the malice of Satan be darkened, so can it never be clean put out. For we have (high praise be given to God therefor!) most plainly, evidently, and clearly on our side all the prophets, all the apostles, and undoubtedly all the ancient ecclesiastical writers who have written until of late years past. Let us be hearty and of good courage therefore, and thoroughly comfort ourselves in the Lord.

He exhorts them, too, to think kindly and pray for the salvation of their persecutors:

Good brethren, though they rage never so fiercely against us, yet let us not wish evil unto them again; knowing that, while for Christ’s cause they vex and persecute us, they are like madmen, most outrageous and cruel against themselves, heaping hot burning coals upon their own heads: but rather let us wish well unto them, “knowing that we are thereunto called in Christ Jesus, that we should be heirs of the blessing.”¹⁸ Let us pray therefore unto God that He would drive out of their hearts this darkness of errors and make the light of His truth to shine unto them, that they, acknowledging their blindness, may with all humble repentance be converted unto the Lord, and together with us confess Him to be the only true God, who is the Father of lights,¹⁹ and His only Son Jesus Christ, worshipping Him in spirit and verity.²⁰

¹⁸ 1 Pet 3:9.

¹⁹ Jas 1:17.

²⁰ Ridley, *Works*, 342, 344–45.

Ridley's call came on October 16 of that same year, 1555, at Oxford, outside Balliol College. A little while before he wrote a letter of last farewell "to all his true and faithful friends in God." He spoke to them "as a man minding to take a far journey." It is a letter, too, of farewell to his countrymen, to his Church of England, to Cambridge, his university where he had studied and taught, to Kent and London where he had ministered as pastor and bishop, and to the peers of the realm, amongst whom he had sat in the House of Lords. "I warn you, all my well beloved kinsfolk and countrymen," he writes,

that ye be not amazed or astonished at the kind of my departure or dissolution: for I assure you that I think it most honour that ever I was called unto in all my life; and therefore I thank my Lord God heartily for it, that it hath pleased Him to call me of His great mercy unto this high honour, to suffer death willingly for His sake and in His cause; unto the which honour He called the holy prophets, and His dearly beloved apostles, and His blessed chosen martyrs. For know ye that I doubt no more, but that the causes wherefor I am put to death are God's causes and the causes of the truth, than I doubt that the gospel which John wrote is the gospel of Christ or that Paul's epistles are the very Word of God. And to have a heart willing to abide and stand in God's cause and in Christ's quarrel even unto death, I assure thee (O man) it is an inestimable and honourable gift of God, given only to the true elect and dearly beloved children of God.

Here again the victorious note of "good cheer" is dominant:

All ye that be my true lovers and friends, rejoice and rejoice with me again, and render with me hearty thanks to God our heavenly Father that for His Son's sake, my Saviour and Redeemer Christ, He hath vouchsafed to call me, being else without His gracious goodness in myself but a sinful and a vile wretch, to call me (I say) unto this high dignity of His true prophets, of His faithful apostles, and of His holy, elect, and chosen martyrs: that is, to die, and to spend this temporal life in the defence and maintenance of His eternal and everlasting truth.²¹

It is, Ridley emphasizes, for their comfort that he is writing, lest the manner of his death should be a cause of confusion and sorrow to them; "Whereas," he urges them,

ye have rather cause to rejoice (if ye love me indeed) for that it hath pleased God to call me to a greater honour and dignity than ever I did enjoy before, either in Rochester or in the see of London, or ever should have had in the see of Durham, whereunto I was last of all elected and named. Yea, I count it greater honour before God indeed to die in His cause (whereof I nothing doubt) than is any earthly or temporal promotion or honour that can be given to a man in this world ... I trust in my Lord God, the God of mercies and the Father of all comfort, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that He who hath put this mind, will, and affection by His Holy Spirit in my heart, to stand against the face of the enemy in this cause, and to choose rather the loss of all my worldly substance, yea, and

²¹ Ridley, *Works*, 395, 397–98.

of my life too, than to deny His known truth, that He will comfort me, aid me, and strengthen me evermore even unto the end, and to the yielding up of my spirit and soul into His holy hands.²²

On the night prior to his martyrdom, Ridley announced to Mistress Irish, the wife of his keeper, and the others who were taking supper with them, that on the next day he was to be married, and “so showered himself to be as merry as ever he was at any time before.” When Mistress Irish wept at the prospect of his painful death he gently but cheerfully comforted her with the assurance that, “though my breakfast be somewhat sharp and painful, yet I am sure my supper shall be more pleasant and sweet”; and when his brother offered to watch all night with him he replied: “No, no, that you shall not; for I mind (God willing) to go to bed and to sleep as quietly to-night as ever I did in my life.”²³

The following day, bound back to back with Ridley at the same stake was his fellow-bishop, Hugh Latimer. Latimer, too, had endured a prolonged imprisonment prior to his martyrdom, and it was during this period that he sent a letter to an unnamed fellow-Christian who, like him, was a captive for the profession of the gospel and whom he wished to encourage to persevere in steadfastness. “The wise men of the world can find shifts to avoid the cross,” he writes,

and the unstable in faith can set themselves to rest with the world; but the simple servant of Christ doth look for no other but oppression in the world. And then is it their most glory, when they be under the cross of their Master Christ; which He did bear, not only for our redemption, but also for an example to us, that we should follow His steps in suffering, that we might be partakers of His glorious resurrection [cf. 1 Pet 2:21, 24] ... We are now more near to God than ever we were, yea, we are at the gate of heaven; and we are a joyful spectacle become, in this our captivity, to God, to the angels, and to all His saints, who look that we should end our course with glory. We have found the precious stone of the Gospel, for the which we ought to sell all that we have in the world [cf. Matt 13:44–45]. And shall we exchange or lay to gage the precious treasure which we have in our hands for a few days to lament in the world, contrary to our vocation? God forbid it! But let us, as Christ willeth us in St. Luke, “look up, and lift up our heads, for our redemption is at hand”²⁴ ... Embrace Christ’s cross, and Christ shall embrace you.²⁵

The last of Latimer’s letters that we have was written from prison in Oxford on May 15, 1555 “to all the unfeigned lovers of God’s truth.” It is a superb manifesto of Christian constancy and joy under persecution which

²² Ridley, *Works*, 405–6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 292–93.

²⁴ Luke 21:28.

²⁵ Hugh Latimer, *The Works of Hugh Latimer*, Parker Society 33–34 (1844, 1845; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 2:429–30, 433–34.

deserves to be placed among the noblest documents of the literature of our profession. This venerable white-bearded saint, whose years are now three score and ten, is as bold and true-hearted in captivity as he ever was during the time of his liberty. Silenced as a preacher, he now puts pen to paper: “Brethren,” he writes,

the time is come when the Lord’s ground will be known: I mean, it will now appear who have received God’s Word in their hearts indeed, to the taking of root therein. For such will not shrink for a little heat or sun-burning weather, but stoutly stand and grow ... I pray you, tell me, if any from the beginning, yea, the best of God’s friends, have found any fairer way or weather to the place whither we are going (I mean to heaven) than we now find and are like to find.

As Bradford had done just over three months previously,²⁶ Latimer draws attention to the afflictions and sufferings which God’s servants throughout the Old and New Testaments experienced: “See whether any of them all found any other way unto the city whereunto we travel than by many tribulations,” he challenges. “Besides this,” he continues,

if you should call to remembrance the primitive church (Lord God!) we should see many that have given cheerfully their bodies to most grievous torments rather than they would be stopped in their journey ... But if none of these were, if you had no company to go with you, yet have you me, your poorest brother and bondman in the Lord, with many other, I trust in God. But if ye had none of the fathers, patriarchs, good kings, prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, holy saints, and children of God, who in their journey to heaven found what you are like to find (if you go on forwards, as I trust you will), yet have you your general captain and master, Christ Jesus, the dear darling and only-begotten and beloved Son of God, in whom was all the Father’s joy and delectation; ye have Him to go before you: no fairer was His way than ours, but much worse and fouler, towards His city of the heavenly Jerusalem. Let us remember what manner of way Christ found: begin at His birth, and go forth until ye come at His burial, and you shall find that every step of His journey was a thousand times worse than yours is. For He had laid upon Him at one time the devil, death, and sin; and with one sacrifice, never again to be done, He overcame them all ... Let us therefore follow Him: for thus did He that we should not be faint-hearted; for we may be most sure that “if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him”²⁷ ... Be therefore partakers of the afflictions of Christ, as God shall make you able to bear; and think it no small grace of God to suffer persecution for God’s truth’s sake ... And as the fire hurteth not the gold, but maketh it finer, so shall ye be more pure in suffering with Christ. The flail or the wind hurteth not the wheat, but cleanseth it from the chaff. And ye, dearly beloved, are God’s wheat: fear not the fanning wind, fear not the millstone; for all these things make you the meter for God’s tooth ... Dearly beloved, cast yourselves wholly upon the Lord, with whom all the hairs of your head be numbered, so that not one of them shall perish without His knowledge ... No man shall once touch you without His knowledge; and when they touch you it is for your profit: God will work

²⁶ See above.

²⁷ 2Tim 2:12.

thereby to make you like unto Christ ... Read the tenth psalm; and pray for me your poor brother and fellow-sufferer for God's sake: His name therefore be praised! And let us pray to God that He of His mercy will vouchsafe to make both you and me meet to suffer with good consciences for His name's sake. Die once we must; how and where, we know not. Happy are they whom God giveth to pay nature's debt (I mean to die) for His sake. Here is not our home; let us therefore accordingly consider things, having always before our eyes that heavenly Jerusalem, and the way thereto in persecution. And let us consider all the dear friends of God, how they have gone after the example of our Saviour Jesus Christ: whose footsteps let us also follow, even to the gallows (if God's will be so), not doubting, but as He rose again the third day, even so shall we do at the time appointed of God.²⁸

October 16, 1555 was the day (as has previously been mentioned) on which Hugh Latimer, aged but unbowed, in company with his younger colleague Nicholas Ridley, was given grace to seal his testimony with the blood of martyrdom. During the preceding imprisonment Ridley had written in affectionate terms to Latimer:

Methinketh I see you suddenly lifting up your head towards heaven, after your manner, and then looking upon me with your prophetic countenance, and speaking unto me with these or like words: "Trust not, my son (I beseech you, vouchsafe me the honour of this name, for in so doing I shall think myself both honoured and loved of you), trust not, I say, my son, to these word-weapons, for the kingdom of God is not in words, but in power."²⁹

This same communication he had prefaced with this memorable prayer:

O heavenly Father, the Father of all wisdom, understanding, and true strength, I beseech Thee, for Thy only Son our Saviour Christ's sake, look mercifully upon me, wretched creature, and send Thine Holy Spirit into my breast; that not only I may understand according to Thy wisdom, how this pestilent and deadly dart is to be borne off, and with what answer it is to be beaten back; but also, when I must join to fight in the field for the glory of Thy name, that then I, being strengthened with the defence of Thy right hand, may manfully stand in the confession of Thy faith and of Thy truth, and continue in the same unto the end of my life: through the same our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.³⁰

When they met at the stake, Ridley had "a wondrous cheerful look" and embraced old Bishop Latimer. They then knelt together in prayer as they sought for the last time the grace of God for victory in this their final trial. After they had been chained back to back at the stake, and as the faggots were lit for their burning, Latimer uttered what has been described as "the noblest sermon he had ever composed":³¹ "Be of good comfort, Master

²⁸ Latimer, *Works*, 2:435, 437–40, 442–44.

²⁹ Ridley, *Works*, 146. Cf. 1 Thess 1:5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

³¹ Bishop Marcus L. Loane, *Masters of the English Reformation* (London: Church Book Room, 1954), 132; repr., Marcus Loane, *Masters of the English Reformation* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 164–65.

Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out!"³² And so once again the grace of God was proved sufficient and His power was made perfect in the weakness of His faithful witnesses; once again the blood of Christ's martyrs was the seed of the church.

With this testimony of the English Reformers before us, we are able to appreciate (and let us not forget that there are many in this present generation who are being called on to prove by personal experience) how true are the words written to Peter Martyr in that same year from prison by Archbishop Cranmer (who was himself to be martyred at the same spot as Latimer and Ridley on March 21, 1556) explaining how he had learnt by experience that

God never shines forth more brightly, and pours out the beams of His mercy and consolation, or of strength and firmness of spirit, more clearly or impressively upon the minds of His people, than when they are under the most extreme pain and distress, both of mind and body, that He may then more especially show Himself to be the God of His people, when He seems to have altogether forsaken them; then raising them up when they think He is bringing them down and laying them low; then glorifying them when He is thought to be confounding them; then quickening them when he is thought to be destroying them.³³

What more need be said to demonstrate that the Reformers are examples to us, in their practice as well as in their preaching, in their dying as well as in their living, of that sanctification which, being the fruit of divine grace, by the evident depth of its reality adds lustre to the name of Christ?

³² John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 7:550.

³³ *Original Letters relative to the English Reformation*, 1:29.

Witness in the Public Square

JAMES W. SKILLEN

Abstract

This article aims to encourage Christians to respond with vigor to Christ's call to follow him in whole-life discipleship. Life in the public square, which includes the responsibilities of citizenship and government, is one of the arenas in which our love of God and love of neighbors must be exhibited. With biblical and historical arguments, the author emphasizes two principles of justice that obligate governments and citizens. The first is "structural pluralism," which requires constitutional recognition and protection of the diversity of God's creatures and the diversity of human responsibilities and organizations. The second is "confessional pluralism," rooted in God's patience and mercy in this age, made manifest in the rain and sunshine that falls on the just and unjust alike. One of the implications for political life is that all citizens should be treated with equal justice without discrimination due to their faith.

Almost everyone in the world today lives in some form of a state that has membership in the United Nations. Some states are so undeveloped or broken that they hardly represent a genuinely governable political community. Others may lack some of the essentials of a dependable, trustworthy government such that many, if not most, of their citizens (or mere subjects) do not trust them or give allegiance to them. Many other states, however, have strong institutions of government, including functioning court systems, regular elections, accountable legislative and executive bodies, and other elements of a rule-of-law system, all of which help them maintain relatively high levels of civic allegiance.

Regardless of the kind of state in which Christians live, they are to bear witness to Christ. Some do so at great cost—even the cost of their lives. Many Christians are being driven from their homes, persecuted, or slaughtered precisely because they are Christians. In some settings they are mistreated or marginalized with disdain. Yet in other cases, there are states in which Christians enjoy the same standing, protection, and participation in their political communities that every other citizen enjoys. Whatever the case Christians must decide how to act in their capacities as citizens or subjects. Should their witness in the public arena be a matter of high or low importance to them? Should they try to keep their distance from politics or, if possible, should they engage with vigor and commitment?

In this essay I want to make the case, on biblical and historical grounds, for the high importance of purposeful Christian engagement in public life, including political and governmental life. Whether that witness can be nothing more than to hold fast to Christ while suffering torture or death (Heb 11:35–37; Acts 7:1–59) or can be much more, even the full participation of free citizens able to work for a more just public order (Job 29:1–24; Jer 22:11–17; Isa 1:13–17), Christian public witness is fundamental to our life in Christ as faithful disciples in all that he calls us to do.

Beyond our citizenship in different states, Christians need to become more fully conscious that we live today in a shrinking world that allows us to be in touch with one another more closely and quickly than ever before. We no longer live in relatively self-contained states with little or no contact with “foreigners” across the globe. The awareness and tangibility of a worldwide Christian community was hard to imagine or understand for many centuries, but it is at hand today if we will only reach out to make it so.¹ Among other things, we need to change our speech and thinking from referring to ourselves as Indonesian Christians or American Christians or Kenyan Christians to speaking of one another as members of the body of Christ—fellow Christians—who may be Indonesian citizens, American citizens, or Kenyan citizens. In the Bible we read that after the resurrection of Jesus he told his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” making clear that on that basis they were to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18–19 NIV). And in the same way, just before his ascension, when Jesus was continuing to teach them about the kingdom of God, he told them that after they received power from the Holy Spirit, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the

¹ See Michael W. Goheen and Erin G. Glanville, eds., *The Gospel and Globalization* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2009).

ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV). We are members of a worldwide community of faith whose highest authority is Jesus Christ, the Lord, and within that community we are, subordinately, citizens of different countries, workers in different occupations, and members of different families.

On what basis should we approach the challenge of Christian witness in public life? At the most basic level we have the great commandments—to love God with our whole lives and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 22:34–40). We also know a great deal from Israel’s history: God’s covenant law holds Israel’s judges, kings, and people accountable to be righteous and to do justice. This is magnified in the words of the prophets delivered against the wickedness of the people and their governing authorities. Justice and righteousness were fundamental norms for Israel’s life and governance in a wide variety of social, economic, and ecological ways.

In fact, an examination of justice and righteousness in the Old Testament shows a significant contrast with Greek political thinking from the time of Plato and Aristotle until the end of city-state independence. In Greek thought, contextualized by life in diverse city states, justice was seen to be part of an ideal *form* of political community. It was believed that if reason could grasp that ideal form, then it could shape the ever-changing conditions of actual political life. Even today, people throughout the world who have been influenced by Greek philosophy tend to ask, what is the ideal form of government? The Bible, however, does not speak of an ideal *form* of government or polity but rather presents God’s *normative* call to do justice. Justice is a *norm* that calls us to act in accord with it, not a *form* that entices the quest for rational capture of an ideal state. In the development of life through changing circumstances, Israel’s responsibility was to do what is just in keeping with God’s commandments regardless of whether the people were wandering in the wilderness or living under judges or kings.

Paul’s brief account in Romans 13 of God’s will for ministers of government is that they are to encourage the good and punish evildoers. Paul does not even hint at an ideal rational form from which we deduce just laws, institutions, and procedures. Nor does he hint at what governments should and should not do to encourage the good or to punish evildoers. It is clear from many parts of the New Testament that God is the merciful judge and that those who govern and those who are governed bear responsibility to do what is right in God’s sight in relation to one another and their neighbors. There has, of course, been a long history of Christians acting politically. There have been martyrs who chose to suffer death because of their faith. At the other end of the spectrum there have been Christian advisers to, and officers of, governments. Depending on their circumstances and convictions,

communities of Christians have either shunned or accommodated themselves to different forms of government, including the Roman imperial system adopted by the emperor Constantine, after his conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century. At the time of the Reformation, Anabaptist dissenters chose to stand apart from both government and the churches that continued to accept church-state bonds. This is not the occasion to try to detail any of this history.² Yet we know today that Christians throughout the world living in almost every conceivable kind of political system continue to face everything from dictatorial oppression to opportunities of participation in open political systems. Political debates and governing struggles around the world continue over what makes for a just political constitution and over particular laws that deal with taxation, education, health care, religious freedom, immigration, economic development, wealth and poverty, and so much more. Internal to almost every political order (or disorder) in the world are tensions, if not outright conflicts, between the powerful and those who lack power, and often between ethnic, religious, regional, and interest groups.

Nor are these tensions restricted to the internal affairs of states. Increasingly, the struggles are between and among states internationally. There are different cultural and civilizational dynamics at work in the world that have shaped and continue to shape political life. There has been, for example, the extensive and long-term shaping power of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other centuries-old religions.³ There have also been newer religions and ideological movements that grow from and often conflict with older religious traditions and also defy the borders of today's states.⁴ In addition, due to rapid population growth and technological changes in the past century or two, we witness mounting international difficulties in trade, environmental pollution, the sale of arms, and access to energy, water, and food resources. In times of war, persecution, drought, and famine, massive migrations take place as people seek refuge, freedom, and economic opportunity. There is

² There are many histories of the church, government, and political thought that cover this. See, for example, Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, eds., *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); S. E. Finer, *The History of Government*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997–1999); and an overview in James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 47–114.

³ See Peter J. Katzenstein, "Civilizational States, Secularisms, and Religions," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 145–65; and Rex Ahdar and Nicholas Aroney, eds., *Shari'a in the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴ See David Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); and Jonathan Chaplin and Robert Jousra, eds., *God and Global Order* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).

also the ever growing number of corporate and non-government organizations with an international character ranging from aid and development organizations to terrorist groups, from churches to banking corporations, from sports associations to drug and sex-trafficking rings.

I mention all these things to remind us that Christian engagement in public service, which is part of our witness to the lordship of Christ, must face up to the full reality in which we live. It will not be enough for Christians to concentrate on only one or two matters of great concern such as religious freedom, humanitarian relief in times of crisis, and protection of the unborn. We must develop a more comprehensive understanding of the normative obligations of governments and citizens both in contrast and relation to the different responsibilities that belong to families, churches, schools, business enterprises, and international public and private organizations. Only if we gain greater clarity about the responsibilities that governments should and should not exercise, will we be able to gain perspective on how they should deal justly within the public commons as well as in relation to the non-government organizations and institutions that exercise different kinds of responsibilities.

My focus in this essay is primarily on the witness of Christians in their capacity as citizens in relation to their governments. Yet we should not overlook that the words “public square” and “public life” often refer to something broader than political life. The word “public” can have a narrower or broader meaning. Often, in a country like the United States, people think of family life, church life, and most personal relationships as private matters, whereas life in the larger business world, in print and television media, in commerce, and in politics is thought of as public life. Regardless of how narrowly or broadly the public realm is understood, humans always bear responsibility to do justice to one another in ways appropriate to each organization and relationship. Doing what is right with one’s children, among members of a church, and between employees and employers is obligatory for Christians everywhere, for it is an extension of the obligation to love our neighbors.

At the same time, I would argue that a family or a church, a business corporation or an art museum does not exist for the purpose of doing justice. Each has its own purpose that is distinguishable from the others. Of course, within each of those organizations or institutions the norm of justice holds members accountable to one another while they seek to achieve their purpose. But the doing of justice in those cases is an accompanying responsibility, not the reason for their existence. By contrast, a political community of government and citizens exists precisely to do justice. It does not exist to raise children or to produce products for a market; it does not exist as a worship community or for the purpose of developing agricultural and artistic

talents. That is why I am choosing to focus on the “public square” as constituted by a political community of citizens under government. And it will become clear in what follows that one of the most important questions of justice for a political community—a state—is how it should be related to the human responsibilities that are *not* political in character. If human beings function as citizens in the political realm, they are always more than citizens. They are simultaneously family members and may also be farmers or bookkeepers, artists or scientists, teachers or journalists, engineers or nurses. How should the political community be organized so that it does justice to human beings in their full, multidimensional identity as both citizens and more than citizens? This question is most urgent for those of us who recognize that we, created in the image of God, bear witness to Christ in all that we do—in all the different capacities and responsibilities of our lives.

This last question of what a just state should be is first of all a question of *constitutionalism*. That is to say, we are dealing here with the matter of how a political order should be constituted. This is the foundational question of political life. In internationally recognized legal terms it is the question of the *basic law* that sets the terms for government and citizenship. At the start it is necessary to answer the question of what governments and citizens should be responsible to do, in contrast to what parents, teachers, business owners, or scientists should be responsible to do. What are the proper responsibilities of government, and what are the boundaries of the exercise of its authority and power? In other words, how and on what terms should a political community be *constituted*?

The matter of constitutionalism is not simply one of writing a carefully worded document. Many constitutions have been written in many countries, but some of them remain little more than paper on a shelf. They have little to do with the structure and functioning of the states they are supposed to constitute as basic law because the actual patterns of the political order do not resemble the terms of the document. Undeveloped citizenship among people who are primarily governed by local tribes may leave a central government powerless. An authoritarian government that is not held accountable by courts of justice and an independent legislative body may function without regard to what the written constitution says. Many authoritarian and totalitarian governments rule arbitrarily outside of any law regardless of what the written constitution might say.⁵

⁵ On the diverse structure of society just outlined, and on principles of a just constitutional order to be discussed in what follows, see Donald S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Finer, *The History of Government*, vol. 3; Jeanne Heffernan Schindler, ed., *Christianity and Civil Society: Catholic and Neo-Calvinist*

In light of this reality I would like to outline two fundamental principles that I believe should be binding on and within any political community. It will not be enough to think of these principles as something merely to be written into a constitution; they are in the first place principles that need to be owned by citizens and woven into the fabric of their political culture. For that reason a Christian witness in the public square must be educationally as well as politically active. Even in countries like the United States, which has an old and still operating constitution, and Indonesia, which has a relatively new and not yet fully operative constitution, these two principles will challenge what is inadequate about those constitutional systems. And in countries that are far from having an adequately constituted public order or are failed states, these principles can point in the direction of what, in my view, needs to be done in order to build more just communities of governments and citizens.

The first principle arises from the very character of the created order—God’s creation. God not only made many different kinds of creatures but also gave humans a wide range of responsibilities. To begin with, think of the diverse responsibilities arising from the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28–29, to be fruitful and fill the earth and to have dominion over it. Marriage leads to children and families, which entail training, education, and the creative development of speech, imagination, and extensive involvement with all other creatures. Learning to tend sheep or farm a field are among the many different kinds of agricultural responsibilities. Enjoying the food provided for us leads to an extremely wide range of culinary artistry. Teaching young people has led to the building of schools, universities, and research centers. As the human generations unfold and the work of earthly stewardship develops, humans invent tools, build houses, organize choirs for music making, engineer bridges, design water and sewage systems, invent astronomical instruments, and create complex institutions. Through these actions, which require cooperative, coordinated teamwork, stewardship becomes possible.

Consequently, at the very foundation of the just governance of political communities there must be the recognition and protection of the diverse non-political responsibilities of human creatures. Governments do not create families and entrepreneurial inventiveness; they do not create scientific exploration and the arts of teaching and learning. These capabilities arise from creatures made in the image of God, called to be servants of the Creator in all kinds of ways. This means, constitutionally speaking, that as a matter of

principle both public law and governing officials are obligated to recognize and do right by all that is *not* governmental in human society as well as doing right by the political community itself. Over the years I have referred to the normative principle behind this obligation as “structural pluralism.” There may be better words to use, but it means quite simply that a just political order must do justice to the differentiated order of creation, including the diverse responsibilities and institutions of human life. A state’s constitution must, as a matter of principle, view all of these creatures and responsibilities as a “structured plurality.” Among other things this means that both totalitarianism and individualism violate the just organizing principles of constitutional law. Every kind of authoritarianism from above the law and every means of reducing human society to individual rights and freedom alone must be rejected as a way of ordering and governing a political community.

This very brief introduction to a basic principle of Christian public witness does not imply that there is only one model of constitutional order for the whole world. There can be different ways to organize political life under the rule of law. The boundaries of a state as well as the boundaries of other organizations and institutions must be recognized if public justice is to be established and upheld. Essentially, the work of law begins by correctly identifying the distinctive identity of persons, institutions, and nonhuman creatures. The law, governments, and judges cannot do justice to both profit and nonprofit organizations without proper criteria for distinguishing them from one another. The law cannot do justice to a school if it treats it the same as a business corporation. Justice cannot be done to church institutions if they are treated like banks or symphony orchestras.

It seems to me that Christians should readily understand and promote this principle, which is founded in the very order of creation. By God’s mercy and grace most people in the world find repulsive the slaughter of the innocent. Arbitrary, authoritarian governments are not typically lauded as legitimate. The crushing of human aspirations, the toxic destruction of air, water, soil, and plants that degrades animal and human life is not usually praised as something governments should encourage and promote. My point here is simply that the constitutional principle of structural pluralism comes not from the will or imagination of a sectarian group or as an outcome of interest-group brokering; it bears witness to the order of reality, which Christians recognize is God’s creation. By God’s grace, the norms of the creation’s order that obligate us in all of life continue to press upon everyone, regardless of whether we choose to heed them.

The second principle I want to put forward is grounded in the loving mercy and gracious patience of God in response to human disobedience

and defiance of God. We all deserve God's just punishment, which according to the Bible is exemplified by the curses promised in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 11:26–29). The most dramatic biblical accounts of such judgment include the great flood (Gen 6–7), the driving of Israel and then Judah into exile because of their violation of God's covenants (e.g., Isa 8–9; Jer 22, 25, 39), and most climactically, the crucifixion of Jesus, who bore the sins of the whole world in his death. Yet throughout the Bible, even as we hear of the deserved judgment of the unrighteous, we also hear the cries of psalmists and prophets, asking God, why do the righteous suffer and the unrighteous prosper? How is that just? There is great mystery in God's withholding of judgment from those who deserve it. Yet the good news that comes with that withholding of judgment is God's call to sinners to repent, a call made possible by Christ's death for us while we were all running in the wrong direction in our sin.

One of the parables of Jesus, a parable that Jesus himself interpreted for his disciples, is that of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43. That parable is as complete an account of the mystery of God's mercy as I think we find in the Gospels. It is a parable of the kingdom and has to do with the whole world. It is the world in which the master authorized the planting of good seed. But mysteriously (as regards our understanding) the devil is at work and weeds (tares) start growing up with the good plants. That kind of evil should not exist in God's good world. The most natural thing one can imagine is that the field workers report this travesty to the master and ask for permission to pull up the weeds. But the master says, "no." The explanation is twofold. If an attempt is made to pull up the weeds, some of the good plants might be destroyed, and it is not the responsibility of the workers to do the separating. Jesus explains that the good plants represent the children of the kingdom, and the weeds came from the devil's hand. At the end of the age, God will send his angels to do the separating.

Why has God allowed the devil to sow bad seed and allowed the weeds to continue to grow with the good plants? That is a mystery only partly explained by Jesus when he says that such judgment will come at the end, not now. At the end of this age "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Matt 13:41 NIV). All that we need to know is that the separation of good plants from weeds at harvest time will be done by the angels at God's direction, not by us. The implication, stated in the parable itself, is that the wheat and weeds will, consequently, grow up together in the same field of the kingdom, enjoying the same rain and sunshine, until the end. And that is simply a restatement of God's patience and mercy in allowing

sin and evil to persist in this world until God brings about final judgment. We might think this is a mistake, an unjust one, but from the viewpoint of the good plants, it is an act of God's mercy and grace, and it gives time for evildoers to repent. As we know from the further teaching of the apostles, God's patience allows for the gospel to go out to the whole world, calling sinners everywhere to repent and believe the gospel. Why has God chosen to do things this way? We do not know, but we are to trust what Jesus tells us and what the Spirit guides us to do.

This parable, which has immense implications for politics and government, fits perfectly with something else Jesus taught, according to Matthew. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains that it is one thing to love one's neighbor, but the high calling of the faithful should be to "love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44 ESV). In doing that, Jesus says, it will show that you are children of "your Father in heaven." For what does the Father in heaven do? "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (vv. 45–46). Do not stop at loving those who love you, says Jesus. Even pagans do that. Instead, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 48). What this reveals about God is that he does not just love those who already return that love; God loves even his enemies. And we are to be like our Father in heaven and act that way too. Part of the mystery of God's loving patience is that it reveals something of who God is and something we are to emulate by acting in the same way.

Now, when I say that there are immense implications here for Christian witness in the public square, I mean, first of all, that we need to look at all our neighbors through the eyes of the two biblical passages just mentioned. Among other things, it means that we should recognize that we are not responsible to separate the righteous from the unrighteous in public life. Politically speaking, in other words, the Christian way of life entails our adherence to the second important principle I am introducing here, namely, equal treatment under public law of all citizens in a political community without discriminating among them for reasons of their faith. God's rain and sunshine come on all of us alike. We should acknowledge this reality as an exhibition of God's grace. This does not mean that there should be no laws and no criteria of judgment about what is lawful and unlawful in the political arena. It simply means that good citizenship, sound governments, and just laws require equal place and treatment of all citizens within that public order. The political community of citizens and government under law is not an ecclesiastical community of faith; it is not a family or a business enterprise. It is a public-legal community for all. The same civil and criminal

laws should apply equally to every person. Citizens who profess faith in Christ should be treated no better or worse than other citizens.

My preferred designation for this second principle is “confessional pluralism,” which is a somewhat richer phrase than “religious freedom.” It means not simply that individuals should have the right to worship as they please or to speak freely of their faith. It means that as a matter of principle, governments should do justice to all citizens both in giving them unprejudiced treatment in the public square and in recognizing their right to the exercise of their religious convictions in nongovernment organizational ways. This is one of the points at which the two principles of pluralism reinforce each other. The multiple responsibilities that humans exercise in family life, education, publishing companies, the arts, and so forth, require recognition and just treatment as nongovernmental responsibilities. That is the structural pluralist principle articulated earlier. And those who exercise those diverse responsibilities along with their civic responsibilities should be treated without discrimination with respect to their basic beliefs, their different faiths.

Confessional pluralism is not a principle for the church. Churches and other faith communities are organized around particular commitments of faith for membership. It would make no sense to say that a church should include in its membership any and every person of all faiths. That would be like saying that a business enterprise should treat as a paid employee anyone who wants to work in it regardless of the person’s capabilities and fitness for the job. It would be like saying that a football team should include athletes from any sport regardless of the athlete’s ability to play football. Diverse nongovernment responsibilities are particular and distinct by their very nature. A church community is a community of faith in Jesus Christ. Part of what constitutes a just political order, which should treat all citizens equally, is the principle of confessional pluralism, which means recognizing that nongovernmental organizations of faith need to be free to be themselves. Confessional freedom means is that citizens should have the same treatment from government with regard to their diverse responsibilities in society, and since government should not have the authority to decide what the true faith of all citizens should be, its obligation is to give equal treatment to all regardless of their faith. That is one of the differences between a church and a state.

These two principles just introduced are not sufficient to account for a full, normative description of how a constitutional political community should be organized. Taking into account both the order of creation and God’s mercy and patience in response to the negative effects of sin in all of life is only the beginning of a Christian witness in the public square. Many additional, important distinctions will have to be made, for example, between civil and

criminal laws, between procedural and regulatory rules, between policies of benefit directed to the commons and those directed to particular social purposes. The responsibilities of police and military forces must be carefully stipulated to determine justifiable use of force by governments and the penalties for misuse of force by private persons as well as public officials. Internal to the life of a political community, countless decisions must be made by lawmakers, executives, and adjudicators about how to support the education of citizens, along with the building and maintenance of infrastructures such as roads, sewers, and energy grids. The kinds of governmental and nongovernmental responsibilities that arise in any country will depend on how broadly or narrowly the people have developed their talents, organizations, and economy. This is not the place to try to explain or offer arguments about any of this. Yet I mention them because government and politics are about more than just retributive justice and the restraint of public evils. They are also about the administration and coordination of life in the public square to maintain a healthy commons where justice can be done to every citizen, to the diverse range of nongovernmental responsibilities, and to the common good of the political community itself.

Governing is an art. Though the purpose of public governance is different from that of every other institution, it has some characteristics similar to any large institution—a university, or a business corporation, or an international bank—that requires mastery of the arts of administration, coordination, organization, and promotion. Not every citizen will be able to master or even understand the requirements of good government and of good laws, but we all have obligations, as citizens, to make judgments about qualifications for public office and the evaluation of just and unjust laws. This is where a Christian witness in the public square depends in part on the contribution of those who are able to focus their attention full-time on these matters and thereby assist Christians in understanding them and gaining civic wisdom. There are Christians who have the ability and God's calling to dedicate themselves to political and governmental life. They can thereby help to educate fellow citizens in the responsibilities of citizenship. Most of us understand that Christian witness would be very weak indeed if there were no pastors or teachers and no congregations of worship and fellowship. Following the Christian way of life is not something each individual believer can do on his or her own. From this it follows that Christian witness in the public square is not something that can be achieved by each individual Christian citizen acting alone. For that witness to be wise and mature it requires communal efforts in prayer, civic education, policy research, and judicious criticism of existing laws and of those who serve in public office.

In sum, this essay has been an attempt to encourage fellow Christians to take seriously the admonitions of Jesus, Paul, and the Letter to the Hebrews to grow in maturity and the habits of righteousness. To grow in that way includes learning to discern the difference between good and evil in every sphere of our responsibilities. The words from Jesus are many and varied, including, for example, the Beatitude, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt 5:6 ESV) and the admonition to love even our enemies, which is closely related to, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:44, 48 ESV). Paul urges the Thessalonians to “test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Thess 5:21–22 ESV). And the author of Hebrews, urging his readers to grow up into maturity, says that the “teaching about righteousness” is not grasped by the immature but only by those who can eat “solid food”—those who “by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:13–14 ESV). Much of this New Testament teaching carries forward what we find in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. And it is all part of the high importance of building up the body of Christ, strengthening its ability to be a faithful, maturing, and enduring witness to the lordship of Christ over all things. May this be our desire, part of what we hunger and thirst for, and what comes from our hearts every time we pray for God’s kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10).

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Post-Christian Confession in Secular Context

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Abstract

Discussions of the “post-Christian” age are wide-spread and also bring an element of anxiety as the Western church confronts present-day challenges. The assumption is that in a post-Christian age, following Christ will be tougher than in the past. While it is important to fully grasp the surrounding cultural milieu in which the church finds herself, and in which she is witnessing, this is only one aspect of the overall picture as far as the task of the church is concerned. Some sketchy lessons and reflections on how to approach post-modernity can come from the way in which Christianity confronted modernity in the nineteenth century or the Roman Empire in the second century. Perhaps the post-Christian challenge is a providential way to re-discover the practical nature of the Christian vision embodied in personal discipline, vocations, church life and practices, and also civic responsibilities.

“**W**e live in a post-Christian age.” This is the refrain that is often heard when discussing the present-day condition of the Christian church in the West. Post-Christian culture, post-Christian society, post-Christian ethics, post-Christian values ... are all rubrics under which discussions take place in Christian circles and which try to analyze the contemporary scene. Apart from the intellectual challenges that it evokes, the reference to “post-Christian something” brings an element of tension to the conversation. A sense of loss, a perceived danger, and an impending threat are all associated with concerns about the direction that

the Western world is taking, moving away from traditional Christianity. The challenge of living in a post-Christian century is that things will no longer be as easy or convivial for Christians as they used to. The assumption is that in a post-Christian age, following Christ will be tough, tougher than in the past. The church will need to learn how to live on the fringes as a politically-incorrect outsider, rather than being a stakeholder in the sacred alliance between the altar (or pulpit) and the throne (or power). A spiritual paradigm-shift is needed to transit from the maintenance mood of the Christian era where Christian institutions set the stage for mainstream culture, to a “missional,” adventurous, and unprotected age in which Christians will be alien intruders in an increasingly inhospitable world.

In a word, this is the main narrative in which the expression “post-Christian” is used. In this article I shall seek to examine the appropriateness of defining our generation as “post-Christian.” Then I will try to argue that while it is important to fully grasp the surrounding cultural *milieu* in which the church finds herself and in which she is witnessing, this is only one aspect of the overall picture as far as the task of the church is concerned. After offering some pictorial historical reflections from different ages of the church, I will conclude with some remarks on our present-day task in confronting the postmodern times.

I. *Post What?*

Beyond what “post-Christian” superficially indicates, a closer inspection is needed. The exact meaning of “post” as suffix of a given word depends on a variety of factors. While the general idea that it refers to what comes “after” something else is sufficiently clear, what “post” stands for in relation to what precedes is debatable. The discussion around the significance of post-modernity can illustrate the point.¹ While the “modernity project” seems to be clearly marked, post-modernity is understood in at least two different ways that can be summarized with two German philosophical words: *Aufhebung* and *Verwindung*. *Aufhebung* is part of the Hegelian dialectical language whereby the new synthesis which comes after the conflict between thesis and antithesis overcomes both while not taking complete leave from them. What comes “post” is a passing from modernity in the sense of being a new stage and phase, a different facet of it. *Verwindung* has

¹ This matter is hotly debated. For the sake of the argument, I am using as a guide the book by Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

a more Heideggerian flavor and evokes the idea of a radical breach from modernity. In this nihilist understanding, post-modernity is modernity dissolved, irreversibly dismissed, definitively disbanded.

When we talk about living in a post-Christian age, should we understand it as *Aufhebung* or *Verwindung*? Does the secular world nurture a disenchant-ed view of Christianity while retaining significant elements of it, or does it want to destroy Christianity in order to replace it with its nihilist emptiness? Perhaps, following the analyses of the Dutch Reformed intellectual Groen Van Prinsterer, the ideology of the French Revolution had a *Verwindung*-type of project in its deconstructing impetus and its upfront attack on the Christian heritage.² Human autonomy masked by unbelief wanted to get rid of any sense of God in society and culture. Some harsh present-day criticism coming from the New Atheism may have a *Verwindung* bent in its attempt to uproot the whole of the Christian plausibility structure.³ In this sense, “post” often means “anti,” against Christianity. Other trends in Western society look more like *Aufhebung* attempts to renegotiate chunks of the Christian heritage in a pluralistic society by displacing them from their inherited superior status and relocating them in the *pantheon* of contemporary religions where they are no longer treated as a given. *Aufhebung*, with its milder attitude than *Verwindung*, may lead us, in spite of its criticism, to define our generation as “late” or “ultra” modern, rather than postmodern, i.e., as another intensified phase of an on-going process of modernization.

Either way, any discussion of what it means to live in a post-Christian age should try to unpack what “post” means. In Europe at least, our post-Christian time is still an age in which most topography is replete with Christian names (e.g., Notre Dame, Saint Peter, Saint Paul, etc.), most established churches continue to have a privileged status in society (e.g., receiving funding from the state in some way), the calendar is still shaped by Christian holidays—Christmas and Easter being central in most countries (although with eclectic meanings attached to them). The public space is increasingly hostile to the Christian voice in public discourse or even to its mere presence, but there are still vast areas where it is solidly embedded in the system: Christian schools continue to exist, church buildings mark the

² Groen van Prinsterer’s famous lectures, *Ongeloof en Revolutie* (1845–1846), were a penetrating analysis of the “idols” of the French Revolution and its totalitarian religion; English translation: *Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution*, ed. Harry Van Dyke (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge, 1989).

³ Both the French Revolution and the New Atheism wanted to replace Christianity with another “strong” and “thick” religion: the rule of human autonomy and the rule of “scientific” thought, respectively. In its Heideggerian meaning, *Verwindung* has a deconstructing thrust with a nihilist exit.

territory, new churches are planted, and Christian public witness is often possible, although it is criticized by secular voices. Sometimes the post-Christian attitude has a more institutional dimension whereby the Constantinian settlement (i.e., the majority church has a favored position in society) is challenged and the role of the church is no longer seen as providing civic and universal services. Other times the post-Christian tendency aims at overcoming the Christian moral framework by making individual choice absolute at the expense of ethical limits and constrains that used to be defined by the basic Judeo-Christian values.

Further analysis is necessary in order to grasp our post-Christian *Zeitgeist*. Any simplistic reading of it may reinforce superficial analyses and lead to shortsighted courses of action. Cultural exegesis needs the breath of a cultural hermeneutics shaped by a Christian worldview and nurtured by historical awareness and a comprehensive overview of cultural trends. Anxiety about a perceived threat or parochial perceptions of the problem are not adequate for a mature Christian discernment.

II. *Post-Christian Conditions*

The West is not uniform in so far as post-Christianity is concerned. There is no single post-Christian condition, but there are several versions and combinations of it. In some Northern European countries, the post-Christianizing process takes the form of an aggressive secularization of society. The basic moral public discourse which took Christian values for granted is undergoing a drastic revision by competing and at times antagonistic moral frameworks. The fundamental societal institutions (e.g., family, school, and church) that received their meaning and place from a basic Christian worldview are undergoing a re-writing of their status, undermining their traditional outlook. While these tendencies do pose a serious challenge, not all post-Christian trends are evil in themselves. The church no longer lives in a protected bubble but is in the free market of religion, so to speak, with many competitors relying on huge resources and attracting a wide audience. Christians need to learn (or re-learn) to be creative and faithful minorities where they used to be part of the mainstream majority.⁴ The transition may be painful and difficult, but mere nostalgic longing for a given *status quo* somewhat marked by Christianity will not serve the cause of the gospel.

⁴ On the opportunities and challenges to be Reformed minorities, see the stimulating reflections by Paul Wells, "Essere una minoranza: sfide e opportunità," *Studi di teologia* 20.2 (2008): 159–81.

In the Southern European context in which I live, most post-Christian moves are welcomed because the form of Christianity that prevailed there tended to be a straitjacket for religious minorities and an obstacle for the flourishing of a pluralistic society. In this context, Roman Catholic Christianity was assumed to be equal to citizenship, putting all non-Catholics in the awkward position of being treated as cultural strangers and second-level citizens in their own homeland. After the still modest impact of secularization on Italian society, minority churches and religious groups are no longer persecuted or harassed by the majority church supported by the state. Religious pluralism and steps towards an “open” society are therefore children of secularization rather than being the legacy of the majority Roman Catholic Christianity. It may seem paradoxical, but there is an element of truth in arguing that post-Christian developments can be more Christian than what Christendom actually implemented in certain contexts.⁵ Evangelical Christians in these countries are called to move beyond a victim mentality about a past when they were persecuted and become spiritually and culturally mature minorities, taking advantage of significant openings in their societies.⁶

This simple observation raises a more radical issue. Not all that is identified as a “Christian” heritage in terms of a “Christian” nation, society, and culture was actually an appropriate expression of what Christianity is. What was normally assumed to belong to a Christian heritage was actually a para-Christian version of it (i.e., something seemingly close but fundamentally distant from it). In many cases, it was a deformed version of Christianity based on a long Constantinian trajectory marked by the heresy of confusing and conflating the state and the church, religion and politics, canon law and common law, Christian identity and national identity.⁷ Moving beyond this so-called “Christian” settlement is a positive contribution towards defining what Christianity fundamentally is and what Christian witness means in a multi-cultural pluralistic world.

⁵ While advocating for Christian values in society, the Roman Catholic Church is, generally speaking, prone to maintain its privileged status in majority situations. See John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003), where he defends freedom but is not prepared to overcome established unfair systems where the Roman Catholic Church has a favored status over against other religious groups. See my paper “La doctrine sociale de l'Église catholique romaine,” *Théologie Évangélique* 6.1 (2007): 51–66.

⁶ As it was well argued for by Samuel Escobar in a recent interview (April 21, 2015), http://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/542/Samuel_Escobar_Let's_avoid_victimhood,_we_should_learn_to_live_as_a_mature_minority.

⁷ See Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004). I do not agree with his Anabaptist perspective, but Murray has several good points in critiquing the “Christendom” settlement and urging the church to move beyond it, not out of external pressures only but out of a desire to be more faithful to biblical standards.

Contrary to the popular expression coined by C. S. Lewis, there is no such thing as “mere Christianity.” In its historical, doctrinal, and social realizations, there is no single version of Christianity, but different forms of it (e.g., Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox), each shaping a different face of Christianity in relation to the world. In exegeting our post-Christian condition, we not only need to investigate what “post” actually means, but we also have the responsibility to clarify what “Christian” means. Historical embodiments of Christianity are not necessarily defensible versions of it. There is the on-going need to *reform* them in light of Scripture. This post-Christian phase is yet another opportunity for the Christian church to practice the *semper reformanda* call of the Reformation, turning away from idolatrous compromises (and) towards an ever growing biblical fidelity.

Without running the risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, and with a generous appreciation of the “Christian” history, most Christian eras have actually been para-Christian approximations, something like, but not quite Christianity worthy of its name. Perhaps Christianity is more of an eschatological ambition rather than a historical realization, more of a *not yet* project than something *already* achieved. Christendom has put an emphasis on the *already* side of Christianity, whereas the post-Christian age we live in reminds us providentially of the *not yet* element of our response to the gospel. Rather than sticking to the defensive stance of a conservative mindset, we should seize the opportunity to refine and implement better practices that are more attuned to the Christian message. It is not an either-or task, of course, but a matter of spiritual intelligence in accepting the challenge to explore more faithful and viable Christian actions in our given context, rather than being obsessed by simply maintaining a Christianized *status quo* inherited from the past.

III. *Nineteenth-Century Options*

The post-Christian era is not the first time that Christianity was faced with a change of the historical tide as far as the place of Christianity in the modern world is concerned. In many ways, the nineteenth century presented similar challenges to those of the present-day. The combination of the Enlightenment and Romanticism with its mixture of rationalism and irrationalism resulted in a powerful assault on the tenets of the Christian faith and the role of the church in society. The French Revolution added ideological and political pepper to the challenge of modernity. In some respects, the post-Christian age is yet another combination of rationalism and irrationalism in a late-modern fashion. As Cornelius Van Til forcefully pointed

out, humanistic thought is always centered on the unstable foundation of human autonomy and always in need of providing new platforms in which rationalism and irrationalism provisionally intermingle in various degrees.⁸ The pendulum swings from one pole to another in a dialectical way, going from the more rationalist “anthropological turn” of modernity to the more irrationalist “linguistic turn” of post-modernity. In this sense, post-modernity is nothing but another ideological combination of rationalism and irrationalism in which the basic humanistic framework centered on human autonomy is still reigning. According to Henri Blocher, humanistic thought is always subject to differing *soubresauts*, jolts, movements that seem to change its orientation radically but are nonetheless expressions of its irrepressible instability.⁹ The task of the church is to have its biblical seismograph on and to assess the changes that take place in society, trying to come to terms with the wave motion of culture.

Nineteenth-century Christianity responded to the challenge of the modernity project in several ways. The following impressionistic summary aims at opening the windows enough to let in a fresh breeze as we consider our present-day endeavor. To begin with, theological liberalism was basically an acceptance of the plausibility structures of the Enlightenment-Romanticism synthesis. Historical criticism applied to biblical revelation showed its rationalist bias and tried to dismantle any sense of divine super-naturalism by reducing Christianity to a form of morality. On the other hand, the centrality given to feelings in religion opened the way to the irrational whereby the ultimate sense of being dependent was considered the essence of Christian faith without any truth-claims or doctrinal connotations. Liberalism accommodated the Christian faith to the claims of the Enlightenment and Romanticism.¹⁰ Even today, this total surrender to the *never* version of modernity is a temptation for some post-liberal Christians. The post-liberal strategy for addressing the post-Christian condition is to submit Christian claims to those of post-modern culture and to find a residual place for the church that does not question the idols of the post-modern religion.

⁸ For a discussion on Van Til’s analysis of autonomous thought, see William Edgar, “No News is Good News: Modernity, the Postmodern, and Apologetics,” *WTJ* 57 (1995): 359–82.

⁹ See Henri Blocher, “Les soubresauts de la pensée humaniste et la pensée biblique,” *Fac-Réflexion* 32 (1995): 4–17.

¹⁰ In his assessment of nineteenth-century liberalism Karl Barth was certainly profound and insightful: *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelische Verlag, 1947); English translation: *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973). Barth’s own way forward, though, was still marked by an unresolved dialectic between rationalism and irrationalism instead of being grounded in the self-authenticating Trinity and the written Word of God.

Rome had a different strategy in confronting modernity. On the theological level it stressed its own right to absolute power by issuing new dogmas in the face of anti-dogmatic rationalism. The 1854 dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception is an instance whereby the Roman Church elevated an oral tradition to a binding belief with dogmatic status. It was a slap in the face for the Enlightenment mentality. On the more political level, the same church issued the other nineteenth-century dogma, that of papal infallibility (1870). If Revolutionary thought fiercely attacked the authority structure of the church, Rome responded by further hardening papal authority. The French Revolution was able to kill the king, but the pope, the last absolute king of the Western world, came out of the confrontation stronger. The *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) condemned all the products of modernity, including freedom of conscience and democracy, thus closing the door to the appreciation of modern ideas. The overall strategy was defensive of the church's prerogatives and its status in the modern world. Instead of following gospel teachings and listening to the legitimate concerns of modernity, Rome became even more self-referential and isolated.¹¹ There is a tendency in certain Christian circles to fight against the post-modern world in the same way: by building battlements of judgment and self-defense that may give the impression of winning the battle but are biblically wrong and self-destructive in the long run.

Revivalism was another nineteenth century answer to the challenge of the modern synthesis of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Revivalism wedded the entrepreneurial, bourgeois spirit of the age with uneasiness towards institutions transmitting revolutionary thought. Charles Finney's confidence in the "new measures" to bring about revival was a form of rationalization of the supernatural work of God. And yet the romantic disposition towards religious feelings matched the revivalist quest for a "deeper" experience of God. Revivalism ended up being a chameleon, fitting the rationalist-irrationalist combination of modernity, not attacking it upfront but implementing survival strategies that made it a very "modern," enlightened, and romantic form of Christianity. The neo-revivalist answer to the post-modern world would be a highly sensual, collectivist but churchless Christianity in which believing and belonging do not necessarily match and experiential participation has priority over doctrinal depth. Global

¹¹ It took almost a century for Rome to change this dismissive attitude. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) issued a "friendly" and welcoming message to the modern world while not giving up any substantial claim of the Catholic Church. For this interpretation of Vatican II, see my "Il Vaticano II, banco di prova della teologia evangelica," *Studi di teologia* 25.2 (2013): 99–125.

Evangelical Christianity seems to follow in the footsteps of nineteenth-century revivalism by offering a *prêt-à-porter* option that finds its niche but does not challenge the arrogant post-modern mindset.

Finally, the Reformed world also provided a response to the challenge of modernity. Thinking of the Reformed camp in a corporate way, the Old Princeton School stressed the need to maintain the credibility and historicity of biblical revelation in an increasingly skeptical age, while being open to scientific academic developments.¹² C. H. Spurgeon also reaffirmed the centrality of preaching the gospel in the context of the local church as the ordinary means of grace for the modern world. The Genevan *Réveil* added to the Reformed doctrinal framework an emphasis on personal conversion, evangelism, and humanitarian concerns, thus paying attention to personal involvement in the Christian faith. The Dutch Neo-Calvinists developed an anti-revolutionary attitude which also had a *pars construens* (constructive element) for Christians to make a positive contribution in a pluralistic society in terms of common grace and Christian responsibility to respond to God's cultural and missionary mandate. Summing up all these voices and others, the Reformed choir confronted modernity apologetically, ecclesiastically, and culturally by trying to provide biblically viable alternatives to the rationalist and irrationalist tendencies of the modernity project. The apologetic concern made it clear that what was really at stake was not the privileged status of the church in society, but the truth-claims of the Bible and the reliability of the Christian narrative. The ecclesiastical concern underlined the importance of the church as the Christian community in the world that listens to God's Word and responds to it. The cultural concern expressed the need for Christians to be faithful to God at any moment of life and in whatever circumstance.

In facing the challenges of the post-modern world, we should be concerned to learn as much as we can from the Reformed stance in dealing with modernity by seeing it as a composite whole. No single Reformed school of thought is sufficient for the task, but the cross-fertilizing of various Reformed traditions may be a way forward as we navigate these post-modern waters. The whole Reformed architecture may well be the infrastructure that provides the best resources for surviving the post-Christian era and consistently promoting the cause of the gospel.¹³

¹² While there are excellent monographs on each strand of the nineteenth-century Reformed tradition or on different regions of the world, the task of writing a family history and theological interpretation of the Reformed tradition as a whole has yet to be done properly.

¹³ I borrow the architectural metaphor from Peter S. Heslam, "Architects of Evangelical Intellectual Thought: Abraham Kuyper and Benjamin Warfield," *Themelios* 24.2 (1999): 3–20.

IV. *The Diognetus Way*

Living in a “Christian” atmosphere is not really necessary for the gospel to flourish. In the first centuries of the history of the church, Christianity lived in a *pre-Christian* setting often marked by anti-Christian paganism, and nevertheless the Christian faith performed pretty well. Christianity does not need to be the state-religion nor the majority religion in order to prosper. Nowadays, the persecuted church lives in a violently *anti-Christian* environment and nonetheless gives the most outstanding witness to the spiritual reality and vitality of the Christian message. So, our post-Christian situation, whatever it may mean, can be an opportunity to go beyond the problematic comfort zone of Christendom and to re-discover the missional calling to be salt and light (Matt 5:13–16) in a crooked and twisted generation (Phil 2:15). The human safety net of being a majority and having central stage in society, though perhaps useful, is not a necessary condition for the mission of the church.

After sketching some nineteenth-century antecedents, it is also fitting to open another historical window in order to see present-day challenges with some historical distance. The *Letter to Diognetus* provides a picture of the dynamics of church life in the second century. If the *Didache* is the first post-apostolic document that presents criteria for admission to the church and the first codification of community life, the *Letter to Diognetus* speaks about the mode and the quality of the presence of the church in the surrounding world. Written in approximately A.D. 150, the document was addressed to a pagan named Diognetus to persuade him to become a Christian.

In trying to interact with the questions of Diognetus, the author explains the nature of the Christian God and the folly of the Greco-Roman idolatrous religions. God is the creator and ruler of the universe while the pagan idols are merely artifacts of human technology. The Christian faith frees people from the illusion and religious tyranny of demonic powers that lurk in idols. Jesus is the Son of God sent to reveal God the Father. He bore our sins, the remission of which is only obtained by faith in him. At this point, after describing the riches of the Christian message and the falseness of paganism, the author argues for the superiority of Christianity by pointing to the moral fiber and spiritual life of the Christian community. In describing the way in which Christians live in a predominantly pagan society, the *Letter* invites reflection on the characteristics of Christian presence and witness in a pagan world (Diogn. 5:1–17).¹⁴

¹⁴ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-lightfoot.html>. On the *Letter to Diognetus*, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 49–67.

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practise an extraordinary kind of life. Nor again do they possess any invention discovered by any intelligence or study of ingenious men, nor are they masters of any human dogma as some are. But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvellous, and confessedly contradicts expectation. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men, and they are persecuted by all. They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are endued with life. They are in beggary, and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things, and yet they abound in all things. They are dishonoured, and yet they are glorified in their dishonour. They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated. They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect. Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life. War is waged against them as aliens by the Jews, and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks, and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason of their hostility.

This is a picture of a Christian community in a pre-Christian setting that was increasingly threatening to the church. The Christian presence is described in terms of behavior that, on the one hand, appears very similar if not identical to that of non-Christians, while on the other hand, is radically different in that they are inspired and nourished by the gospel.¹⁵ Christians do not choose to live in isolated enclaves or extra-urban ghettos, they do not use sub-cultural communicative codes that are incomprehensible to others, they do not use special costumes or clothing, nor do they eat special foods. They are citizens like everyone else. Yet they are different. Their particularity is “paradoxical.” While rooted in society, they live as if they were strangers. They get married and build families, without practicing infanticide. They share everything, except the marital bed, leading apparently normal lives, but diffusing the perfume of Christian witness everywhere. They are loyal citizens who respect the law, but their lifestyle morally surpasses the requirements of conventional social behaviors. Their communities are apparently politically harmless and, indeed, seem to be allied to the *status quo*, as they are most respectful of the

¹⁵ Similar descriptions of the Christian presence in pagan society are offered by Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* 17 (ANF 1:168; PG 6:354) and Tertullian, *The Apology* 42 (ANF 3:49; PL 1:554–59). See D. F. Wright, “Christian Faith in the Greek World: Justin Martyr’s Testimony,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 54.2 (1982): 77–87, and Gerald Bray, “Tertullian,” in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, ed. B. G. Green (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), 64–107.

political order. Yet they have their cultural particularities for which they demand to be respected even if they are radically different from the prevailing cultural standards. In most cases, their conduct elicits a mixture of admiration and astonishment by outside observers. In other cases, it causes indignation that turns into slander and persecution, although the reasons for hatred against the Christians are not rationally justified.

In biblical terms, they are “in” the world but not “of” the world (John 15:19; 17:11 and 16). In terms of the *Letter*, Christians have a *paradoxos politeia*, a paradoxical citizenship (Diogn. 5:4). On the one hand, they belong to the city like any other citizen, with the same rights and duties, without any special distinguishing mark. On the other hand, the Christian citizens are “different” because they are members of a kingdom whose provenance is “in heaven” and whose values are irreducible to those of the other non-Christian members of society. The cost of living out a *paradoxos politeia* in the context of on-going misunderstanding in the wider society was demanding, because the ancient pagan scheme was not generally accustomed to it.

In his *Apology*, Tertullian helps us understand what it means for the early church to be “in” the world but not “of” the world in that particular context. On the one hand, he recognizes the duty of all Christians to pray for the authorities, although they persecute the church, and to ask God to give the emperor a long life, a peaceful kingdom, a faithful senate, brave troops, and so on. Christians are to pray for the prosperity of the Roman Empire and do their duty by participating in the life of society. In this sense, theirs is an active citizenship, positively affecting the *res publica*. At the same time, Tertullian says that Christians do not want and cannot accept that the emperor is divine. This is the limit of their submission to state authority and to the prevailing cultural patterns.¹⁶ “If he be a man, it is the interest of a man to give place to God; let him content himself with the name of emperor, for this is the most majestic name upon earth, and it is the gift of God.”¹⁷ In so doing, Christians are not part of an “unlawful” or “contending faction” that undermines public order.¹⁸ They refuse only immorality and idolatry. They consider themselves, and they are, citizens of the Empire. Their submission, however, is limited by their other citizenship: that of the kingdom of God, which forbids them to recognize any other God apart from the biblical Creator and Sustainer of the world.

These churches are described phenomenologically as Christian communities struggling to find their space in a pagan society. They are invisible as

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Apology* 30–33 (ANF 3:42–43; PL 1:502–11).

¹⁷ Tertullian, *Apology* 33 (ANF 3:43; PL 1:509–11).

¹⁸ Tertullian, *Apology* 38 (ANF 3:45–46; PL 1:526–31).

far as the architectural structures of their meeting places are concerned, and their real visibility lies in the moral and spiritual quality of their lives. They speak by their words and behavior. Christians want to be included socially without being culturally irrelevant or hidden. Their presence is marked by proximity, not by separation or marginalization. They are neither totally assimilated nor totally opposed to the system: they are present with the tensions that their *paradoxos politeia* implies. Their identity and commitments translate into practices sometimes entirely similar to those of other social groups, but at other times they are strongly countercultural as interpreters of a different worldview.

Using Richard Niebuhr's typology of the relationship between Christ and culture, the church described in the *Letter to Diognetus* is not "over" the world, nor is it "against" the world, and it is not even "parallel" to the world. It is "in" the world with its own spiritually and culturally creative posture but without being absorbed by it. It is certainly "against" sin and its cultural products and "for" the renewal of grace wherever it can be found.¹⁹

V. Back to the Post-Christian Issue

The nineteenth-century antecedents and the Diognetus way cannot be simply transferred into our own post-Christian situation and automatically applied to it. They are nonetheless reminders of the same tension that the church has to face in different conditions, whether they be "pre," "anti," or now "post" Christian.

Otherworldly and this-worldly dynamics are always at stake when dealing with how to relate to culture. In David Wells's words,

By its very structure, evangelicalism finds itself both affirming and denying culture, stressing both its continuity with and discontinuity from the world. The pendulum has tended to swing from side to side, touching first one set of antitheses and then the other. The paradox should not be resolved. And it should not be resolved in favor of one set of antitheses over the other. For God's own relationship to the world is steadily and unchangingly bipolar, in part characterized by its continuity with it and in part by his discontinuity from it.

And again, "The Word of God must be related to our own context in such a way that its identity as divine revelation is authentically preserved while its relation to contemporary life is fully worked out."²⁰

¹⁹ See D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 227.

²⁰ David F. Wells, "An American Evangelical Theology: The Painful Transition from *Theoria* to *Praxis*," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 92–93.

Here the paradoxical nature of our citizenship is related to the bipolarity of God's relationship to the world. How to articulate that bipolarity in the post-modern world is the task we face. The Christian age displayed a tendency to try to overcome the bipolarity and solve the paradox by proposing that the church make the kingdom of God present by saturating society with Christian morality and institutions. The post-Christian generation radically questions this result and forces the church to be more humble, more open to self-criticism, readier to rely on God's promises rather than on human success, without losing the courage to be Protestant, whatever the cost.²¹ Perhaps the post-Christian challenge is a providential way to re-discover the *ordinariness* of the Christian vision embodied in personal discipline and vocations, church life and practices, and civic responsibilities:²² a more faithful Christian worldview put into practice by a more faithful community of Christians in whatever circumstance and context they find themselves.

²¹ Borrowing the title by David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

²² Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

Persecution of Christians Today

THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Abstract

The majority of Christians live in a situation of religious freedom in democracies. Has Christianity become a major focus of persecution? Yes, approximately 10% of them live as minorities in an ever growing hostile environment. By exploring ten factors behind the persecution of Christians, the article shows that persecution is a complex phenomenon. The article discusses the major reasons for persecution of Christians and sees religious fundamentalism—defined as a militant truth claim—in the major world religions of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as the major reason for the growing number of Christians being killed and churches being destroyed. The four other reasons are religious nationalism, the displacement from Islamic countries of long-established Christian churches, limitations on freedom of religion, and the special price paid by converts from Islam and Hinduism. A take away from this article is that while individual Christians ought not to retaliate, Christians around the world should hold governments in which persecution occurs accountable.

Parts of this article were delivered as the opening lecture of the “Congress on Persecution of Christians Today,” on October 23, 2011 under the title, “Current Developments Relating to the Persecution of Christians around the World: What Can Be Done in Politics, by the Media, and by Churches against Fundamentalist Violence.” Sections of this article were published in German: Thomas Schirmacher, “Religionsfreiheit und Christenverfolgung,” *Evangelische Verantwortung* 3+4 (2013): 6, 8–11. Online: http://www.cdu-admin.de/image/magazine/pdf/23_2_4_201314_47_21ev_34_13_web.pdf.

I. Christianity: The Most Persecuted Religion?

The German *Spiegel* magazine recently ran an article with the title “Merkel at the Church Assembly: ‘Christianity Is the Most Persecuted Religion,’” upon the occasion of the German Chancellor’s words of greeting at the Fall Synod of the Protestant Church in Germany.¹ Many newspapers and commentaries were indignant. And the indignation about Angela Merkel’s statement appeared for many to be greater than that about the persecution of Christians itself. I would have at least expected statements such as: “Indeed, the persecution of Christians is widespread around the world, and there are far too many Christians who die, but one should also think about ...” Further, one is left with the impression that the reaction would have been different if another religion besides Christianity had been mentioned.

Above all, I disagree with the argument that such a statement is not permissible because it disparages other religions or implies that their persecution is less serious. When we say that the abuse of women is more frequent than the abuse of men, we are not saying that the abuse of men is a good thing! Whoever observes that Jewish graves are more frequently desecrated does not thus find desecration of other graves to be a good thing or a less severe matter. And if there are rankings for democracy, freedom of the press, corruption, racism, hostility towards women and their victims, then why not for religious freedom and related victims? In my book *Racism*, I document that globally the most widespread forms of racism are forms of racism against Jews, Sinti and Roma, and against dark-skinned individuals.² However, in so doing I am not lessening expressions of racism towards others. “Every persecuted individual suffers regardless of which religion he belongs to,” stated Wenzel Michalski, the head of Human Rights Watch (HRW) in Germany.³ And in the newspaper *Die Welt*, it was recently stated that the German Federal Government should work for the protection of all threatened minorities. But this German administration is doing that more than practically any other government in the world! At a recent German Federal Parliament debate (*Bundestag*), I sat in the official visitors’ gallery among Baha’i, Alevites, and Sufis who were thankful for the debate.

¹ Cf. Angela Merkel, “Grusswort [5. November 2012],” *EKD Geschäftsstelle der Synode* 20.7 (2012): 2; http://www.ekd.de/download/s12_grusswort_merkel.pdf.

² Thomas Schirrmacher, *Rassismus alte Vorurteile und neue Erkenntnisse* (Holzgerlingen: Hänssler, 2009).

³ Cited in “Befremdung über Merkels Äußerung zu verfolgten Christen,” *Die Welt* (11.06.2012), <http://www.welt.de/newsticker/news3/article110703364/Befremdung-ueber-Merkels-Aeusserung-zu-verfolgten-Christen.html>.

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel correctly stated in her welcoming words at the Synod that the global situation of religious freedom can generally be described as serious and also clearly stated that religious freedom is to be protected in Germany and around the world as an essential human right.⁴ Whoever accuses the Chancellor of only wanting to protect Christians did not listen to her when she spoke at the Synod or any other time.

As far as I am able to tell, no one has said that her statements are generally untrue. A number of people have said—and that would come closer to the truth—that we do not have enough data and that we should be more cautious regarding the available data. For example, I myself have used scientific arguments to contradict the oft mentioned number of 100,000 Christian martyrs worldwide—this number is supposedly five to ten times too high. However, whoever doubts the statements made by the Chancellor should not critique her statement but rather the specialists and studies she references.

For instance, one could look at the new comprehensive study entitled *Christianophobia* by Rupert Shortt.⁵ One could take the August 2011 report of the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life, “Rising Restrictions on Religion,” according to which no religion experiences more oppression in more countries than Christianity, namely in 130 countries; the updates for 2012 and 2013 give even higher numbers.⁶ One could look at publications of the International Institute for Religious Freedom. While it is indeed Evangelical in its orientation, its accredited specialist journal, the *International Journal of Religious Freedom*, has authors from all religions as well as non-religious researchers who publish in it.

I may have made a contribution to this debate since in 2010 my keynote speech at the 47th Federal Annual Meeting of the Protestant Working Group of the CDU/CSU (the CDU is Mrs. Merkel’s party) was entitled “Persecution and Discrimination of Christians in the 21st Century.”⁷ Before my presentation, the German Chancellor gave a clear indication of support for religious freedom and expressed opposition to the persecution of Christians. I made similar statements that I still stand by. Moreover, the

⁴ Merkel, “Grusswort [5. November 2012],” 2.

⁵ Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: A Faith under Attack* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). See also John L. Allen’s *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York: Images, 2013) or Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville: Nelson, 2013).

⁶ See “Rising Restrictions on Religion—One-Third of the World’s Population Experiences an Increase,” August 9, 2011; <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/08/09/rising-restrictions-on-religion2/>.

⁷ Thomas Schirrmacher, “Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen im 21. Jahrhundert,” *Evangelische Verantwortung* 11+12 (2010): 5–10; http://www.cdu-admin.de/image/magazine/pdf/5_10_11_201013_54_16ev_11_12_web_281010.pdf.

data that has been amassed on the state of religious freedom in the last three years reinforce my position. For that reason, I would like to briefly sketch the salient points.

II. *Christianity on the Sunny Side and on the Dark Side of Religious Freedom*

Christianity enjoys the sunny side of religious freedom more than the other major world religions, but the same applies to the dark side. No other major religious community has such a high percentage of members who live in a realm of religious freedom. That is natural, given that almost all earlier “Christian” nations, i.e., nations with a majority Christian population, now grant religious freedom and that most of them are functioning democracies. An exception to the rule is seen in a number of Orthodox countries that find themselves in midfield between democracy and an autocratic state. For that reason, religious freedom is partially limited even if no one dies there for his or her faith.

On the other hand, no other large religious community is continually affected by harassment, even to the degree of threats to life and limb. And even among the smaller religions there are only a few that have comparable percentages. For instance, there are the Baha’i, who largely owe their persecution to their location in Iran and their strong expansion within the Islamic world, or the Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose conscientious objection to military service has led to their imprisonment in many places. And even for them, the percentage of adherents *killed* does not seem to be higher than for Christianity at large.

Recently, the Pew Foundation, located in Washington, has brought together all available international surveys on religious freedom.⁸ In the process, they came to results similar to that of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom, likewise located in Washington, and our International Institute for Religious Freedom: In 64 countries around the world, i.e., one third of all countries, there is no religious freedom or only very limited religious freedom. Unfortunately, these 64 countries account for two-thirds or, more precisely, 70% of the world population. There were 24 countries involved where armed conflict resulted in more than 1,000 deaths and where religious affiliation played a central role. As a result, there have been 18 million refugees worldwide.⁹

⁸ See “Restrictions on Religion,” in *PewResearchCenter: Religion & Public Life*; last update (February 26, 2015); <http://www.pewforum.org/topics/restrictions-on-religion/pages/3/>.

⁹ Cf. <http://www.hudson.org/topics/51-religious-freedom> and the IIRF Reports, and <http://www.iirf.eu/index.php?id=436&L=0>.

Let us look more closely at the 64 countries with respect to the two largest world religions: Only in India is a large number of Muslims living in a non-Muslim country with limited religious freedom. Conversely, only in Russia does a large number of Christians live with a limited level of religious freedom in a country where the majority of the population is Russian Orthodox.

If we disregard India and Russia for a moment, the difference between the situation faced by Christians and Muslims quickly becomes apparent: the remaining 700 million Muslims who live in countries with limited religious freedom or no religious freedom live in Islamic countries.

In contrast, the remaining 200 million Christians living in countries with limited religious freedom or no religious freedom live as minorities in non-Christian countries, spread out predominantly over communist countries and Islamic countries (as well as in India).

This means that although Muslims enjoy much less religious freedom than Christians, since most of them live in Muslim countries, they only notice this in those rare cases where they seek to break out of their religion, for instance, if they wish to become atheists or Christians, or if they do not belong to religious orientations tolerated by the state, as was the case for Shiites recently slain in Pakistan.

III. *Christian Persecution without Parallel*

In which sense does the frequency and great extent of persecution of Christians justify our focusing especially on them? Is it true that the persecution of Christian minorities around the world has taken on such a magnitude that the sheer numbers involved foist them upon us as far as the question of religious freedom is concerned?

It is at the same time difficult to lump everything in the world together or to define the point at which an individual begins to be persecuted or to suffer discrimination. Does it already occur when an individual is concerned that his or her own church could be set on fire during a worship service, or does it only occur when the church is actually set on fire? Is an individual only persecuted if religion is the sole reason for harassment, or is it also the case when religion is only one factor among many?

Violence against Christians ranges from the murder of nuns in India to the torching of churches in Indonesia, the battering of priests in Egypt, and the torture of a recalcitrant pastor in Vietnam, all the way to children being cast out of their families in Turkey or Sri Lanka if they attend Christian worship services.

Hindu fundamentalism is also directed against Muslims. However, there is hardly a parallel to be found anywhere in the world to the 50,000 affected Christians from the Indian state of Orissa who were driven from their homes in 2008/2009, resulting in the death of 500 people and the displacement of the rest—still living in tents.

There is no parallel in the other world religions to the 100,000 Christians on the Maluka Islands of Indonesia who were displaced by force in 2000/2001 (whereby several thousand deaths occurred). In the Sudan and Nigeria, many Christians likewise died—as complicated as the particular situation might be in these countries at the border between Islam and Christianity in Africa.

There is no parallel in the religious world to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Christians from Iraq between the years 2007 and 2009. Above all, currently, this is continuing unfortunately in Syria. An incredible number of refugees are on the move in the Near East, and there is real danger that Iran and Lebanon will not be able to handle this large number of refugees. This is because this displacement is only one aspect of a larger development. Before our eyes, the share of long-established Oriental and Catholic churches in core Islamic countries is drastically shrinking. Every time I meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Istanbul, the number of members of his church in Turkey is smaller, in a country where once millions of Christians lived. The Syrian-Orthodox patriarch reported something similar about Syria to me recently. Moreover, regardless of the outcome of the civil war, Christians in Syria are suffering tremendously, and their future looks dismal. The same is true, but to a lesser degree, about Lebanon. Even in Egypt, the sole core Islamic country in which an Oriental church counts millions of members, the most recent developments point to the end of the centuries long truce with Christians.

Furthermore, practically every day we receive reports from churches that have been set on fire or have been bombed, wherein Christians die. They are seldom from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India but more frequently from Pakistan and Indonesia and continually, however, from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, or Nigeria. And quite frequently, the number of fatalities lies above 20, occasionally over 50. Such reports also increasingly make their way into the Western media. As far as I know, there is nothing comparable with respect to other religions. At most, the fatalities as a result of inner-Islamic conflicts could be mentioned.

Whoever wants to find comparable dramatic events in history would have to go back to the persecution of Jews in the Third Reich or the bloody turmoil between Hindus and Muslims during the time of the founding of India

and Pakistan or—again, as part of the persecution of Christians—the mass murders conducted by Stalin or Mao.

An additional example illustrates this. In many countries, it is dangerous to leave Islam, regardless of whether one converts to atheism, Baha’i, or forms of Islam that are viewed as sects. However, leaving Islam most frequently occurs in the direction of Christianity. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* has written: “Since the influence of fundamentalists has increased, the pressure on Christian minorities has intensified. The Protestant Church in Germany holds Christians to be the most frequently persecuted faith community in the world. ... Even more threatened than traditional Christians, however, are Muslims who convert to Christianity.” Further, “Apostasy, i.e., falling away from Islam, can be punishable by death according to Islamic law—and in Iran and Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, Mauretania, Pakistan, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia the death penalty still applies.” Remarkably, “The Egyptian Minister of Religion defends the lack of a death penalty for converts from Islam in Egyptian law—because apostasy from Islam is already the equivalent of high treason.”¹⁰

IV. *Why Are Christians So Persecuted?*

In the Sunday issue of the major German newspaper *Die Welt* (June 6, 2006), Till-R. Stoldt commented that “eighty percent of all people persecuted worldwide are Christians. Never before have they been more intensely persecuted. And nowhere are they more often discriminated against than in Islamic countries. Those are the findings of the International Society for Human Rights and the World Evangelical Alliance.” He continues,

No regime in the world wants to be caught shedding blood. Most of the time public critique from a Western government is sufficient to prevent the killing of converts in Iran, Afghanistan, or Nigeria. However, European politicians do not consistently exert their influence, about which promoters of human rights complain. Nevertheless, solidarity with Christians could aid in this clash of cultures, because Muslim and Hindu governments and aid organizations primarily help their own people. This selectivity toward those needing help forces the West to focus on those who are “not worthy” of help. This of course is not a reason to copy such selectivity. Rather, it means that in the future we need to be as deeply involved on behalf of Christians as for Islamic Kurds, Bosnians, Kosovans, or detainees in Guantánamo Bay. Tortured and threatened Christians also turn their hope to Europe because they are slandered and persecuted in Muslim countries as the Western world’s “fifth leg.” However, EU countries ignore this responsibility far more often than the USA does and often refrain from providing full assistance.

¹⁰ Juliane von Mittelstaedt, Christoph Schult, Daniel Steinvorth, Tholo Thielke, and Volkhard Windfuhr, “Religionen: Geduldeter Hass,” *Der Spiegel* 8 (2010): 96, 99; February 2, 2010; <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-69174713.html>.

We want to ask specifically why it is that Christians are most often affected by religious liberty violations. Reasons for the persecution of Christians are complex, and most often not purely religious. Political, cultural, nationalistic, economic, and personal motives can play an important role. This is even clear in the Old Testament. In the case of Queen Jezebel, hatred for God and his prophets was mixed with a desire for power as well as personal enrichment (1 Kgs 16–19). In John’s Revelation, hatred for the church is accompanied by political and economic reasons. Another example is the artisans, goldsmiths, and silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:23–29), who felt that their welfare was endangered (v. 27) by Paul’s successful proclamation of the gospel and therefore instigated a riot. When the slave owners realized that they would lose revenues after a fortune-telling spirit was driven out of their slave, they had Paul and Silas taken into custody (Acts 16:16–24). Thus, we should be aware that the reasons behind the persecution of Christians or the restriction of religious liberty are often complex and that persecution is entangled with existing problems of the respective culture and society.

Please note that if an adherent of a hated religion and bearer of a hated skin color is tortured, one should not downplay the religious component or the racism involved. Racism and religious hatred are both detestable, and if they occur simultaneously, they have to be fought on both fronts.

After this qualification, let us return to the question of why Christians are so often affected, and in reality affected far above the average, by restrictions of religious liberty.

1. Christianity is by far the largest religion in the world.

For that reason, human rights violations relating to religious affiliation are most common among Christians.

2. Christianity is experiencing phenomenal growth around the world, in particular in its evangelical form.

This increasingly threatens the position of leading religions in numerous countries. There is increasing competition between the two largest world religions, Christianity and Islam, and this is occurring at the expense of other religions.¹¹ However, regarding content, Islam has historically been oriented against Christianity. This is a confrontation that never occurred

¹¹ All the following numbers are from David Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), and from updates in the ecumenical *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, available at www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/IBMR2006.pdf. Numbers from other researchers are similar. Numbers referring solely to Evangelicals are the most conservative, as most estimates reflect significantly higher numbers.

between Islam and Buddhism. Christianity has adapted to this challenge over the past 1,400 years, and in this respect, the confrontation carries a considerable amount of unnecessary baggage.

Only the three largest world religions are presently growing faster than the world population. The world population is expanding at a rate of 1.22%. Hinduism is growing at a rate of 1.38%, primarily because births are exceeding deaths. Islam is growing at 1.9% for the same reason, as well as because of economic and political measures, and missionary activities. Christianity is growing at a rate of 1.25%, whereas missionally active evangelical Christianity is growing at an enormous rate of 2.11%. This development is making up for the shrinking of Christianity in the Western world. A net increase of 5.4 million evangelicals is being added yearly to the currently estimated total of 255 million evangelicals. This translates to a daily increase of 14,800.

The point is not to take sides, but rather to make the observation that growth in non-Western Christianity is producing a tension worldwide. Christianity has tripled in size in Africa and Asia since 1970. In each of the non-Christian countries of China, India, and Indonesia, considerably more people go to church on Sundays than in all of Western Europe combined.

That, of course, leads to all sorts of tensions. In India, for example, Christians have for more than a century made casteless education possible. Millions of casteless people have become Christians, because otherwise no one looks after them. According to the constitution, there is to be a certain percentage of casteless people in all state occupations and state authorities. Suddenly, there are Christians in influential positions everywhere, far in excess of their proportion to the overall population in the country. A host of other such examples could be mentioned.

3. Most non-Christian religions have little success to show in missions or do very little in the way of missions.

Moreover, they often employ political, economic, or social pressure instead of, or in addition to, peaceful attempts at conversion. In recent decades, Christianity has made significant progress toward renouncing violence and political and social pressure, while at the same time turning toward more content-oriented conversion work and peaceful missionary efforts.

The situation in Northern Ireland, until recently, illustrates what the rule was up to 400 years ago in Christianity. Today this leaves Christians aghast and is completely rejected. In the meantime, peaceful missions work and selfless social involvement have become the trademarks of Christianity. The number of foreign full-time Christian missionaries is estimated at 420,000, the number of full-time church workers at 5.1 million.

4. Countries with a colonial history are looking to regain their own identity by recovering traditional religions, and they increasingly use legal means and/or force against “foreign” religions.

In India, for instance, Hinduism is promoted against Islam and Christianity; in Indonesia, Islam is set against Christianity and Hindu-Buddhism; and, in Sri Lanka and Nepal, Buddhism is advanced against Christianity and Islam.

5. In many countries, there is a growing connection made between nationalism and religion.

When one thinks of India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan alone, one-third of the world population is affected. In Turkey, Turks are expected to be Muslims. Turks who become Christians fight in courts for years in order to have their religious affiliation changed on their passports. Christianity in Turkey, as well as in other places, stands in the way of nationalism. After a difficult path, the Christian faith itself has hopefully taken final leave of the connection between nationalism and Christianity. There are exceptions such as Northern Ireland, again, until recently, or a few national orthodox churches, but they confirm the rule.

6. Christianity and certain of its representatives have in many places become distinct and clear voices on behalf of human rights and democracy.

Christian involvement for the cause of the weak and of minorities, which has not always or in all places been very pronounced, has in many locations become the trademark of Christianity. This is so much the case that Christians have become the prime targets of human rights opponents and tyrants in Latin America and North Korea, mostly because they are just seen as organized opponents. Moreover, Christians increasingly have global networks at their disposal, which can often be activated against human rights violations and can produce worldwide reactions in the press.

7. Closely related is the fact that Christianity often endangers well-established connections between religion and industry.

Drug bosses in Latin America that have Catholic priests or Baptist pastors killed, for instance, surely do not do this because they are interested in an opposing religion. Rather, it is because the church leaders are often the only ones who stand up for native farmers or indigenous people groups and therefore stand in the way of Mafia bosses.

8. *The peacefulness of Christian churches, which often appears as true pacifism, invites the use of force since no resistance is feared. On a global stage, Muslims fear American retaliation but not a reaction of indigenous Christians.*

Christians who believe in the separation of church and state often demonstrate this in the form of pacifism. Since no resistance is anticipated, Christians become fair game. For instance, I have discussed with church leaders in Indonesia whether or not they should defend their homes and families against marauding, heavily armed gangs of Jihad militia. Individual Christians have in certain cases defended their families with the use of force. Who in the security of the West can criticize them? Still, Christian churches have in the end agreed on non-violence, but sometimes at a price. In Indonesia, incidentally, violence is, for the most part, directed not against Christian missionary activities but rather against “Christian” (in Indonesia, mainly Catholic) islands on which Christians have for centuries lived undisturbed in their own settlements and are suddenly raided by heavily armed militia.

9. *Christians are often equated with the hated West.*

To be sure, the West has for a while no longer been predominantly Christian. McWorld or pornography, which evokes images of the enemy for many, has actually nothing to do with Christianity. Churches in the Third World nowadays, practically without exception, operate independently and are under indigenous leadership. Still, native Christians are unable to escape suspicion. Turkish Christians are suspected of conducting espionage for the CIA. Chinese Christians are viewed as underlings of the USA or of the “Western” pope, and despite all the Western monetary support, “Christians” in Palestine are still considered underlings of Zionism.

10. *The international nature of Christianity is regarded as a danger.*

As Paul wrote, Christians ultimately see themselves as people who, beyond having their national citizenship, are bound above all to other heavenly citizens (Phil 3:20). According to Jesus, the church understands herself to be multicultural and extending beyond national borders (Matt 28:18). This can be seen as a threat because of the enormous international personal, idealistic, and financial interconnections. Christian theology has for a long time been internationally oriented, with Christian theologians pursuing an ongoing dialogue with their peers from around the world. Christians view this situation as an enrichment; non-Christians, however, often view it as an incalculable power factor.

The Chinese government “cannot” and does not want to believe that no one is directing the millions of evangelicals in house churches in China.

Nor can it believe that, unfortunately, these churches often break away from each other and go separate ways. It cannot believe either that the pope only appoints indigenous bishops and does not seek to interfere in China's political affairs. This is in spite of the fact that in Poland the pope recently prohibited the operation of an overly political Catholic radio station. The Chinese government says yes to a Chinese Catholic church, but no to a church subordinated to the pope.

The Chinese government is anxious that an influential organization in China could be run from a foreign country. China has this in common with many countries. It would therefore be beneficial for politicians to suggest that Asian church leaders meet with Chinese politicians and party members and let them know that the West does not run the large Asian churches, for instance in India, but that these churches are completely under indigenous leadership.

As a point of criticism, some American Christian missions work, and occasionally that of other countries, can give the false impression that there is a worldwide US conquest strategy. Since American Christian television reaches the entire world, this can intimidate others. Also, the use of the previously common word "crusade" may be taken literally by many.

V. Five Negative Global Developments

In what follows, we consider the five most frightful developments limiting religious freedom. In particular, we look at restrictions on Christians' freedom and what restrictions are currently increasing.

1. Religious Fundamentalism

The first place belongs indisputably to fundamentalism, in particular, militant fundamentalist movements in Islam, in Hinduism (above all in India), and in Buddhism (above all in Sri Lanka). The term "fundamentalism" should not be defined by its usage in the 1960s and 1970s in its association with a particular view of the Holy Scriptures. Also, journalists who have no specialized knowledge about religion often hurl wrong notions in newspapers and television broadcasting programs. Rather, "fundamentalism" should be defined as a socio-religious and academic term. Here, I can only briefly sketch out what I have presented in my book *Fundamentalism: When Religion Becomes Dangerous*.¹²

¹² Thomas Schirrmacher, *Fundamentalism: When Religion Becomes Dangerous*, trans. Richard McClary, The WEA Global Issues Series 14 (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2013).

Fundamentalism does not mean one has a truth claim. If that were the case, most people on earth would be fundamentalists, and only the good people, above all Western Europeans who are proud of *not* knowing the truth and of always being skeptical, would not be fundamentalists. If the term was used in this sense, you would have to look hard to find a non-fundamentalist in Africa. Instead, fundamentalism is what we are all fearful of. Or, according to my definition, fundamentalism means “to assert a truth claim with violence,” that is, a “militant truth claim.” The term fundamentalism, which became prominent in 1979, was the term coined for the Ayatollah Khomeini, who imposed a certain Islamic direction on all the people in Iran and which remains to this day in that country.

To consider something to be absolutely true or false does not as such make an individual dangerous. This becomes a problem for society when this individual derives from that the assumption that he may enforce his belief in thought and practice on others and the entire society. And this sort of fundamentalism has appeared in all world religions and is responsible for the large number of Christian martyrs, as well as victims in other religions. If you reduce the persecution of Christians to people who die, then you would quickly observe that the main culprits are actually not governments or population groups, but above all militant fundamentalist movements that in most cases are waging war against their own countries—Iran and Sri Lanka are here as much the exception as Islamist movements in other countries, tolerated or even supported by Saudi Arabia or Pakistan.

We need to differentiate between majority Islam and Islamism, between majority Hinduism and that which one calls Hindutva in India—fundamentalist Hinduism, responsible, for instance, for the dead in Orissa; and between majority Buddhism—for instance, the Buddhism of the Dalai Lama, and fundamentalist Buddhism as one finds in Sri Lanka where the government acts against Christians and Hindus. All of these fundamentalist movements in the world religions stem from the last century, in the 1920s and 1930s, and emerged in the final phase of colonialism, above all in India (then Pakistan) and Egypt. They all represent new forms of their respective religions, which before this were not in existence.

Islamism asserts the following: An Islamic country can only be ruled by the Sharia and inhabited by Muslims. Everybody else is out of place there. By the way, the first who were affected by this in Pakistan were the Ahmadiyya, who from the viewpoint of Muslims are a Muslim “sect.” Many of them were killed as apostates and had no place in the new post World War II Pakistan.

It is similar in India. However, it took much longer before the ideology of the Hindutva gained favor. In a democracy, this came in the form of a party

that rose to power, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is the political wing of the largest voluntary corps in the world, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Every place where this party co-governs as a coalition party or even forms the government, laws are passed against other religions. Christians and Muslims are slaughtered, as was the case in the state of Orissa, where more than 500 individuals were bloodily mishandled and killed in broad daylight, and tens of thousands were driven out. As the new prime minister of India is not only the head of BJP, but a former active member of RSS, Christians expect things to become worse.

The party was born out of the idea, from the 1920s and 1930s, that India solely belongs to the God Rama. Indeed, since the term “Hinduism” was first used by the English for purposes of census taking in order to consolidate the innumerable Indian religions, this is of course not simply a radical form of classical Hinduism. The idea that the country belongs to a single god is a completely new theory and is borrowed from monotheistic religions. There are still members of the media and scholars who disseminate the idea that fundamentalism is anti-modern and always points to an earlier golden age. But in fact, fundamentalism supports highly modern movements by shifting theological elements into the center, elements which had never been present in the history of the respective religions. Rama being the most important god is an example of that. In the process, a considerable deviation from the classical embodiment of the religion occurs. Also, whoever argues that Osama Bin Laden can only be understood as a “medieval die-hard” overlooks that al Qaeda is an ultramodern movement. For example, the office of suicide attackers is found neither in the Koran, nor in the hadith, nor in the course of Islamic history. As this office has being further expanded, in a completely un-Islamic manner women and children have been able to become suicide bombers.

In addition to its direct influence, fundamentalism has caused a devastating development. Thus, particularly in heavily populated countries such as India, Indonesia, and Nigeria, in which the great world religions used to co-exist peacefully, now unrest and violence are stirred. If the state does not move against this in an uncompromising fashion, as has often been the case with Hinduism in India or with Islam in Indonesia, the minority of a religion—the followers mostly range between 1% and 5%—can destabilize entire countries and trouble the peaceful relationships of tens of millions of people. For instance, in Indonesia more than 200 million Muslims live peacefully with 23 million Christians and want to continue that way. Yet there is also a minority of one million sympathizers—primarily sponsored by Saudi Arabia—that is responsible for the killing of many Christians and members of unconventional Islamic groups.

Fundamentalists also theologically justify forcing others to live as they do. From a Christian point of view, only the state can act against their militancy. Only the state has the monopoly on power in order to fight, prevent, or punish violence. In Iraq, one cannot ask Christians to take care of themselves. For Christians have unlearned—partly for theological reasons—how to defend themselves. They cannot employ karate, far less use a machine gun. If they or Coptics in Egypt are suddenly threatened by deadly violence, they will either be defended by the state or be at the mercy of their enemies. Indeed, Christians are convinced that it is not their task and their right to shoot back and to solve problems in this way. Rather, only the state can and may see to it that there is peace and justice. For that reason, we again and again turn to governments here on earth, even if we repeatedly hear that this is one-sided. To whom should we otherwise turn?

Since fundamentalism is the number one factor worldwide that triggers the persecution of Christians (and is also responsible for the persecution of other religions), we do not have another choice than to become involved politically and to move the state to stem this type of fundamentalist religion.

The same is the case in the German speaking realm. The Swiss Evangelical Alliance, to the astonishment of many others, spoke out firmly against the ban on minarets prior to the referendum. Indeed, we want religious freedom for everyone among us, also for Muslims. And we want to do everything possible to coexist peacefully with them. Furthermore, we are glad about the great majority of Muslims who want the same. However, we also have to act with all the means at one's disposal according to the rule of law against Muslim groups that have weapons, terrorist funding, or literature promoting violence in the basements of their mosques. We act so not primarily because they are Muslims but rather because they have weapons in their basements. If churches had weapons in their basements, they should also be searched. German constitutional protection on the federal and state levels is very effective, such that practically every mosque that is searched is one where a find is made. The freedom of religion does not protect people and fundamentalist movements who want to act violently against other people or the state. A democracy capable of defending itself has to act against people who call for violence in the name of religion, regardless of which religion.

According to our Christian convictions, the state correctly holds a monopoly on the use of force. We want to proclaim the gospel in peace and therefore can do nothing but turn to the state against violent people who want to kill our friends in the name of a religion. And if the relevant state does not react, then we have nothing to do other than to turn to other states with the plea to exercise their influence.

2. Religious Nationalism

Second place—in a very similar manner—belongs to nationalism. Because of the shifting of masses of people around the world, there are more and more countries in which it is very difficult to link nationalism to common lineage, a common history, a common language, or the like. There are more and more countries and parties which, in order to save nationalism or to incite popular support among the public, play the “religion” card. A Turk is Muslim, a resident of Sri Lanka is Buddhist, and an Indian is Hindu.

This is not the fundamentalist variety that directly advocates violence. However, it is a worldwide political development in more and more countries. Affiliation to a country is tied to religion, i.e., naturally the majority religion. By this I do not want to say that we can completely remove ourselves from this. Hungary has just been inundated by Christian nationalism. When several years ago the independent American televangelist Pat Robertson called for all Muslims to leave the United States since the United States only belongs to Christians, I protested loudly in the name of the World Evangelical Alliance. The next day the daily newspapers in India were full of text statements like this: “We have always said that all the Christians should get out of India.” Fortunately, the reaction of the World Evangelical Alliance was mentioned as well.

As a German, self-criticism is also in order: Indeed, the emphasis on Christianity in German politics can sometimes sound dangerously like it actually does not refer to the content of the Christian faith but more to the sentiment, “I am not a Muslim.” Accordingly, Germany belongs to the Christians, not the Muslims. As a politically involved and committed Christian, I quite certainly believe that we have central values to present to our society. But please, let it be for the benefit of everyone!

For example, at the end of worship services for fallen German soldiers in Afghanistan, it is often difficult to differentiate clearly between taking a final farewell from fellow soldiers in a church ceremony and a ceremony where a final farewell is taken from the German armed forces. While traditionally there was a pause between these two ceremonies, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two. Further, it can even happen that the minister of defense preaches in the church service! The impression should not be given that Christians have died in Afghanistan in the battle against Islamists or that the state and the church have fused in matters relating to the army. I acknowledge that some provisions should be made to respect our ecclesiastical and military traditions, but we should remain vigilant.

Religious nationalism is also the great danger in the Arab rebellion throughout a number of Arab countries. Nothing actually unites Arab societies any

longer, as they have completely ruptured. In this context, someone can quickly take advantage of the religion card and say: “There is only a future for the country under a religious flag” and exclude all non-Muslims.

3. The Displacement of Long-Established Christian Denominations from Islamic Countries

The third considerable development, which is not completely independent from the first two, is the displacement of long-established Christian denominations from core countries in the Islamic world. If you look at a world map showing the suppression of religious freedom or a map indicating Christian persecution, you will be able to identify the entire core regions of Islam as a tight-knit problematic zone.

I am suspicious of most conspiracy theories, and as an academic I only want to state something when “hard facts” can be cited as evidence. However, whoever looks long enough at this question sometimes has to ask whether, in addition to the general development in the Islamic world, there is not also a corporately acting, central “string puller,” systematically seeing to it that in one country after the other long-established Christians are driven out of the Islamic countries. This can occur through the use of direct violence, or it can occur through unbearable living conditions and gradual emigration. In the meantime, the Islamic world is—apart from Southeast Asia—almost completely “Jew-free,” and if the development seen in recent years continues, it will be “Christian-free”—apart from Southeast Asia.

In the case of Turkey, for example, seldom is a Christian killed there. Over the past few years, three Protestants, two Orthodox, and one Catholic were killed. However, if you visit Greek Orthodox churches, you will notice that predominantly older people, mostly women, attend. Either they can no longer move away, or they do not want to move away. The families, i.e., the children, have long since made their way to the West due to everyday discrimination. This Christian migration out of core Islamic countries is a dramatic development—especially if you know the following: Because this type of Christianity is often connected with ancient languages (among them the language Jesus used) and preserves ancient cultural assets, the fading away of these churches implies not only the loss of churches but also of cultures. What Copts pass on is predominantly Egyptian culture from a time before Islam conquered Egypt. The Copts pass on Christian culture prior to the time of Islam and Arabization and even elements of pre-Christian Egyptian culture.

One cannot simply say: “What’s the difference? If these Christians are able to live in Canada in peace and prosperity, aren’t things better for

them?” We are talking about peoples and cultures whose culture and religion are bound to a homeland, to a particular language and region which can only be taken to and maintained in another country in a very limited fashion. Even when we as Christians in Germany endeavor to at least settle Syrian Orthodox Christians near a Syrian Orthodox Church—so that on Sundays they can at least go to their own church—it seldom works. Indeed, the state decides according to completely different criteria, and refugees are simply divided up and “poured from the watering can” into different political municipalities. Thus, it can happen that Christians coming to Germany are immediately threatened again by similar fundamentalist Muslims in their new residential environment. And the nearest Christian of their type, who speaks their language, is so far away that, as asylum seekers, they cannot even visit him or her.

This observation also applies in a very similar way to all religious minorities in the Islamic world, including Muslim minorities. For instance, it is estimated that the predominant Turkish Alevites make up 13% of the population. However, they are not tolerated in Turkey. In the past, they were severely persecuted and are nowadays severely discriminated against. Germany is their number one refuge and destination country. They integrate themselves well here since Sharia is not part of their type of Islam and, for example, they have extended a freer role to women. Almost all German politicians of Turkish descent are Alevites or of Alevite descent. Another example are the Bahá'í from Iran. They encounter more problems than Christians in the core Islamic countries but live freely in Israel, the USA, and Germany.

It remains that the overall threat to religious freedom hits Christians hardest since they are numerically so strong. Furthermore, they make up longstanding people groups that have lived locally for 1,700 to 1,900 years, not to mention during the early days of Christendom prior to the majority conversion to Christianity.

I do not know anyone who at the moment knows how this process should be halted. For that to happen, one would have to challenge the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is a group of 57 states claiming to speak for 1.5 billion Muslims.¹³ In their charter, they state that they only campaign for Islamic minorities—indeed only for those in non-Islamic countries. On the one hand, and in no uncertain terms, they say that they only stand up for their own people. Efforts are not undertaken for Islamic

¹³ For all that follows, see the website, www.oic-oci.org; see also, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_für_Islamische_Zusammenarbeit.

minorities in their own countries. At the International Institute for Religious Freedom, we have conducted a small research project to determine whom the OIC actually represents. One quarter of the alleged 1.5 billion people whom the OIC represents are not Muslims. They are people who live in Islamic countries, who are used in order to establish a high number of Muslims, but who are in fact not Muslims. Thus, 80% of those people who are not Muslims are Christians. That means about one-fifth, namely 300 million people. When the OIC again becomes active for its cause at the UN, one would have to ask about the status of the hundreds of millions of non-Muslims in their own countries.

There are no longer any states that are Christian on the basis of conviction. And even if there were any, they would have the Christian conviction to speak for and care for every citizen and not only for Christians. Thus, it is only the free countries on earth—e.g., the religiously neutral and once Christian Germany, as well as the religiously neutral and once Muslim Mali, which can counter the OIC.

4. Limitations on Freedom of Religion Due to Compulsory Registration

The fourth global development to mention is the limitation on religious freedom due to compulsory registration. Around the world in many countries, we have the increasing problem of more and more complicated registration processes. Above all, smaller religions are exposed to the continued suspicion that they are being controlled remotely from outside the country, that they are conducting money laundering, or that they are dangerous for the domestic freedom of the country. One may often want to understand this as a reaction to terrorism. However, laws are mostly passed that affect everyone and lead to a situation where a growing number of Christians around the globe suddenly land in the realm of illegality—and I am not only speaking of Evangelical Christians who already had house churches and already had lived underground in many countries. Rather, this impacts an increasing number of Christians of all denominations. This illegal status brings about severe consequences. For instance, one may not own a building, theological training cannot be conducted, it might be difficult to enter certain professions, or an individual may not work for the state or study, and the like.

There are Christian minorities in Turkey that have existed since before the Ottoman Empire but are just as affected as Evangelical churches that have been founded only recently. The Catholic Church celebrates its worship services in the capital city of Ankara in a building belonging to the embassy

of France, i.e., a location that is extraterritorial since it is not allowed to do so on Turkish soil. The representative of the Protestant Church of Germany to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch is formally employed by the German embassy. Otherwise, he would not be allowed to be there. The old seminary building of the oriental church on the half islands of Halki is empty since theological training is forbidden. Christians have to file suit to receive placement in higher education—with uncertain outcomes. Being employed by the police or becoming an officer in the army is unthinkable.

This is a very large and complex topic, so we could only point to it briefly. In short, mostly Christian minorities have to suffer around the world, even if, depending on the country, other religions and their minorities are involved.

5. The Highest Price Has to Be Paid by Converts from Islam and Hinduism

In this final point, I want briefly to address a development that is not necessarily in line with the other four, that is, I want to speak about a numerically small group that, however, pays the highest price for their being Christian. They are mostly “converts,” are called “apostates” by Islamists and Hindutvas, and come out of certain world religions to embrace the Christian faith. This entire issue is closely tied to the first development.

The highest price paid around the world is paid by people who convert to the Christian faith from religions that either on the whole or according to their fundamentalist wing have no provision for leaving. Alternatively, leaving the religion is punished. This is true in countries in which converts are killed, as in Pakistan, as well as in countries where individuals cannot be sure about their lives and in most cases have to be smuggled out of their country, e.g., Egypt (and it is here that the Coptic Church in particular is active). However, it also applies to countries where reconversion is compulsory, as is the case in a number of states in India where reconversion to Hinduism is involved, or in Sri Lanka where reconversion to Buddhism is involved.

Unfortunately, long-standing churches—remotely controlled from the USA—are all too ready to vilify these converts. These limitations to religious freedom even occur where there are no anti-conversion laws, as in Greece, even within the European Union. I could fill volumes with sad examples, whereby the statements do not withstand closer examination. People in the West would rather believe the representatives of the large churches than let those involved speak for themselves. Even if there are black sheep everywhere, and some criticism might be justified, Christian ecumenism still has a lot to learn at this point.

The many anti-conversion laws around the world have precisely this

background. For them, it is not at all a matter of preventing conversion brought about through coercion, force, brainwashing, or financial promises. Otherwise, Christians would seldom come into view. It is truly a matter of preventing and punishing such religious conversion. Or, even as violence in the Indian state of Orissa has clearly shown, it is a matter of compulsory reconversion with state support. In Orissa, it appears that those involved are hauled by mobs into Hindu temples where they have to endure Hindu rituals. If they nevertheless refuse to become Hindus after these events, they are trampled to death.

Just how insane the anti-conversion laws are is demonstrated by the example where giving a Bible is viewed to be bribery, although Bibles are found on the market at ridiculously low prices all over the world.

Combating converts has come into fashion. It is often traceable back to a fanatic mob, whereby the state allows a mob to do as it likes, without officially being a participant. This is the rule in Pakistan or in Sri Lanka. And even where there is massive persecution of Christians, the following applies: Things are even worse for converts.

And all too often converts are also not safe when they flee to free countries. Even if, as a general rule, German security officials fortunately respond immediately to calls for assistance from converts—which is not the case, for instance, in Great Britain or Austria and for which reason converts willingly relocate to Germany—their situation is not ideal in Germany. Converts from Islam, who have received asylum in Germany, often still live at an unknown location with fake names. Fortunately, an official name change is allowed. Perpetrators can be relatives, but perpetrators can also be the foreign countries' secret service agencies. There have been harrowing reports on this in various large daily newspapers and magazines, and on television and in books (e.g., *Sabatina*).

Thanks to globalization, the plight of converts is placed directly before our eyes. I can only call upon us all: Wherever you have the opportunity and as far as it relates to people who have come to the Christian faith from other religions—regardless of their denomination—and who now are experiencing threats from their relatives, or from fundamentalists prepared to use violence, or who would be coerced to reconvert: Have an open heart, an open house, an open purse, and an open church. Speak with politicians and pastors about these people. There are not many of them, but they are the ones who pay the highest price for believing in our Lord Jesus Christ. They are the ones among us who in fact directly embody the cross. If only one member of the body of Christ suffers, then all the members of the body of Christ suffer.

Witnessing in Word and Deed in the Context of Religious Persecution

PHILIP TACHIN

Abstract

Witnessing in word and deed in the context of religious persecution is a challenge. The issue of “word and deed gospel” concerns not only the living of blameless lives; it also involves extending active love towards unbelievers. To show charity towards a harmless unbeliever is easier than to do the same towards a harmful one. In other words, we are asking, can we truly love a harmful unbeliever to the extent of demonstrating good deeds to him or her, or are we permitted simply to maintain a disposition of non-hatred towards that person? This question can be restated as the questions answered by this research: Is it possible to witness in love by word and deed under religious persecution? What are the theological foundations for “word and deed” evangelism in the context of persecution? What are the preconditions for effective witness under persecution? The argument for the necessity of both word and deed in evangelism is built on the Christological structures of the person and work of Christ and the specific teachings of Christ that our deeds are as critical as our words in the proclamation of the gospel, even in the current context of global religious terrorism. The purpose of this research is to deepen our understanding of the truth that witnessing in word and deed is the most comprehensive evangelistic approach, even in hostile environments. The goal of this perspective is to inspire zeal and courage for a deliberate pursuit of the mission of God until his kingdom is fully realized.

I. Introduction

Witnessing is an essential concept in the proclamation of the gospel. In the Old Testament Jewish culture, bearing witness or giving testimony was such a serious undertaking that only credible people were allowed to do so. Those who were to bear witness or testify about a matter were expected to possess a great deal of knowledge of the matter in question; otherwise, there could be severe consequences. False witnesses were liable to severe punishments. “The Sadducees held that only when the falsely accused had been executed, the false witnesses should be put to death; the Pharisees, that false witnesses were liable to be executed the moment the death sentence had been passed on the falsely accused.”¹ In the New Testament, *martyreō* means to “testify, address solemnly; insist, urge.” Christ said, *kai esesthe mou martyres* (“and you will be my witnesses”) (Acts 1:8). Matthew Henry argues that some have even translated this passage as “*And you shall be martyrs to me, or my martyrs, for they attested the truth of the gospel with their sufferings, even unto death.*”² Such a translation would follow the precedence of the KJV and GNV in Acts 22:20, which translates *martyros*, referring to Stephen, as “martyr.”

By calling on his disciples to be his witnesses, Jesus called upon their ability to testify, as they had been acquainted with his life, work, and bodily resurrection. This means Jesus’s call to his disciples to witness for him was a call to die: as subsequent events would show, those who persecuted them deemed their testimony to be false and so executed them as liars and perjurers (*martyrs*, Acts 22:20; Heb 11; 12:1; Rev 1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 11:3; 17:6; and *martyria*, Rev 1:9; 6:9; 20:4). Christians have been persecuted up to our time on the grounds that their testimony of the bodily resurrection of Christ is false. Jesus himself was persecuted and crucified on the assumption that his claims to divinity were false and blasphemous.

II. An Overview of Current Global Religious Persecution

Religious persecution is persecution by governments and other groups against adherents of one or more particular religions. Since its inception,

¹ Paul Levertoff, “Witness,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), <http://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/witness.html>.

² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Salem Web Network, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/>.

Christianity has been the most persecuted religion in the whole world.³ John Allen argues that “the world is witnessing the rise of an entire new generation of Christian martyrs. The carnage is occurring on such a vast scale that it represents not only the most dramatic Christian story of our time, but arguably the premier human rights challenge of this era as well.”⁴ However, Nelson Jones tries to water down the gory nature of the specific target of Christians as an endangered religious group, saying, “If Christians are persecuted in many parts of the world, so are Muslims, Hindus, atheists, Buddhists and Jews.”⁵ To him, “we are dealing with group rivalries, hatred of minorities, political struggles and only rarely a persecution based in the specifics of Christian theology.”⁶ This is too simplistic and falls short of explaining the nature of “rivalry” that he proposes. At least several contexts will not be compatible with such a conclusion. How is this true of Christian minorities in Iraq, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, China, East Timor, Burma, Iran, Indonesia, Libya, Nigeria, and other places? In most cases, Muslim fundamentalists rise up against Christians with either the slightest excuse or with no provocation at all.

Persecution of the Christian church, especially by religious groups, mainly Islamic, has been increasing over time. In countries where Christians are minorities, the situation is exacerbated. Current global Information and Communication Technology (ICT) networks have facilitated connections between Boko Haram in Nigeria, Taliban in Afghanistan, Al Shabab in Somalia and Kenya, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb, ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and fundamentalist movements in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Niger, Mauritania, Mali, Sudan, Chad, and Cameroon that have spread from the Arab Spring. With these religious groups growing in strength in many regions of the world, Christians who are the primary targets have suffered irreparable losses. According to *The World Watch List 2015*, Christians in fifty countries suffer the greatest of all persecutions just for their faith in Jesus Christ.⁷

³ Prominent voices around the world have acknowledged this: Pope Benedict XVI in January 2011; Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, in November 2012; and David Cameron, British Prime Minister, on April 10, 2014. See also John L. Allen Jr., *The Global War on Christians* (Colorado Springs: Image, 2013); Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: A Faith under Attack* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); and Kelly James Clark, “The Most Persecuted Religion in the World,” *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kelly-james-clark/christianity-most-persecuted-religion_b_2402644.html 01/04/2013.

⁴ Nelson Jones, citing John Allen’s *The Global War on Christians*, in “Belief, disbelief and beyond belief,” *New Statesman*, <http://www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/2014/04/are-christians-really-world-s-most-persecuted-religious-group>.

⁵ Jones, “Belief, disbelief and beyond belief.”

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “World Watch List,” *Open Doors USA*, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>.

Open Doors USA reports that each month at least 322 Christians are killed for their faith, 214 churches and Christians' properties are destroyed, and Christians suffer 722 incidents in the form of violence such as beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests, and forced marriages.⁸ This report shows that the growth of the extreme horror of organized religious persecution in many nations by governments and religious sects is a grand battle that the cosmic evil forces are waging against the church.

The struggle with the horror of religious persecution in our time, such as is exhibited by Boko Haram and ISIS, strikes the human emotions so deeply that it cannot be easily put aside.⁹ Modern technology avails us with the opportunity of seeing such horrors as these Islamic militants gruesomely chopping off the heads of their innocent victims. The question is whether family members of those directly affected or those of us who share in the suffering of the global Christian family will be willing to lovingly share the gospel of Christ with our persecutors.

This brings to mind the struggle that the prophet Jonah had in his time. In his own context, the Ninevites' actions were tantamount to terrorism against Israel, and they deserved condemnation under the wrath of God without being given the opportunity to hear the word of God for possible repentance from their evil ways. God demonstrated to him that his feelings and expectation of the destruction of his enemies was not appropriate.

Islamic violence in Nigeria has a history that spans three decades. It used to consist of the mobilization of mobs armed with machetes, cutlasses, and sticks who would attack and kill Christians and burn down churches. The recurrence of religious violence has reduced opportunities for evangelism in the extreme north. Today, Islamic violence against Christians in northern Nigeria has increased to a deadly level with the emergence of Boko Haram, which receives massive funding from unrevealed sources and such highly sophisticated weaponry that it has even overpowered the Nigerian armed forces. Abu Qaqa, one of the leaders of the sect, has emphasized time and again that Nigeria can only have peace if Islam becomes the state religion.¹⁰ Though Muslims too have suffered violence from the sect, Christians have been the main targets; many parents have had their daughters kidnapped, and some have even died from heart attacks as a result of the emotional

⁸ "Christian Persecution," *Open Doors USA*, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>.

⁹ J. Nelson Jennings, "Christian Mission and 'Glocal' Violence in 2006 A.D./1427 H," in *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, ed. Keith E. Eitel, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 15 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 20.

¹⁰ Abu Qaqa, *Punch*, July 11, 2012, 2.

trauma. In the city of Jos, it is extremely difficult for many Christians to have anything in common with Muslims again. The situation in the politically, economically, ethnically, and religiously complex Plateau region of Nigeria has always been explosive, and Muslims have exploited the religious angle to achieve domination of the northern region.¹¹ The problem has not always been purely religious; rather, the complex ethnic and political situation in Nigeria has made achieving peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims an arduous task. Many believe that “beyond poverty and social injustice, the group has a parochial interest which they spiced with religion because they knew how sensitive the religious issue in Nigeria is and moreover they knew that it is the only way to get cheap solidarity among average Northern Moslems who cherish his [*sic*] religion.”¹²

III. *Some Christian Reactions*

If the gospel is to be preached by word alone, some may venture to oblige, perhaps in the manner of Jonah, but when it also involves employing one’s personal resources for the benefit of Muslims, it becomes a struggle; it will take the special grace of God for many Christians to view contributing their physical resources as part of the preaching task.

For instance, in my university in Lagos, we have a Christian fellowship with weekly prayer meetings. The majority of the fellowship members come from Pentecostal backgrounds, and they believe that it is right to call for “Holy Ghost fire” to consume their enemies, mainly Boko Haram. Some of these prayers for “Holy Ghost fire” have even been directed against some of their colleagues, whom they deemed to be their enemies in the university. The result they expect from this “Holy Ghost fire” is the literal death of their enemies.

In a number of places, the issue of witnessing to Muslims has been overshadowed by anger and the desire to retaliate. In the states of Kaduna, Plateau, Adamawa, Kano, and the city of Onitsha, some Christians have indeed retaliated by killing Muslims.¹³ This view is also prevalent in the

¹¹ Jennings, “Christian Mission and ‘Glocal’ Violence in 2006 A.D./1427H.” 25. See also Sunday Bobai Agang, *The Impact of Ethnic, Political, and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria, and a Theological Reflection on Its Healing* (Carlisle, PA: Langham Monographs, 2011), 37–58.

¹² Babatunde O. Oyekanmi and Christian C. Ubani, “Chronological Analysis of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria—July 2009 to July 2012: Implication for National Security and Development,” *Nationalities, Identities and Terrorism*, ed. V. Adefemi Isumonah, Musibau Olabamiji Oyebode, and Adeola Adams (Ibadan: John Archers, 2013), 224.

¹³ Ibrahim Garba (*Christian Science Monitor*, [June 17, 2012]) reports retaliation in Kaduna; <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2012/0617/Christians-retaliate-after-three-more-churches-bombed-in-Nigeria>. Cristina Silva [April 8, 2015] also culled reports from the *International*

Central African Republic, where Christians have turned into a hostile militia.

Statements from Islamic fundamentalists are highly provocative, and the temptation to retaliate to their unprovoked destruction of lives and property cannot be overstated. Some prominent Christian leaders in Nigeria have indeed been provoked to respond.

Peter Akinola, an Anglican Archbishop, has been quoted as saying, “May we at this stage remind our Muslim brothers that they do not have the monopoly of violence in this nation.”¹⁴ He has also been accused of refusing “to condemn the retaliatory killings of 700 Muslims following the deaths of 75 Christians in sectarian violence” in 2004.¹⁵ Similarly, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, President of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), said,

I will be surprised if the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria thinks the best way to find a solution to a problem and to bring peace to Nigeria is to declare war. Violence is not the preserve of one person; anybody can be violent, and we don't advocate that. I will never come out to say we are prepared for war, but you are hearing it now. Let me settle down, you will hear our response and they will also get our response. We love Nigeria.¹⁶

Such statements by prominent Christian leaders in Nigeria imply that they see Islamic religious violence not as persecution in the sense that requires Christian endurance but rather as deliberate lawless criminality that must be met with stiff resistance or even retaliation. If persecution in our time is to be understood this way and reacted to in ways different from those of the past saints, this will amount to a compromise of the unique Christian life. Muslims are now quick to label Christianity also as a violent religion.

I have confronted some of the organizers of our prayer meetings, telling them that praying for the death of our enemies was contrary to the Spirit of Christ, who urged us to forgive and pray for our enemies. The question is whether Christians who have fallen into the temptation of hostility can approach Muslims or their enemies with the gospel of Jesus in true love. How can Christians honor Christ in their actions or reactions towards religious persecution against them?

This is the defining point for the distinctiveness that we have been called to and set apart for so that our exemplar, Christ, may not be lost from our

Business Times (<http://www.ibtimes.com/boko-haram-violence-christians-take-revenge-against-muslims-nigeria-1874995>) of the attacks of Christians upon Muslims in Adamawa state for inviting Boko Haram to come and destroy them.

¹⁴ “Peter Akinola,” *Internet Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1373391/Peter-Akinola>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “No One Has Monopoly of Violence, Oritsejafor Tells Shariah,” *Nairaland Forum*, <http://www.nairaland.com/722081/no-one-monopoly-violence-oritsejafor>.

spiritual direction. In the thick of persecution, we must rightly perceive the importance of that persecution from the biblical point of view before we can appropriately respond to it. Therefore, nothing is so offensive that it should make us relinquish our call to a holistic gospel that meets the spiritual and physical needs of people. The Christian life is a definite life system that is extraordinary in its response to the natural environment and to hostility.

IV. *The Christological Paradigm for Witnessing in Word and Deed*

There has been a tendency in liberal scholarship to take the functional aspect of Christology and ignore the ontological aspect for the purpose of denying the deity of Christ. A lopsided Christology is fallacious. Total Christology or Christology proper insists that the person of Christ is as important as his work. This total Christology, a proper understanding of who Christ was and what he did, is necessary for an accurate grasp of what the whole gospel is about. God the Redeemer was made manifest in human nature. If only as God could he save man because of the infinite distance between divinity and humanity and the requirement of sacrifice, as our Redeemer he came with our humanity, which was necessary for the full redemption of mankind.¹⁷ The being of God and his actions were inseparable in this redemptive act. All great works on Christology have maintained this balance. Christ did not just proclaim to the people that he was the Messiah or the Son of God and stop at that; his divine works evidenced him.

Though God attested Jesus's identity at his baptism and transfiguration with words, Peter points to the function of deeds in the proclamation of the divine work of God among us in very strong terms when he says that the divinity of Jesus was attested by his mighty deeds (Acts 2:22). Apart from preaching and teaching, Jesus, clothed with power by the Holy Spirit, "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38 ESV). Christ demonstrated in actions what and who he was and why he came so that even if his words were not enough to convince the people, his works might: "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37–38 ESV). Christ's point is that words and deeds are mutually complementary in demonstrating the

¹⁷ John Calvin adduces several reasons for both the divinity of Christ and his humanity in his redemptive work. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 2.12.1–3; 464–67.

presence of God's kingdom for human good. The power of Jesus's teaching was unequalled (Matt 7:29), but his deeds spoke much more, as multitudes came to him with various physical needs (Matt 9:26, 31; Mark 1:28; Luke 4:37). His words were not without works, nor his works without words; Christian witness must be in word and deed as well. It is with this understanding that Christ taught, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16 ESV). This statement, which commands our active obedience, presumes that believers are already proclaiming the new kingdom verbally and adds that their actions must match their words. It means that when we claim to be Christians, our actions can glorify God or insult God, provoke faith in others or shut their minds to God.

The contemporary church needs to listen to the instructions that Jesus gave. Her witness is to be word and deed at the same time. "And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay" (Matt 10:7–8 ESV). The early church understood this clearly, and as believers complied with it, the result was remarkable and has become a reference point: "And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (Acts 4:33–35 ESV). This may sound too altruistic for some in our time, yet it can give the contemporary church a helpful paradigm for creatively articulating a workable spiritual and social transformative platform in a way that is consistent with the realities of our time.

The proclamation of the gospel in word and deed is truly the whole gospel to the whole person. This approach intrinsically involves the idea of self-denial. Though word and deed are two distinct modes of sharing the gospel, they are not mutually exclusive. Word ministry may be lighter in some cases, as it only involves verbal declaration of the message or truth: those who tell others what to do may not themselves share in the burden of doing it, and they may even fail to live what they preach. Deed ministry involves personal demonstration in faith and life as well as the commitment of resources. To combine word and deed requires that one give much in self-denial, so that when the love and care of Christ are preached, those qualities are expressed in practical ways. Such a person also denies himself or herself the pleasures of the world system that is contrary to God's kingdom lifestyle.

If the reign of God is to ensure justice for the oppressed, give peace to the nations, end poverty, satisfy human souls, and rectify moral values in accordance with his character, then we must not use our imagination to carve out attitudes that suit our own convenience and interests.¹⁸ Since we are not our own in our ministry but are called to witness to Christ in the world, we should “forget ourselves and our own interests as far as possible.”¹⁹ Without self-denial it is impossible to connect word and deed in our gospel proclamation. It is this self-denial that can make a Christian willing to forgive his persecutor and even offer help when there is need. We must give all that God has equipped us with to meet the needs of others.

Calvin knew that the gospel can be relevant to those in need if the church moves to meet those needs. He lamented specifically how the poor in his time received only insignificant alms and how the church mocked the recipients of its diaconal action.²⁰ He was thinking that the power of the cross to bring complete redemption includes not only palliatives but specific programs and investments that transform lives. It was as a result of this understanding that Calvinism combined word and deed at its most sophisticated level in the work ethic that produced the socio-economic system of which capitalism is the major fruit.²¹ Herman Bavinck emphasizes “works of mercy,” strongly recommending the following among other points: “that love and mercy be recognized and practiced as the most outstanding Christians virtues”; “that the ministry of mercy be given much larger place on the agenda of all ecclesiastical assemblies than has been the case up and until now”; “that for general needs it be undertaken communally and expanded by asking the local church to assist other churches and further by assisting poor and oppressed fellow believers abroad.”²² This tallies with Calvin’s thinking. Contemporary Reformed assemblies in nations that are more economically advanced should reorganize their global outreach. Bavinck indicts the Reformed church in his time for performing below expectation on works of mercy, giving the passing grade to the Roman Catholics.²³

¹⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 309.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*, trans. Henry J. Van Andel (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 21.

²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes* 4.5.15.

²¹ Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 119. See also Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2001); “John Calvin,” *New World Encyclopedia*, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=John_Calvin&oldid=968165.

²² Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science and Society*, 428–29.

²³ *Ibid.*

Abraham Kuyper reminds us that the sovereignty of Christ covers all aspects of life.²⁴ Presenting Calvinism as a life-transforming system, he says that it seeks the complete transformation of society by first looking to God and then to the neighbor.²⁵ Therefore, rather than becoming intimidated, the church needs to evaluate her witness in word and deed in compliance with the prevailing global challenges of our time. This indeed is love, biblical love, which is “not naive, guilt-provoked sentiment. Biblical love is not a feeling. Biblical love is the compulsion to do things God’s way, living in obedience to His unchanging, unerring purposes.”²⁶ This is the uniqueness of Christianity, namely, that the religion we profess “demands not a mere profession of the truth, but principally the practice of piety and love (Rom 2:28–29).”²⁷ George Grant asserts this point in very strong terms: “Welfare is not essentially or primarily the government’s job. Welfare is our job. It is the job of Christians.”²⁸ If this is true, then the church needs to do more in the prevailing global circumstances of economic hardship and in places of natural disasters.

V. How Then Should We Respond in the Context of Persecution?

When we consider how we should respond in the context of persecution, we need to ask whether or not persecution of Christians is done by those who are drunk with the desire to unleash violence on the innocent. In some cases, persecution against Christians may be due to our unjust or hurtful attitude towards others, and this may have caused them to develop hatred and indignation against us. In such situations, we need to correct our actions, since they constitute the witness to what we represent. Sometimes, however, it may be simply the raging of Satan against the growth of the church. In this case too, we need to employ all our spiritual resources to stand firm in truth, love, righteousness, faith and the faithful declaration of the word of God, through which we can effect the change that Christ has called us to accomplish in our fallen world. J. D. Payne has made some important observations, arguing that persecution fits properly into the plan of God, as the Lukan tradition portrays it. As a continuation of the redemptive history of the rejection and persecution of the Old Testament messengers of God into

²⁴ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

²⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 28.

²⁶ George Grant, “Authentic Christianity: Word and Deed,” *Jubilee* (Summer 2014): 14.

²⁷ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 2:704 (17.3.3).

²⁸ Grant, “Authentic Christianity,” 15.

the age of the church, it is essentially a consequence of following Jesus.²⁹ If Christ is the compass of our spiritual voyage, then his life and teachings clearly tell us that we should not expect persecution to be absent from our lives. When he rebuked the disciples who did not understand the necessity of persecution in the scheme of God, he queried, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26 ESV). Before his crucifixion, he reiterated what he had earlier told them: “Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours” (John 15:20 ESV). Paul and Barnabas, who understood the necessity of Christian suffering, encouraged believers saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22 ESV). The force of the argument is compelling, as tribulation apparently has become a gateway to heaven when God deems it fit for believers. Paul reminded Timothy that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12 NIV). This will happen because “evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse” (2 Tim 3:13 NIV).

Paul Tripp has argued that our suffering belongs not only to God; rather, it is “an instrument of his purpose in us and for others” that demands that we “put Christ on the center stage” as we bring “the full range of our suffering to him.”³⁰ This means that as we try to decide whether we should give our love to those who hate us or make life difficult for us, we must remember that “God is the key Actor” in what we face on a daily basis; then we will resist the prideful impulse to develop resentment towards others.³¹ Calvin argues that our love in deeds for others should be based not on whether they deserve it but on our life principle, which is to be consistent with the kingdom principle: “Now if he has not only deserved no good at your hand, but has also provoked you by unjust acts and curses, not even this is just reason why you should cease to embrace him in love and to perform duties of love on his behalf (Matt 6:14; 18:35; Luke 17:3).”³²

In the ministry of the gospel, it is not difficult to reach out to those who do things well or act nicely towards us. The challenge of loving actions is

²⁹ J. D. Payne, “Missions in the Context of Violence: A New Testament Response,” *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, 66–67. He appeals to Scott Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts*, JSNTSup 142 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 337.

³⁰ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 153–54.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

³² Calvin, cited in Denis R. Janz, ed., *A Reformation Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 258. Elsewhere Calvin extensively discusses the unconditional service that Christians are to render in society (Calvin, *Golden Booklet*, 33–34).

how to face someone who viciously hurts us. In this respect, one encounters those who are “undeserving” of benevolence, “the stranger,” the “despicable,” and the “worthless.”³³ Calvin strongly supports engaging such people with deed evangelism. “If he has deserved no kindness, but just the opposite, because he has maddened you with his injuries and insults, even this is no reason why you should not surround him with your affection, and show him all sorts of favors.”³⁴ In Calvin’s thought, hostility should not quench the fire of our love in this context. The gospel in deed has no boundaries. To be able to rise above those limits is “the only way to attain that which is not only difficult, but utterly repugnant to man’s nature: to love those who hate us, to requite injuries with kindness, and to return blessings for curses.”³⁵ The requirement to overcome this and assert the influence of the gospel is to consider the image of God in such people. The goal of the gospel is the renewal of the image of God that was smeared by sin. Though the natural impulse is to resent the wicked, Calvin avers that though God himself sometimes punishes the wicked, we are not required to emulate him and judge them; that is his prerogative. We are rather to “imitate his fatherly goodness and liberality,” and Christ “proves from the effect, that none are the children of God, but those who resemble him in gentleness and kindness.”³⁶

Though some believe that deed witnessing is not a critical aspect of the gospel, Christopher Wright raises an important question that makes it inescapable: “How does the power of the cross impinge on each of the evils that are at work here?”³⁷ This draws heavily on the centrality of the cross in the task of mission and evangelism. “The kingdom does not only address the spiritual and moral needs of a person, but his material, physical, social, cultural and political needs as well.”³⁸ Many evangelical scholars uphold the “relationship between evangelism and social action as inseparable.”³⁹ Grant has even argued that authentic Christianity is defined by the combination of word and deed as anchored upon the model of Christ and the apostolic practice.⁴⁰

While this may seem too ideal because of our natural human inclination to react negatively towards those who hurt us, it is real because Christ, the

³³ Calvin, *Golden Booklet*, 33–34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 259.

³⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 318.

³⁸ John Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 211. For emphasis, see also Wright, *The Mission of God*, 318.

³⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 316.

⁴⁰ Grant, “Authentic Christianity,” 11–15.

apostles, and many believers afterwards were able to do it by the grace of him who causes his people to be able to do all things. Paul and Peter argue that the divine power has granted us the virtues that are required for our advancement in godliness, which can only grow through practice. It is this that can make the church today effective in a holistic approach to witnessing. Paul says, “Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:14 ESV). Peter says, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:8 ESV).

The question of reconciling our unique Christian life of love and the brutality of religious persecution by showing “humanitarian compassion” even to those who persecute us is a critical one. We need to realize that despite the suffering (mainly from those who follow Islam), “Jesus Christ has defined our agenda, and because we love him we are constrained to embrace as well the mandate he has given the Church to evangelize the Muslim world.”⁴¹ Jennings believes strongly that evangelizing the Muslim world is our distinctive way of dealing with violence and suffering.⁴² As we agonize over our victimization, we should be careful not to become persecutors ourselves by wishing for the destruction of our enemies in our hearts. Persecution is part of the process of spiritual advancement to eternal glory: again, Paul says that all godly people “will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). Our life system is shared only by those who know the new spiritual birth, and it is offensive to those who have no experience of it. But our gospel has the power of renewal, when “Christianity comes in contact with evil and persecution, it goes beyond non-resistance to active benevolence. It does not destroy its enemies by violence but instead converts them by love.”⁴³ All this is embedded in our actions, through which God draws people to himself in Christ Jesus.

In the context of violence against the gospel and the struggle over how best to respond, we need to consider the larger picture of the sovereignty of God, who is “aware, concerned, and involved,” and our consequent victory over suffering and death, which is in his hand.⁴⁴ If the contemporary church understands that persecution against Christians is a part of our “spirituality and mission” in accordance with the eternal *missio Dei*, then our response

⁴¹ Jennings, “Christian Mission and ‘Glocal’ Violence in 2006 A.D./1427H.,” 21.

⁴² Jennings (ibid., 22) follows the position of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978, on Muslim Evangelization.

⁴³ Omar Miranda, “Jonah Meets ISIS,” *The Compass Magazine* (November 21, 2014), <https://www.thecompassmagazine.com/blog/jonah-meets-isis>.

⁴⁴ Jennings, “Christian Mission and ‘Glocal’ Violence in 2006 A.D./1427H.,” 22.

will be more constructive and productive in our efforts to reach even the restricted parts of the world.⁴⁵

How then do we respond appropriately to our enemies? Christ began his ministry with basic teachings about the radical uniqueness of the kingdom rules and the Christian life. It is a life system that is strange in the context of a sinful world. Sunday Bobai Agang is right to argue that “the Sermon on the Mount calls Christians into a path which responds to evil through a departure from the use of violence.”⁴⁶ But it is more than just a departure from violence and violent reaction against those who persecute us. It entails positive actions that can effect change in the enemy. Hence, Christ says, “Let your light shine” (Matt 5:16 ESV). More profoundly, he says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44), and furthermore, “If you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” (Matt 5:47 NIV). While the gospel in all its glory and goodness is to be ministered primarily to the victims of persecution, there should also be a strategic plan to reach persecutors who also need to change their lives and ways. Through this, we can turn many to righteousness as well as create a better world.

VI. *Practical and Effective Approach*

In order for our witness to have an effective impact, we must understand contemporary factors that lead to religious terrorism and persecution against Christians and be better informed as to the approach that will yield a positive impact. In Nigeria, apart from the political dimension of access to power and economic resources, factors such as poverty, marginalization, exclusion, deprivation, social insecurity, and unjust distribution of resources have been instrumental in persuading young people to join Islamic fundamentalism.⁴⁷ Failed governments have created grounds for the development of various crimes, including dangerous religious reactions. Jabbour argues that for witnessing among Muslims to be effective (especially in the Middle East), the personal, socioeconomic, and political conditions that make young people turn to fundamentalism and terrorism need to be understood.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Charles L. Tieszen, “Mission in Contexts of Violence: Forging Theologies of Persecution and Martyrdom,” *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, 76, 78.

⁴⁶ Agang, *The Impact of Ethnic, Political, and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria*, 234.

⁴⁷ Eghosa E. Osaghae, “Coming to Grips with Terrorism in Nigeria,” *Nationalities, Identities and Terrorism*, 5, 10.

⁴⁸ Nabeel T. Jabbour, “Islamic Fundamentalism: An Arab Evangelical Offers a Surprising Perspective,” *The Plain Truth Online* [July-August 1999], <http://www.ptm.org/99PT/JulAug/Islam.htm>.

The task of the gospel is extensive and intensive. It is co-extensive with the scope of Christ's rule over "the whole world as a testimony to all nations," "to the whole creation," and "to the end of the earth" (Matt 24:14; cf. Matt 28:18–19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8 ESV). The gospel has the power to penetrate hardened souls (Heb 4:12), but it must be presented in less sophisticated environments to those who are struggling to find meaning where socio-economic and political conditions are unjust. It has to address the conditions that lead to fragility in social relations so that people can learn not only to endure and tolerate but also to seek peaceful ways of solving conflicts.

In such situations, there is hostility to everything, not just the gospel, but these situations provide an opportunity for Christian witness in word and deed. All of human life, both the physical and the spiritual, lacks wholeness. In many third world nations, the failure of government accounts for the breakdown of law and order. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a comprehensive, life-transforming system that does not leave out any aspect of life. Since Calvinism follows this, as ably argued by Kuyper, armed with our scriptural and theological knowledge, we should begin to chart new ways that can break through all kinds of barriers. In situations in which neither physical, social, nor spiritual needs have been met, Christian witness can include cross-centered social action that points believers and unbelievers to what Christ's life and work did for them.

VII. Conclusion

What preconditions must be met before we can witness in love to our persecutors? Considering the unpredictable consequences of witnessing in hostile contexts, and given that the natural man sees the things of God as foolishness and opposes them (1 Cor 2:14; Rom 7–8), it is necessary in every age for believers to be regenerated and equipped with divine power to face the challenges. Jesus knew the enormity of the mission to which he called his disciples. There will be sufferings of all kinds, including persecution, torture, and death. Jesus instructed them to "stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49 ESV), and again, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8 ESV). The fear factor was the background of the promise of power to become witnesses. Prior to being equipped with this power, the disciples fled at the arrest of Jesus, and Peter lost his integrity when he denied Christ because of the danger. Henry explains what this promise of power involves for believers: "You shall be animated and actuated by a better spirit than your own; you shall have power to preach the gospel, and to prove it out of the

scriptures of the Old Testament ... and to confirm it both by miracles and by sufferings.”⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Jesus encouraged the disciples not to give in to fear or to have hearts troubled about their lives and the ministry they would be entrusted with because they would not be left on their own (John 14:27). They would be empowered.

When Paul says, “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7 ESV), he makes clear the contrast between the timidity that is characteristic of the natural man and the courage of the regenerate, by which one is able to face the opponents of the cross. Even Jesus needed such power from God for the great task that he came to do before he embarked on it. He acknowledged the receipt of the anointing of the Holy Spirit that would empower him to proclaim good news to the poor and deliver the sick and demon possessed (Luke 4:18–19). The extraordinary boldness and clarity that Peter and John demonstrated when they were filled with the Holy Spirit puzzled the authorities and mitigated their original intention to deal brutally with them (Acts 4:13–21). Their testimony is our source of encouragement: “With great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33 ESV). Proclamation of the gospel in word and deed is challenging because there are several layers of difficulty to deal with, including socio-economic, political, physical and even health issues. Behind these is Satan, the greatest antithesis of the good news of Jesus. The church depends entirely on the grace and power of God to fulfill her calling.

The current global turmoil is an expression of the vacuum in human souls. It portends great danger for humanity. Only the church can provide the answer, but she can only do so if she is willing to chart a program of holistic gospel as the agenda for the global church. The Reformed church should as a matter of urgency go back to the basics of Christ and the apostles and endeavor to recover the heart of Calvin for the transformation of human society. This should be done through building genuine relationships across cultures and especially with those who currently persecute the church.

⁴⁹ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

“With Heart and Hands and Voices”: Integral Ministry of Word and Deed from a *Missio Dei* Perspective

PHILLIPUS J. (FLIP) BUYS AND ANDRÉ JANSEN

Abstract

Missiological reflection indicates that mission organizations and churches worldwide are reconsidering the biblical foundations of integrating word and deed in proclaiming the gospel. The Lausanne Movement in its 2010 Cape Town congress, the Micah Network, the Gospel Coalition through its journal *Themelios*, the World Reformed Fellowship, and several recent missiological publications all address the relationship between words and deeds in the mission of the church. This article attempts to make a contribution to the debate by analyzing key biblical terms in which God reveals himself through the integration of word and deed, calling for a holistic approach in missions, in which words and deeds are not separated when proclaiming the gospel.

Missiologists, missionary organizations, and churches are rethinking the biblical foundations of integrating word and deed when proclaiming the gospel and structuring the ministry of local churches. Examples from the Lausanne Movement, the Micah-network, the Gospel Coalition,

The title of this article is taken from the well known hymn “Now Thank We All Our God” which is a translation from the German “Nun danket Alle Gott,” written circa 1636 by Martin Rinkart (1586–1649).

and the World Reformed Fellowship serve to illustrate this.

The Lausanne Movement held a congress in Cape Town from October 16 to 25, 2010, where 4,200 participants assembled from 198 countries. The object was to raise awareness among churches worldwide about their unfinished missionary task and “to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching—in every nation, in every sphere of society and in the realm of ideas.”¹ The congress held discussions on the best way to deal with the issues of poverty and injustice in a biblical manner. It also considered how to counter the false teachings of the so-called prosperity gospel in contrast to the true proclamation of the gospel. Thus, the relationship between word and deed was central.

The Micah-network, a growing coalition of churches and Christian development-aid organizations worldwide, was born out of a concern for holistic mission and reflection on how “to grow together in our understanding and practice of Christian discipleship in a global world affected by consumerism, injustice, and oppression,” a concern rooted in Micah 6:8. Such a concern, again, demands that the integration of word and deed be worked out in such contexts.

The Gospel Coalition is a network of theologians aiming to stimulate believers in deepening their faith in the gospel of Christ and fulfilling their ministry with a theocentric and Christ-centered focus. The goal is to proclaim the reign of Christ over all of life with a persevering hope through the Holy Spirit in such a way that individuals, congregations, and cultures are transformed. When this is accomplished, there will be agreement in believers’ proclamation of the gospel “between our entire lives and God’s heart, words, and actions, through the mediation of the Word and Spirit.”² The foundational principles of holistic mission work are discussed in depth during conferences of the Coalition and expounded in its publications. Their holistic mission, as indicated in the statement above, focuses on the relationship between one’s heart, one’s words, and one’s deeds.

As a third example, the newly approved Statement of Faith of the World Reformed Fellowship clearly states that believers, in obedience to their God-given mission, should reach out to all people with both hands.³ The one hand beckons people to embrace Christ in faith, confess their sins,

¹ S. Doug Birdsall and Lindsay Brown, *The Lausanne Movement: The Cape Town Commitment—A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*, 1 October 2010, <http://www.lausanne.org/docs/CapeTownCommitment.pdf>.

² Ben Peays, “The Gospel Coalition: Foundation Documents,” 12 April 2011, [http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/Foundation%20Documents/FoundationDocuments\(English\).pdf](http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/Foundation%20Documents/FoundationDocuments(English).pdf).

³ Samuel Logan, “A Proposed Statement of Faith,” World Reformed Fellowship, 15 March 2010, <http://wrfnet.org/articles/2010/03/proposed-statement-faith#.VOt4pEJPr6B>.

repent, and believe, so that they may receive everlasting reconciliation with God through Christ; the other demonstrates, by concrete deeds of mercy and compassion, the goodness of God's kingdom in Christ's Name. This is the example that was set by Christ himself. By following his example, believers prove that they are being transformed into his image and that they have received through the Holy Spirit the firstfruits of God's future, the coming of God's new creation. In the paragraph from the Statement of Faith that deals with "The transformation of human community," this commitment is formulated as follows. Note the connection here between words (calling people to love) and deeds (social involvement).

Our proclamation of the gospel has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. Likewise, our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the great commission by which God sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore this commission, we have nothing to bring to the world.

In addition to these examples, a large number of recent publications reflect on integrating word and deed in holistic mission work from a biblical perspective.⁴

In light of these examples, the search for a foundational theory of holistic mission work indicates that people are increasingly uncomfortable with dualistic thought patterns when pinpointing the focal point of evangelistic outreach. The main issue is whether the focal point of care for the poor should be compassion or justice.⁵ This question has led to a heated debate between evangelical and ecumenical Christian denominations. Ed Stetzer criticizes remaining tendencies of a dualistic approach in Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert's work.⁶ John Battle, Tim Chester, Keith Ferdinando, and

⁴ The following theological publications have been published in the past decade on the topic: Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 2011) and *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Dutton, 2010), Gerhard Verbeek, *Recht in overvloed: Gerechtigheid en professionaliteit in de ontmoeting tussen arm en rijk* (Budel: Budel, 2005); Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Tetsunao Yamamori and C. René Padilla, eds., *The Local Church: Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2004); Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009).

⁵ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 5–25; Verbeek, *Recht in overvloed*, 45–90.

⁶ Ed Stetzer, review of *What Is the mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/what-is-the-mission-of-the-church-making-sense-of-social-justice-shalom-and#page=>.

Bennie van der Walt offer a variety of views on integrating the proclamation of the gospel and social engagement.⁷ Van der Walt advocates the routing out of dualism altogether, due to its unscriptural tendencies, as well as the separation of the gospel's proclamation from social engagement.⁸

This article aims to demonstrate, by discussing and analyzing key biblical concepts, how word and deed are integrated in God's self-revelation and why this implies the need for a holistic approach, which avoids separating word from deed in the proclamation of the gospel. In what follows, we note how these concepts require the integration of word and deed by looking at them from the perspectives of God, creation, Christ, the church, and the Holy Spirit. Before we get to these concepts, however, a few words are required on the biblical-theological foundation of the *missio Dei*, since that is the biblical locus for integrating word and deed.

1. *The Missio Dei and the Integration of Word and Deed*

A biblical-theological foundation will help us establish the starting point of the unity between word and deed and to clarify how word and deed can be integrated when proclaiming the gospel from a *missio Dei* perspective.

1. *Missio Dei*

In his definition of *missio Dei*, David Bosch mentions that the theological origin of this concept is to be found in covenantal Reformed Theology of the post-Reformation.⁹ The Latin term *missio Dei* was coined as early as the fourth century by Aurelius Augustine to describe the sending acts within the Trinity, the Father's sending of the Son. From then on, *missio Dei* became a major term employed in Catholic and Orthodox dogmatics.¹⁰

In 1952, the term was adopted by the WCC Missions Conference in Willingen and became popular in Protestant missions theology through George Vicedom's book, *Missio Dei* (1958) and through other German Lutheran

⁷ See John A. Battle, "A Brief History of the Social Gospel," *Western Reformed Seminary Journal* 6 (1999): 5–11; Tim Chester, *Good News to the Poor: Sharing the Gospel through Social Involvement* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004); Keith Ferdinando, "Mission: A Problem of Definition," *Themelios* 33.1 (May 2008): 46–47; and Bennie J. Van der Walt, "Ontwikkelingsamewerking vir Afrika, met besondere aandag aan 'n vennootskapsverhouding," *Koers-Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 72 (2012): 468–504.

⁸ Van der Walt, "Ontwikkelingsamewerking vir Afrika."

⁹ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 8.

¹⁰ See Karl Müller, *Mission Theology: An Introduction with Contributions by Hans-Werner Gensichen and Horst Rzepkowski*, trans. Francis Mansfield, *Studia Instituti Missiologici Societatis Verbi Divini* 39 (Nettetal: Steyler, 1987), 66–67.

theologians and missiologists involved in ecumenical agencies, for example, Karl Hartenstein and Walter Freytag.¹¹ George Vicedom explains that “*missio Dei* declares the sending to be God’s own concern, which He began in His Son and which He continues through the Holy Spirit in His Church till the end of time.”¹² Thomas Schirrmacher adds that “the term is valid to be used by Reformed and Evangelical Christians also, because it belongs to the heart of Christianity, no matter whether this term is used for the fact that God sent himself for the redemption of the world, or for the fact that missions of the Church is the outcome of God’s mission.”¹³

Amidst this larger appeal to *missio Dei*, however, several writers make it clear that there is hardly any agreement about the different terms used within the missional debate.¹⁴ For this article, the term *missio Dei* will be defined as follows:

Through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, God, for his own glory, is uniting people from every tribe, nation, kingdom, and language to worship him forever in the New World.

2. Criteria

This article poses five questions as criteria to consider and discusses key concepts from a *missio Dei* point of view, demonstrating the close connection between word and deed. In other words, these questions will serve as perspectives on the integration of word and deed for each of the key biblical concepts we discuss.

1. Who is God?
2. Why did God create the earth?
3. Why did Jesus Christ become man, die, and rise from the dead?
4. Why was the Holy Spirit sent to earth?
5. What is God’s purpose with the church in the world?

II. Key Concepts

Now that we have laid a foundation for the *missio Dei* and set out the questions that will shape our understanding of word and deed relations for key biblical concepts, we are ready to examine the concepts themselves: *word*, *blessing*, *godliness*, *fear of the Lord*, and *peace*.

¹¹ George F. Vicedom, *Missio Dei* (Munich: Kaiser, 1958).

¹² *Ibid.*, 352.

¹³ Thomas Schirrmacher, *World Mission: Heart of Christianity* (Beese: Reformatorischer Verlag, 2008), 22.

¹⁴ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective, Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 17.

1. *Word*—*dabar*, *logos*, *rēma*

A biblical study of the term “Word” reveals that verbal proclamation (e.g., preaching, teaching, and prophesying) is inseparable from proclamation by works (demonstration). In this sense, “Word” does not preclude “deed.” Both *dabar* and *logos* can be translated with *word*, as well as *deed*.¹⁵

Earl Kalland points to the repeated use of *dabar* in the Old Testament to indicate that God speaks and that his Word has consequences.¹⁶ The one who speaks (*dabar*), acts accordingly.¹⁷ To “grasp the word is to grasp the thought. But the word is also dynamic. It is filled with a power which is felt by those who receive it but which is present independently of such reception.”¹⁸ “Word” is both the message as such and its application. The message is specific, but in practice its effect is dynamic. How does this tell us more about God himself?

(a) *God*. God makes himself known through his *dabar* in a self-authenticating way, so that people experience his divine power. This revelation is not only addressed to Israel, but to all the nations of the world (Jer 31:10; Ezek 36:4), who will eventually come to hear the word of the God of Jacob (Mic 4:1–2) and to sing about what they have heard and seen (Exod 20:18). Even the deaf will hear, and the blind will see; people will rejoice in the Lord, and the poor will sing praises for the holy God of Israel (Isa 29:18–19).

In addition to God making himself known through his *dabar*, we see that God is present through his *dabar* since he is his *dabar* and reveals himself through what he accomplishes.¹⁹ The word of the Lord has an effect and operates as he chooses, according to his will (1 Kgs 13:26). God told Isaiah that his *dabar* will accomplish what he wants it to and that it will establish what he desires. The word that God speaks and its concrete effects are connected.²⁰ F. J. Pop makes it clear that the word is God’s heavenly creative power, which is operating on earth.²¹ The grounding of the meaning of “word” in God himself is crucial in order to understand the unity between word and deed in the missionary situation. And we find that unity in the context of God’s creation. So, it is fitting to ask next, “In what sense does God’s *dabar* tell us something about why or how God created all things?”

¹⁵ F. J. Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim: Verklaring van een aantal Bijbelse woorden* (’s Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1984), 581.

¹⁶ Earl S. Kalland, “399. דָּבָר (*Dābar*),” *TWOT* 1:178–80.

¹⁷ Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim*, 579.

¹⁸ Otto Procksch, “C. The Word of God in the OT,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 508 (abbreviated *TDNTa* hereafter); cf. *TDNT* 4:92.

¹⁹ Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim*, 579–80.

²⁰ Kalland, *TWOT* 1:180.

²¹ Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim*, 581.

(b) *Creation and people.* God created both heaven and earth through the spoken word (Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6; John 1:3), demonstrating the Semitic equivalence of word as speech and as fact or act.²² The world becomes a reality through the creative divine Word.²³ According to Allen Myers, Paul concurs with this in Romans 10:17–18: the spoken word awakens faith.²⁴

According to Pop, for the Israelites, the spoken word formed a unity of events and their impact, expressed by the use of the word *dabar*. A word should not merely convey the matter under discussion to someone; it should do it in such a way that the hearer can be assured that the matter is what the word describes; word and matter should be interchangeable. Then the hearer will attest that the word is true (Deut 27:15–26; Num 5:22).²⁵ Thus, *dabar* tells us not only how God created (he acted through his word), but how we relate to the world and to others; our words and deeds are united. Our primary example, as always, is the person of Christ.

(c) *Jesus Christ.* Pop shows how Jesus's words and works form a unit. His word is both a promise of salvation and a word of judgment.²⁶ These two aspects generate in Christ the power of salvation as well as justice. Through his words, Jesus healed the sick, called disciples, judged unbelievers, and foretold the future. His words and miracles inspire awe. Jesus Christ himself embodies these words through the unity of his person and his work.²⁷

In addition, and adding Trinitarian depth to union of word and deed, Myers interprets Jesus's incarnation as the revelation of God's most significant word.²⁸ According to the witness of John 1 and Hebrews 1, Jesus is the personification of God's Word by whom everything that exists originated.²⁹ One can infer that Jesus embodies the integration of words and works: his word goes hand in hand with his work.³⁰ This is confirmed by Henk Medema, who notes that the Word is never simply theological, but always relational and personal.³¹ This is because the truth *came to man* incarnated in

²² Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 1064.

²³ Procksch, *TDNT* 4:99–100 and *TDNTa* 509.

²⁴ Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 1064.

²⁵ Cf. Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim*, 580.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 582.

²⁷ Gerhard Kittel, "Word and Speech in the NT," *TDNT* 4:107 and *TDNTa* 510; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 33.100, 260 (abbreviated hereafter as L&N); Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim*, 585.

²⁸ Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 1064.

²⁹ L&N 33.100.

³⁰ Kittel, *TDNT* 4:107 and *TDNTa* 510.

³¹ Henk P. Medema, *Totaal christendom: Zending in de hele wereld, van Kaapstad tot Lausanne* (Heerenveen: Medema, 2011), 56.

Immanuel. The word addressed to man is *the Word* himself and is himself God. This Word, however, should not be considered apart from the Holy Spirit. How does the third Person of the Trinity bear on the union of word and deed as exemplified in the Word himself?

(d) *The Holy Spirit*. The word of God works as a dynamic power through the activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:18). By this power God realizes and accomplishes concrete things. According to Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, *logos* and *rēma* primarily refer to the content of the communicated message of the gospel,³² as well as to the content of the proclamation of Jesus.³³ Gerhard Kittel points out (using Eph 1:13) that the Holy Spirit seals those who accept God's word and is inseparably connected to the process of integrating the word with works.³⁴ In this sense, the Spirit is always bound up with the Word. This has important implications for the church.

(e) *Church*. In the New Testament, Christians constitute the church as believers and respond to the word of salvation in all aspects of their life, becoming bearers of the Word through whom God himself speaks (1 Pet 4:11).³⁵ The Word entails a verbal account and proclamation about Jesus Christ. This includes the Word of the cross, of reconciliation, and grace, of life and truth—and is not a random concept.³⁶ Life includes events and is an account of things that have been received and accomplished (Matt 12:36; 18:16; Acts 8:21; Phil 4:17; 1 Pet 3:15; cf. L&N 13.115). When God expresses his word verbally through man, it causes man to come alive: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation” (Jas 1:18 ESV). From a *missio Dei* perspective, the church brings the Word of God to all through audible words and visible works, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The holy life and righteous lifestyle of believers also aims at gaining the respect of people outside the congregation (1 Thess 4:12; *pros tous exō* has the meaning of *unbelievers*).³⁷

Verbal proclamation of the word does not exclude, but initiates witnessing through works, so that words and deeds together present a testimony of God's healing and transforming grace. There is no tension between speaking and acting, words and works, because they are one.³⁸ The church is a community that witnesses to God's Word through its heart, voice, and

³² L&N 33.98.

³³ L&N 33.260.

³⁴ Kittel, *TDNT* 4:119 and *TDNTa* 512.

³⁵ Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim*, 582.

³⁶ Kittel, *TDNT* 4:117, 119 and *TDNTa* 511–12.

³⁷ See L&N 11.10, Heinrich Greeven, “Ἐὐσχήμων,” *TDNT* 2:770–71 and *TDNTa* 278.

³⁸ Pop, *Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim*, 582.

hands (Deut 30:11–14; Rom 10:8–10). This triad of heart, voice, and hands is central to the *missio Dei* and will be referenced continually in the remainder of the article.

This is in agreement with the revelation to John in which the prophetic Word of God and the testimony of God’s Word becomes fully and tangibly real in Jesus Christ: “Receiving the word, when authentic, involves doing.” Christ is the incarnation of *logos tou theou*—God’s Word in incarnate action.³⁹

In this respect, our words must be offered to make God and his grace known through Jesus Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is why the integration of word and works is paramount in missiology.

2. *Blessing*—*brk*, *eulogeō*, and *makarios*

The second key concept we can examine is *blessing*. The notion of the Lord’s blessing provides, from a *missio Dei* point of view, a crucial perspective on the relation between word and works. The Bible uses a variety of words to indicate God’s blessing: *brk*, *eulogeō*, and *makarios*.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God’s blessing has a spiritual as well as practical application. According to W. W. Wessel, this points towards the spiritual fruit (Rom 15:29; Eph 1:3) that the gospel brings, as well as material blessings (Heb 6:7; 12:17; 2 Cor 9:5), through which someone receives kindness and favor.⁴⁰ The goal is to enable someone to be successful, prosperous and productive, and enjoy a long-lasting life.⁴¹ According to Louw and Nida, such a fruitful life indicates divine favor, implying that the verbal act itself constitutes a significant benefit.⁴² Hermann Beyer adds to this by emphasizing the active aspect of transferring this blessing through words and works.⁴³ The result is acceptance, happiness, and prosperity.⁴⁴ Again, we ask, “How does blessing tell us more about who God is?”

(a) *God*. Word as well as works are anchored in God, who is both the blessing and the one who grants or takes it away. Because he alone is God, everything finds its origin with him: death and life, sickness and health. The sovereign God alone grants true freedom and offers countless blessings.

³⁹ Cf. Kittel, *TDNTa* 512 and *TDNT* 4:123–24, 119.

⁴⁰ W. W. Wessel, “Blessed,” in *NBD*³ 142–43; Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 162–63; cf. Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 1999) (Logos Bible Software, version 4).

⁴¹ John N. Oswalt, “285 בָּרַךְ (*bārak*),” *TWOT* 132.

⁴² *L&N* 33.470.

⁴³ Hermann W. Beyer, “εὐλογέω, εὐλογία,” *TDNT* 2:755 and *TDNTa* 275.

⁴⁴ Beyer, *TDNT* 2:756 and *TDNTa* 275; Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998) (Logos Bible Software, version 4).

The presence of God itself is a blessing for creation as well as man, who, without it works in vain (Ps 37:22; Prov 22:10).⁴⁵ God is a personal Being and, therefore, has the power to provide blessings for persons.⁴⁶ His blessing is a concrete indication that he wishes to grant freedom and grace. God reveals himself as the sovereign one of the universe who, in contrast to the heathen idols, wields both salvation and doom, as in Deuteronomy 32:39 (NIV): “Look! I am the One! There is no other God except me. I put some people to death. I bring others to life. I have wounded, and I will heal. No one can save you from my powerful hand.” Such a passage highlights the sovereignty of God as blessing.

This is also shown in our requests for blessing. The blessing of the high priest is a prayer to God, asking for his presence, grace, and healing power over the spiritual and physical lives of his people.⁴⁷

Lastly, blessing also expresses adoration, when people kneel in prayer and worship before God (1 Kgs 8:54; 18:42; Ezra 9:5).⁴⁸ So, blessing calls for a response in word and deed.

(b) *Creation*. As for creation, Christopher Wright demonstrates that blessings are linked closely to it and that God’s gifts to his children are meant to be enjoyed: abundance, fruitfulness, long-lasting life, peace, and rest.⁴⁹ People are meant to experience blessings in the context of a healthy relationship with God and their neighbor. These blessings are always linked to obedience and trust in God and his law.⁵⁰ By appropriating the received blessings, a Christian glorifies God.⁵¹

The greater blesses the lesser, in the same way that a father blesses his sons or a king his subjects.⁵² Similarly, the rich are to bring blessing to the poor, the strong to the weak, and the healthy to the sick in a prosperous, significant, and productive life. In response, blessings are also used to express

⁴⁵ Beyer, *TDNT* 2:756 and *TDNTa* 275; Oswalt, *TWOT* 132.

⁴⁶ Beyer, *TDNT* 2:756 and *TDNTa* 275; Franklin H. Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs, eds., *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1972) (Logos Bible Software, version 4).

⁴⁷ Oswalt, *TWOT* 132.

⁴⁸ Cf. Beyer, *TDNT* 2:756, 758 and *TDNTa* 275–76; Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000) (Logos Bible Software, version 4); James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009) (Logos Bible Software, version 4).

⁴⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 221.

⁵⁰ Beyer, *TDNT* 2:757 and *TDNTa* 275.

⁵¹ Beyer, *TDNT* 2:758 and *TDNTa* 276.

⁵² Oswalt, *TWOT* 132.

thanks and recognition to the one who made a prosperous and meaningful life possible.⁵³

The range of blessings offered by God, and the contrast they have with God's curses, tell us even more about God's blessings in creation. According to John Kselman, the wide range of blessings includes vitality, healthy and long-lasting life, fertility, and plentiful offspring.⁵⁴ By contrasting blessing with curse, he clarifies the intent of blessing: a curse can entail any utterance that eventually leads to death, be it sickness, childlessness, or natural or other disasters, such as drought, famine or war.⁵⁵ Carpenter and Comfort point out that God blessed the people of Israel with rain, safety and security, the law, health, and "many other things."⁵⁶ According to Psalm 67, God's people received his blessings in order to be a blessing to other nations so that the whole world might honor and fear God. Blessings, in other words, serve a purpose that extends beyond personal satisfaction.

Referring to Jeremiah 29:7, Christopher Wright stresses that Israel did not only receive blessings, but had to *be* a blessing, even during exile among her enemies.⁵⁷ By seeking prosperity for the city and praying for its inhabitants, Israel was not only a favored people, but also an instrument to bless all humankind according to the promise God made to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3). God's blessings include hope for Israel's future, both spiritual and practical. At the same time, Israel was commanded to make God's blessings visible by means of her words and works. While Israel, God's son (Exod 4:22), failed to do this, Jesus Christ, God's true Son, succeeded in every way.

(c) *Jesus Christ*. When God blessed his children in Jesus Christ, people showed joy as a result of Christ's redemptive work, the arrival of God's kingdom on earth.⁵⁸ Christ became flesh (John 1:14) in order for his flock to have life in abundance (John 10:10). Such abundant life is closely related to the calling of God's people to *be* a blessing to others, for the concept of *eternal life* (Greek, *zōēn aiōnion*) does not only allude to life after death. It points to a qualitatively better life than that which one may already have inherited and experienced on earth.⁵⁹ This happens when one truly believes in Jesus Christ

⁵³ Oswalt, *TWOT* 132.

⁵⁴ John S. Kselman, "Curse and Blessing," in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 199.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*.

⁵⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 99–100, 221.

⁵⁸ Beyer, *TDNT* 2:763 and *TDNTa* 276; Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*; Friedrich Hauck, "μακάριος," *TDNT* 4:367 and *TDNTa* 548.

⁵⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, "ζάω, ζωή (βίωω, βίος)," *TDNT* 2:865–66 and *TDNTa* 294; Hermann Sasse, "αἰών, αἰώνιος," *TDNT* 1:205–6 and *TDNTa* 32.

(John 5:24; 6:47; 20:21). For a believer, true life in abundance is analogous to a tree planted near a stream (Jer 17:8). Such a person can withstand the storms of life and drinks from the source of God's living water, turning to offer word and deed ministry to one who is weary (Isa 50:4; Matt 25:31–40). This is the life of abundance that Jesus refers to in John 10:10.

Notice again the theme of the unity between heart, hands, and voices. This becomes clear when martyrs are called "blessed" (Matt 5:10) because of their enduring faith in Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ Their faith (heart) led to testimony (voices) and corresponding action (hands).

In all of this, Jesus Christ *is* the incarnation of God's blessings poured out over humankind, anticipating the redemption of heaven and earth. Christ embodies *and* administers God's blessings through his atoning sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice becomes instrumental in believers' proclamation and ministry, which is oriented towards eternal victory. The inseparable bond between word and deed in God's blessings is thus embodied in Christ. But, as with our discussion of *dabar*, blessing through the Word does not occur in isolation from the Spirit.

(d) *The Holy Spirit*. The blessing of the Holy Spirit is integrally connected to the proclamation of the gospel in terms of heart and hands and voices. Wright highlights the following events: Jesus's mission, the ascension, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, relating them to God's promise to make Abraham a blessing for all people as part of the *missio Dei*.⁶¹ In this process, the Holy Spirit, as Paraclete, fulfills a key position in the propagation of God's blessing to humankind, filling our hearts with praise that works itself out in words and actions.

Continuing on this line of discussion, we find that, according to Psalm 104:29–30, God's Spirit renews creation by uniting word and deed.⁶² Genesis 27 describes the blessing of Jacob and Esau, in which the Holy Spirit directly connects blessing with life. According to Gijsbert van den Brink and Cees van der Kooi, blessing is vital to life, especially in the Old Testament times, because it relates to growth, bloom, progress, progeny, vitality, and power.⁶³ Cursing, on the other hand, entails the stagnation of life, crops, a lack of health, and limited offspring.⁶⁴ The Holy Spirit is essential in connecting words to deeds, then, because he brings creation to new life.

⁶⁰ Cf. Hauck, *TDNT* 4:368 and *TDNTa* 369.

⁶¹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 189.

⁶² Gijsbert van den Brink and Cees van der Kooi, *Christelijke dogmatiek: Een inleiding* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012), 447.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 448.

⁶⁴ Magdalene Frettlöh, *Theologie des Segens: Biblische und dogmatische Wahrnehmungen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), 55–57.

Taking a step back, we see that God gives commands and blessings in the name of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:13). Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit will glorify him by proclaiming him as God's embodiment (John 16:14), and the Holy Spirit explicitly points to Jesus's victory over sin and Satan, which he achieved as the Christ through suffering, death on the cross, and resurrection. Due to this victory and passion, believers already taste victory in Christ. The Holy Spirit leads believers to experience the reality of Christ's love, and to become, through their words and deeds, a channel of love directed towards a broken world. The blessing of the Holy Spirit entails giving believers joyful assurance in the present, and making them the first-fruits of God's future glory. So, those who receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit become channels of received compassion in order to bless others who are suffering in a broken world (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:3–7). The Holy Spirit provides a guarantee and a foretaste of God's great future, which moves people to become a blessing to others in all aspects of their lives (heart, hands, and voices). The holistic implications of the Spirit's blessings become clear when we read that "the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Rom 8:22 ESV). A believer who is filled by the Holy Spirit develops a vision of the cosmic impact of the gospel and becomes a witness to God's blessings in heart, hands, and voice. This points us to the implications that blessing has for God's church.

(e) *Church*. From the perspective of *missio Dei*, the church fulfills an essential and holistic role in passing on God's blessing to others. The most distinctive way in which the church expresses its faith is by blessing God visibly as well as audibly, by praising him with heart, hands, and voices (Ps 103:1; 134:1–2), and this has a ripple effect in the world at large.⁶⁵

John Oswalt points out that believers should transmit the blessings received from the Lord, by caring practically for the well-being of others (Gen 27; 48:9, 15, 20; 24:60; 31:55; 1 Sam 2:20; Acts 2:42–47).⁶⁶ This demonstrates that God blesses his children so that these blessings are passed on in visible, audible, and tangible ways. In this sense, the view of Carpenter and Comfort is too limited when they state—based on Ephesians 1:3—that blessings are not physical, but merely spiritual matters.⁶⁷ Blessings *are* spiritual, but with tangible *effects* such that those who are blessed may thank God and serve his eschatological purposes.

⁶⁵ Cf. Beyer, *TDNT* 2:758, 761–62 and *TDNTa* 275–76; Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes*.

⁶⁶ Oswalt, *TWOT* 133; cf. Matthew G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (London: Nelson & Sons, 1894), 102; Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 162–63.

⁶⁷ Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*.

The comprehensive eschatological impact of blessings often surfaces in the prophetic books. Isaiah looked forward to a time when God's blessing would be realized in the present, rather than only anticipated for the future (Isa 19:23–24; 61:4–11). The blessings of the kingdom of heaven are promised to people in specific circumstances: the poor, the hungry, mourners or those who are hated and despised, who already experience the arrival of the kingdom as a blessing (Matt 13:16–17).⁶⁸ The Beatitudes, in this light, are not only oriented towards future life and consolation. Friedrich Hauck rightly points out that the early church experienced blessing when they collected contributions for the congregation in Jerusalem.⁶⁹ Paul typifies this deed of unconditional love as a peace offering. Augustine, on the other hand, emphasizes that one's life cannot be blessed when it is detached from eternal life.⁷⁰ The blessing of eternal life provides consolation and a godly perspective in this life. As a result, the church acts spiritually, physically, and materially so that those who suffer may find comfort in a new way of living.

In this perspective, the sacerdotal blessing of the Lord is an indicator, an imperative, and a promise. Matthew Henry refers to the task of the priests in correlation to the high priest's blessing in Numbers 6:24–27. The priest, as God's voice to His people, teaches, commands, and blesses them.⁷¹ Whoever receives and lives out the law also receives blessing. Therefore, when 1 Peter 2:9 refers to the faithful as a priesthood, one can rightly deduce that the church, as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, is given the task of proclaiming, commanding, and blessing in terms of heart and hands and voices (Matt 28:18–20). The realized promise of the blessing becomes even clearer in Revelation. The visions depict scenes in which every creature in heaven and on earth is involved in the praise of him who sits on the throne, and of the Lamb.⁷²

In the broadest sense, God's blessings reach back to before creation and stretch into the future age. They include both the spiritual and physical life of believers and also all that is on earth and in heaven. The response is to praise his glorious grace, which he has given the elect freely in the one he loves (Eph 1:3–11). In this sense, believers already experience eternal life in their hearts and actualize it with their hands and voices. Paul refers to this as receiving the "firstfruits" or "deposit" (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:22) of God's eternal blessing. The church thus functions as God's instrument to bring and to *be* this blessing to others in his Name (Matt 25:34–46). According to

⁶⁸ Beyer, *TDNT* 2:763 and *TDNTa* 276; Hauck, *TDNT* 4:368 and *TDNTa* 549.

⁶⁹ Hauck, *TDNT* 4:369 and *TDNTa* 549.

⁷⁰ Augustine, *The Trinity* 13.8.11 (*NPNF*¹ 3:173).

⁷¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (New York: Fleming & Revell, 1900), on Num 6:22–27.

⁷² Beyer, *TDNT* 2:763 and *TDNTa* 276.

the New Testament, the church fulfills this role by proclaiming the gospel holistically, by using hearts, hands, and voices.

3. *Godliness—eusebeia*

The next concept we will explore is *godliness*. Godliness can also be translated as “devotion” or “dedication.” From the perspective of *missio Dei*, godliness integrates the fruits of the Spirit as a result of living in fellowship with God in total devotion. John Calvin states in his commentary on 1 Timothy that godliness is the beginning, middle, and end of the Christian life.⁷³ If one’s life manifests godliness, then nothing is lacking.

Godliness is expressed as “good deeds” (1 Tim 2:10 NIV), “piety” or “devout practice” (1 Tim 4:8), and “spiritual exercise” (Phil 4:8 GNB). A believer’s entire existence becomes a living expectation of God’s final judgment. This way of life is characterized by *eusebeia* (2 Pet 3:11–12), a term that denotes a loving, revering, dedicating, and surrendering frame of mind towards God himself. In this way, God lays claim to the total life of the believer, and impacts human relationships by believers’ behavior, reflecting right religious beliefs and attitudes.⁷⁴ Once again, we ask what we can learn about who God is from the concept of godliness.

(a) *God*. Godliness is honoring God as the Creator and Savior, the one who demands active obedience to his revealed will. It entails personal dedication surpassing lip-service in fear and admiration (Prov 1:7; Isa 11:2; 33:6; Luke 2:25).⁷⁵ Thomas Strong describes godliness as respect for God that influences one’s entire way of life.⁷⁶

Yet, godliness without God as its source and foundation amounts to moralism. An attitude of total devotion has great value in every aspect (1 Tim 3:8), but a mere outward appearance lacks the essence of true godliness. Therefore, genuine godliness grows from faith (*pistis*), has its roots in Christ, is empowered by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23), and is expressed in all aspects of believers’ daily lives with a focus on glorifying God.⁷⁷

⁷³ See L&N 53.5–6 and John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 244.

⁷⁴ Phillipus J. Buys, “Vorming van ’n man van God: Evaluering van internasionale debat oor predikantsopleiding in die lig van perspektiewe uit 1 en 2 Timoteus,” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 44.1 (2012): 58.

⁷⁵ Cf. Werner Foerster, “Εὐσέβεια,” *TDNT* 7:182–83 and *TDNTa* 1012; D. G. Peterson, “Godliness,” *NBD*³ 422.

⁷⁶ Thomas Strong, “Godliness,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 662–63.

⁷⁷ Foerster, *TDNT* 7:183 and *TDNTa* 1012.

(b) *Creation*. With regard to creation, God created humans to be fruitful by working, inhabiting, and keeping the earth. As the *imago Dei*, man was placed on earth to bear fruit in glorifying God (Gen 1:26, 28). Revelation concludes with a similar perspective: God's elected people bearing fruit as part of the new heaven and earth (Rev 22:1–5). For Werner Foerster, godliness designates respect for the divine created order and is a practical way of living.⁷⁸

In contrast, a Gnostic view promotes ascetic life and takes creation to be evil and malicious. Foerster assumes that these ideas originated from the belief that the resurrection (2 Tim 2:18) had taken place already.⁷⁹ An integral understanding of creation and its total redemption, however, makes it clear that content and practice, doctrine and life, are inseparable. Heart, hand, and voice are never sundered from one another, as we see with Christ himself.

(c) *Jesus Christ*. First Timothy 3:16 sketches God's complete plan of salvation through Jesus Christ as the majestic mystery of true godliness. Jesus's life embodied godliness: in the incarnation, the confirmation by the Holy Spirit, his appearance to angels, proclamation in the world, and his exaltation. John Janzen, therefore, argues that true godliness is only possible through Jesus Christ, referring to 2 Peter 2:13, according to which God grants humans all they need to live and serve him.⁸⁰ Paul also points out in 2 Timothy 3:12 that a godly life (*eusebōs zēn*) is lived in Christ. A godly life has a clear Christological foundation as seen in several texts on *eusebeia* (Titus 1:1).⁸¹ And wherever Scripture discusses Christ, the Spirit is close at hand.

(d) *The Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in the lives of believers (John 5:5, 8, 16; Rom 7:4; Gal 5:22; Col 1:10). Several texts contrast godliness (Gal 5:20–21; 1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7–8; 6:11) with the practices of man's sinful nature (Acts 3:12; Gal 5:20–22; 1 Tim 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5–6; 2 Tim 3:5). Paul typifies godliness as the believers' walk in faith (Rom 8:4). These references confirm Lambert Floor's thesis that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit cannot be a hidden matter, seeing that the Holy Spirit stimulates a radical new attitude to life and regenerated activity in believers.⁸² In other words, the Holy Spirit integrates godliness with the holistic dimensions of heart, voice, and hands, because when the Spirit dwells in believers, his activating power also makes Christ's stature increasingly visible in their lives.⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ John F. Janzen, "Godliness, Godly," in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Achtemeier, 352.

⁸¹ Cf. Buys, "Vorming van 'n man van God," 58.

⁸² Lambert Floor, *De doop met de Heilige Geest*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Voorhoeve, 1989), 19.

⁸³ Ibid., 138.

This integration of godliness with the holistic dimensions is evident where *eusebeia* is used. This is especially true of the Pastoral Epistles, in which pastoral counsel is given to the congregations. Floor describes the purpose of this: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the congregation is revealed when the Spirit's fruit takes form in an individual believer's life.⁸⁴ The Holy Spirit thus plays an essential role in integrating godliness with the holistic dimensions of existence. It is important to consider J. C. Conell's comment that godliness derives from a right attitude to the Lord and does not run parallel to it—as two railway tracks.⁸⁵ In this sense, the Holy Spirit cultivates right attitudes in believers, who comprise the church, the body of Christ.

(e) *Church*. Godliness is the manifestation of a living faith in Christ. For believers, this is the outward expression of an inner experience.⁸⁶ Seen from a *missio Dei* perspective, the church is God's instrument that radiates glowing love and awe towards God arising from a disposition of love, dedication, reverence, and devotion. Christians are to lead consistent, godly lives, showing godliness by being continually conscious of God's presence in every aspect of their lives.⁸⁷ This flows from the absence of greed and from an attitude to life in which people are satisfied that their basic needs are met.⁸⁸

Such a way of life is in stark contrast to that of the false teachers whom 1 Timothy 6:3 condemns as opposing Jesus Christ himself by being conceited, ignorant, and having a sickly craving for quarrelsome questions. They are filled with envy, strife, blasphemy, evil suspicion, and exploit *eusebeia* for profit. On the other hand, the man of God (*anthrōpos tou theou*) is characterized by an inner longing to be righteous (*diakaiosunē*) before God and man in godliness (*eusebeia*), faith (*pistis*), love (*agapē*), perseverance (*hypomonēn*), and affection (*praupathian*).⁸⁹

From the explanation above, one can deduce the godliness of the church as God's instrument. The church's task is to model, through hearts and hands and voices, a lifestyle honoring God together with fellow worshipers. This lifestyle arises from a true knowledge of God and his grace in Jesus Christ (1 Tim 3:16; 4:7–10; 2 Tim 3:10–12; Titus 1:1; 2:11–12). A sincere dedication to God changes and transforms relations and behavior in all

⁸⁴ Ibid., 139

⁸⁵ J. C. Conell, "Godliness," *NBD*³ 432.

⁸⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *Sermon Starters*, vols. 1–4 (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992) (Logos Bible Software, version 4).

⁸⁷ Clive Anderson, *Opening up 2 Peter* (Leominster: Day One, 2007), 29.

⁸⁸ Buys, "Vorming van 'n man van God," 58.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

respects.⁹⁰ Believers should direct their lives toward glorifying God, at the same time winning their neighbors for Christ (1 Pet 3:1–2).⁹¹ Janzen links to godliness the characteristic biblical terms such as righteousness, justice, love, steadfastness, affection, virtue, knowledge, self-control, and brotherly love (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Pet 1:5–7).⁹² Hereby they prove that godliness is integral to the church’s task: affecting all human relations through words and deeds, from a disposition of love, awe, devotion, and a total surrender to God. First Timothy 4:8 provides another clear example of this integration. Paul directly connects the spiritual and daily life, as well as present and eternal life and confirms that godliness has great value and holds a powerful promise for eternal life, for the present and the future.

In this light, the church is God’s instrument that favors human lives with an integrated godly ministry. The aim is to effectuate godliness in this life as well in the next.⁹³ Athanasius explains this form of integration as follows, “For of these two things we speak of—faith and godliness—the hope is the same, even everlasting life.”⁹⁴ Foerster states, “The reference is to the positive effect of this mode of life.”⁹⁵ The eschatological perspective of godliness is clearly seen when Paul connects it specifically to the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11–13). Therefore, godliness is closely linked to the hope of eternal life (Rev 22:2).

Here, the church has to be constantly aware of the core responsibility of holistic godliness as an instrument of the *missio Dei*. This implies the task of revealing God in terms of hearts and hands and voices to all the nations and serving him. Godliness is not just aimed at the individual believer or at the church as institution. It entails an attitude of constant awareness of the impact that Christian life has on the life of unbelievers.⁹⁶

In sum, only because God is proclaimed as the source of godliness can the lifestyle of believers who are saved in Christ follow his example of true godliness. As a result, they prove in all aspects of their lives that they are empowered by the hope of eternal fruit, the new earth and the new heaven. By demonstrating godliness through grace, people fulfill their creational command as images of God.

⁹⁰ Peterson, *NBD*³ 423.

⁹¹ Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 296.

⁹² Janzen, “Godliness, Godly,” 352.

⁹³ Strong, “Godliness,” 662.

⁹⁴ Athanasius, *Festal Letters* 11.10 (*NPNF*² 4:536).

⁹⁵ Foerster, *TDNT* 7:182 and *TDNTa* 1012.

⁹⁶ Foerster, *TDNT* 7:183 and *TDNTa* 1012.

4. *Fear of the Lord—yr', pkhd, and phobos*

We now come to the *fear of the Lord*. Fearing God implies a combination of holy respect and fervent love. This experience is at the same time (1) a consciousness of being in the presence of true greatness and majesty; (2) a thrilling sense of privilege, (3) an overflow of respect and admiration; and perhaps supremely, (4) a sense that God's view of one's life is the only thing that really matters. This attitude to life clearly characterizes, according to Acts 9:31, the spirituality of the first Christian church. While living with deep respect before God and acting in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the congregation grew in number (*poreuomenē tō phobō tou kuriou kai tē paraklēsei tou hagiou pneumatos eplēthuneto*).⁹⁷ Childlike fear of the Lord describes a core aspect of Christian spirituality and is fundamental to morality and integrity. This fear also grounds a missionary vision which flows from appropriating God's faithfulness, grace, and love. Profound awe, respect, and reverence for the Lord describes the church's reaction to the great deeds the Lord has done.⁹⁸

(a) *God*. Applying this to our knowledge of God, we find that he, as the almighty and sovereign Creator, Judge, and Keeper, compels people to fear him, either out of anxiety and fearfulness, or with honor and deep respect. God instills fear by proclaiming his majesty and grace, but also by his mighty deeds in nature and his amazing power. Fearing God means one's heart is sensitive to both his God-ness and his graciousness. His people experience great awe and deep joy when they begin to understand who he really is and what he has done for them. They get a taste of his astonishing forgiveness (Ps 130:4)—a gift that determines their behavior and their whole attitude to life, a life that is surrounded by God's creation.

(b) *Creation*. After man fell into sin, the childlike, loving, and respectful fear of the Lord changed into terrified anxiety. This caused the first humans to hide from God out of shame due to their nakedness. From then on humans were fearful of God's punishment because of their disobedience. Perfect love and harmony were expelled by anxiety because of the wrath of the Lord caused by the fall into sin (1 John 4:18). The Bible ends, however, with the prospect of the new heaven and earth. In this new creation, people will live

⁹⁷ Phillipus J. Buys, "Strome van lewende water: Nuwe Testamentiese perspektiewe op die missionêre karakter van die kerk," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 47.1 (2012): 7.

⁹⁸ L&N 53.58–59; Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) (Logos Bible Software, version 4); James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997) (Logos Bible Software, version 4); J. D. Douglas, "Fear," *NBD*³ 365.

not in fear or anxiety, but in awe, honor, love, and respect towards God. In this regard, the Bible begins and ends with a childlike fear of the Lord.

Through this God-given holy fear, people are able to show honor and respect for God's authority, obey his commandments, and reject all forms of evil (Jer 32:40; Heb 5:7).⁹⁹ Douglas adds that the fear of the Lord can be seen as the principle of wisdom and sincerity.¹⁰⁰ Such an attitude even determines the type of person whom God loves, which means that man's life into all its dimensions is service to God. Therefore, true filial fear of God is expressed through God-centered worship. The fear of the Lord brings people in the right relationship to God as they come to obey and serve him with their entire life (Exod 20:20). The fear of the Lord is integrally interwoven with the believer's words and deeds. This is the main reason to obey the Great Commission; being a blessing to the nations means that the ends of the earth will fear the Lord (Ps 67:8), for judgment has come by the righteousness of Christ (Rom 1:17–18).

(c) *Jesus Christ.* Jesus Christ emphasized the fear of the Lord, by pointing out that God can destroy one's body and soul in eternal damnation (Matt 10:28; Luke 8:50).¹⁰¹ Horst Balz points out that Jesus continually stressed the relation between the fear of the Lord, on the one hand, and faith and obedience radiating from the lifestyle of believers, on the other.¹⁰²

According to John 14:1–11, Jesus presented his words and deeds as a challenge to his disciples: they should follow him in deference and glorify the Father. While the fear of the Lord determines the implicit tone and attitude to Jesus's words and deeds, this attitude is directed at glorifying the Father, and it is also complemented by the work of the Spirit in us.

(d) *The Holy Spirit.* For believers who have come to know the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit, the fear of the Lord loses the element of anxiety. It is worth noting that the early church, increasing in number, was characterized by fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). These believers no longer experienced the anxious fear of suffering (1 Pet 3:14; Rev 2:10) or of death (Heb 2:15); they were set free by Christ's death and knew that God was their Helper in all things (Rom 8:15, 28–30; Heb 13:6).¹⁰³

The Holy Spirit applies to believers' hearts the freedom that Christ achieved on their behalf, and so they serve and follow God, through words

⁹⁹ Cf. Günther Wanke, "φοβέω," *TDNT* 9:201–2 and *TDNTa* 1274.

¹⁰⁰ Douglas, *NBD*³ 365

¹⁰¹ Cf. W. Mundle, "Fear," *NIDNTT* 1:623.

¹⁰² Horst Balz, "φοβέω," *TDNT* 9:213 and *TDNTa* 1276.

¹⁰³ Cf. Balz, *TDNT* 9:214 and *TDNTa* 1276.

and deeds in their daily lives, which is manifested in the church as a whole.

(e) *Church*. Seen from the perspective of *missio Dei*, the fear of the Lord should typify the attitude of the church's words and deeds; it is part of the church's teaching of the Word as in Psalm 34:11, and it shapes a sensible and purpose-driven life (Prov 10:27; 14:26–27; 19:23; 22:4).¹⁰⁴ This shows that the fear of the Lord is integrated into the spiritual as well as the ordinary daily lives of believers. In this sense, the church functions as God's instrument that calls people to live in childlike fear of the Lord (2 Cor 5:11). First Peter 1:17–19 points out to church members that awe and reverence for God, which is expressed in holiness and prayers, are intertwined, because believers know that (cf. “knowing that” [*eidotes hoti*] in verse 19) the precious blood of Christ—the Lamb, spotless, without sin or blemish—redeems them.

Childlike fear of the Lord is also a comprehensive way to describe Christian spirituality. It grounds morality and integrity and integrates the faith, love, and deeds of the church. According to Acts 9:31 and 2 Corinthians 5:9–11, this has practical effects. Firstly, it encourages the emergence of a missionary vision in the church through which believers' numbers grow. Secondly, this attitude means rest and peace. The prospect that everyone will appear before the judgment seat of God was for the early church an incentive to such a mindset, and the fear of the Lord serves God's great purpose for his full counsel.¹⁰⁵

But fear of the Lord also brings joy and blessing. God wishes to restore honor and glory in a broken and corrupt world in order for believers to “taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!” (Ps 34:9–10 ESV). God gives eternal joy to all whom the Holy Spirit has brought to know God through Jesus Christ. In response, they obey God out of love and reverence with all their heart and through their hands and voices.

5. *Peace—shalom and eirēnē*

The final concept we will explore is peace, *shalom*. Academic publications on missional matters regularly debate the meaning of *shalom* and the consequences it holds for the scope, the nature, and purpose of mission. An example is the debate about the book by DeYoung and Gilbert regarding the true nature of the church's mission, the locus of social justice, peace, and the role the Great Commission.¹⁰⁶ They emphasize that the gospel is proclaimed to

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Balz, *TDNT* 9:216 and *TDNTā* 1276.

¹⁰⁵ Buys, “Strome van lewende water,” 11.

¹⁰⁶ DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*

make disciples; thus, they regard social responsibility as being of secondary importance.¹⁰⁷ Stetzer, however, rightfully indicates that they constrict the focus of *missio Dei* by their view that practical justice for the poor and practical peace do not form part of the church's missional task.¹⁰⁸

The gospel testifies that God reveals himself as the God of peace. Christ himself embodies, brings, and makes peace (Eph 2:14–16); he calls upon his followers to be peacemakers (Matt 5:19), and as a result the church is commissioned to live in peace (Acts 9:31). The holistic dimensions of heart and hands and voices are integrated into the *missio Dei* perspective expressing God's nature, character, and activity, revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the ministry of peace seeks an integrated approach in the nature, character, and activity of the church in accordance with the *missio Dei*.

(a) *God*. With reference to our knowledge of God, we can note that Gideon calls the Lord *JHWH-Shalom*—"The Lord is Peace" (Judg 6:24 ESV). This identification is echoed several times in the New Testament (Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20). God in his nature, being, and character is the God of peace who brings peace.¹⁰⁹ The mutual relation of the Triune God is one of godly peace. "God makes peace in his high heaven," according to Job 25:2 (ESV). Paul writes, "the mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6 ASV). Peace is God's gift to man (Num 6:26) and bestows wholeness, including welfare, health, favor, perfection, well-being, rest, and restoration to responsibility. Peace is grounded in God's revelation and deeds.¹¹⁰ Revelation, we recall, includes creation.

(b) *Creation*. Although the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 does not mention the term "peace," peace did exist. Timothy Keller argues that God created all things in a good, harmonious, mutually dependent, close relationship.¹¹¹ As thread is woven into a dress, harmonious relations are woven into a community. This interwovenness makes it clear that peace cannot only be limited to a spiritual condition between God and humans or among people.¹¹² Without righteousness there is no peace (Ps 72:3–7; 85:9–11; Isa 32:17). The meaning of peace in Scripture is holistic peace between all forms of existence.

¹⁰⁷ DeYoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?*, 20, 62.

¹⁰⁸ Stetzer, "Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert: What Is the Mission of the Church?"

¹⁰⁹ Stelman Smith and Judson Cornwall, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names* (North Brunswick: Bridge-Logos, 1998).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Keller, *Generous Justice*, 173.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

The heavenly fullness and richness was realized—with heart and hands and voices—in the creation before sin ended the perfect communion between God, humans, animals, and the rest of nature.¹¹³ Sin, as broken relations, is absence of peace in the whole of creation. Keller points out that, although *shalom* is translated by *peace*, the term has a much broader meaning.¹¹⁴ It describes full reconciliation and a state of full bloom in various dimensions—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. All relations are perfect, good, and filled with joy where the peace of God reigns, and peace that is now being restored by the work of Christ.

(c) *Jesus Christ*. The protevangel in Genesis 3:15 promised that a Savior would make peace by destroying evil. Christ is offered as God's merciful gift of peace so that humans may experience peace with God (Rom 5:1). Christ's redemption reconciled creation with God by making the new covenant a reality. This salvation-historic event is summed up in the concept of peace.¹¹⁵ In John's gospel, Jesus comforts and encourages his disciples by announcing that he will leave them heavenly peace (14:27; 16:32; 20:21), referring to Isaiah 60:17 (NIV): "I will make peace govern you. I will make godliness rule over you." God speaks about the restoration and glory of his restored people in Zion, and to encourage his suffering people God promises that peace and justice will prevail instead of corrupt dictators.¹¹⁶ A central feature of the new community is described metaphorically by the word *shalom*. The connection of mental and physical reality is evident.

Peace is an act from God for sinful human beings redeemed through Christ (Rom 12:18). Bringing further clarity to our understanding, Foerster highlights three concepts of peace (*eirēnē*) in the New Testament, namely a sense of peace and tranquility; a state of reconciliation with God; and the redemption of the whole person in an eschatological sense, this latter one being foundational.¹¹⁷

We must be careful not to think of peace only in negative categories. Peace does not merely mean absence of disasters, war, and injustice.¹¹⁸ Peacemaking ushers in a time, place, and condition in which love, justice and political and moral uprightness thrive. When God's peace rests upon his people, they enter the highest state of grace.¹¹⁹ God's people will experience welfare,

¹¹³ Ibid., 173–75.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Phillipus J. Buys, *A Biblical Response to Poverty and Social Justice: A South African Post-Apartheid Reformed Perspective* (Unpublished, 2010), 7.

¹¹⁶ Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*.

¹¹⁷ Foerster, "εἰρήνη," *TDNT* 2:412–16 and *TDNTa* 209–10.

¹¹⁸ Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

prosperity, peace, security, and safety. For missional ministry from the *missio Dei* perspective, an integral understanding of peace is essential and opens multiple views, leading to a more holistic approach to mission.

(d) *The Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit integrates words and deeds in missional ministry and makes peace. The Holy Spirit is proclaimed as the God of peace (Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20), which becomes clear in the Spirit's actions. He gives obedience, peace, and joy (Rom 14:17); strengthens believers' hope, filling them with joy and peace (Rom 15:13; 8:6); and guides their daily behavior by the fruits of peace (Gal 5:22–25). The Spirit brings believers an experience and awareness of well-being, satisfaction and completeness, irrespective of their external circumstances.

The Holy Spirit also establishes peaceful mutual relations between people (Eph 4:3) as well as between people and God. The Spirit gives believers peace instead of fear (Rom 8:1–2, 11, 14–17), bringing peace of mind to those who have to endure difficult situations (Hag 2:5; John 16:5–21; 20:21–22). With reference to 1 Thessalonians 5:23–28, Knowles summarizes the Holy Spirit's integration of peace: "Peace is what happens when we align our hearts with heaven. Peace is a wholeness of body, mind, and spirit, so that we are at one with Christ in the will and purpose of God."¹²⁰

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, peace emerges in words as well as through deeds, in a ministry of peace by acts of mercy, thus contributing to the glory of God.

(e) *Church*. Lastly, from a *missio Dei* perspective, the church is bearer and worker of peace. The believer's task is to establish beacons and signs of the rich diversity of God's peace, the eternal peace of Zion (Isa 60:17). First Corinthians 3:9 depicts the church being where God cares through his servants, and where God himself bestows his blessings.¹²¹ God employs the missional ministry to proclaim his peace in the world by word and deeds. In the process, men are called to develop peace to its fullest in all contexts of life, be it economics, politics, health or nature, but the church never develops such things in isolation.

The church must constantly seek and pray for peace, and act as peace-maker. Several biblical passages confirm this commission (e.g., Eccl 17:1; Matt 5:9; Mark 9:51; Rom 12:18; 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Tim 2:2), and the concept of peace is applied in practice in a variety of ways.¹²² Mutual peace is found in unity, unanimity, and harmony, and it impacts everything. In Psalm

¹²⁰ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2001), 642–43.

¹²¹ F.W. Grosheide, *Korte verklaring der Heilige Schrift met nieuwe vertaling: Paulus' eerste brief aan de kerk te Korinthe opnieuw uit den grondtekst vertaald en verklaard* (Kampen: Kok, 1933), 42.

¹²² Cf. Buys, *A Biblical Response to Poverty and Social Justice*, 7.

85:11–12, David connects love, faith, peace, and justice—qualities that are actualized by words and deeds. In light of all that Scripture teaches, the anticipation of an eternal state of peace is an eschatological focus throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

God employs righteousness and justice to restore peace. Only righteousness can bring true peace.¹²³ The restoration of *shalom* means that believers combine their time, possessions, power, and resources as sacrifices offered to benefit the life and needs of others.¹²⁴ In line with this, Cornelius Plantinga’s summary of peace reveals its nature and effect: “In the Bible *shalom* means universal flourishing wholeness, delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder at its Creator and Savior, opens doors, and welcomes the creatures in whom He delights.”¹²⁵ The church is thus the bearer, instrument, and worker of the divine peace, and does this by integrating Word and deed in its ministry.

It is evident that peace begins with God—who he is and what he does. When God brings peace in and through Christ, he reconciles man by Word and deeds to himself, and restores the broken relation with humans. This is worked out in practice in terms of the various relationships in which believers are involved. The promise of eternal peace results in the church accepting the call to spread peace here and now, in the diverse relationships in which people find themselves. Through its proclamation, peace is an eschatological beacon and sign of the final coming of the kingdom. According to the *missio Dei* perspective, God shapes peace in the present as the foreshadowing of eternal peace; the church is Christ’s instrument in announcing it.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is seen that these key biblical concepts integrate aspects of word and deed. Put differently, God intertwines the holistic dimensions of heart and hands and voices in his greater design for people, and for his glory. Our conceptual analysis shows how words and deeds are integrated in God’s self-revelation and calls for a holistic approach in which both aspects are inseparable in the proclamation of the gospel. From the perspective of *missio Dei*, the concepts discussed in this article provide a basis for a holistic understanding of word and deed, as inextricably linked. The key words analyzed

¹²³ Ibid., 8.

¹²⁴ Keller, *Generous Justice*, 175.

¹²⁵ Cornelius Plantinga, *Not The Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

are interwoven like the different threads of a spider's web. When one touches a single thread, the entire web moves. Likewise, all of the biblical concepts discussed above are implied when one of them is in question.

The Ministry of Religion and the Rights of the Minority: The Witness of Protestant Christianity in Indonesia

BENYAMIN F. INTAN

Abstract

The practices of the Ministry of Religion in Indonesia that discriminates against and disregards the freedom and rights of the minority are contradictory to the aspirations of the founding fathers of the nation as declared in the Indonesian Constitution. In order to bridge this gap it is essential to have a critical and reflective study on religion-state relations and the existence of the Ministry of Religion. The study presented in this article will deal with this problem from a historical standpoint and will be based on the underlying principles of Christian witness and thought in Indonesia. It will also recommend some practical strategies in protecting the freedom and rights of the minority in Indonesia.

I. Introduction

Democracy and the rights of minorities are correlated and closely linked. For this reason, the United Nations issued a Declaration on Minorities in 1992, stating that “a positive approach to the rights of a minority” is one of the important requirements in the formation of a democratic society.¹ A

¹ David Beetham and Kevin Boyle, *Introducing Democracy: 80 Questions and Answers* (Cambridge: UNESCO Publishing/Polity Press, 1995), 56.

country that suppresses the rights of its minority citizens will have its democracy threatened.

When a country disregards the rights of a minority and accommodates only the agendas of the majority, then a tyranny by the majority will arise.² Western nations, rooted in the tradition of democracy, have attempted to curb this tyranny of the majority religion by separating religion from the state, in the hope of founding a just state in which the state seeks to accommodate the agendas of all religions and not to give preference to a select few.

As Indonesia is pluralistic in terms of religion, the founding fathers of the nation had early on fully realized the danger of the rise of tyranny by the majority religion and had accordingly paid careful attention to the problem of religion and the state.³ Their concern was expressed in chapter 29 of the 1945 Constitution or *Undang-Undang Dasar* (UUD), which states that “the State is founded on the principle of One Lordship,” and “the State guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace his/her own religion and to worship according to his/her religion and belief.” This statement contains three basic thoughts. First, Indonesia is not a theocratic state since no religion is explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. This means that the State will be fair to all religions and not take sides with any one in particular. Second, being founded on the principle of One Lordship, the State appreciates and encourages the contribution of diverse religions in the life of the nation.⁴ Third, the Constitution must guarantee the freedom of each individual in changing his or her belief or religion.

However, in reality Indonesian politics have not conformed to this ideal. The formation of the Ministry of Religion has put Islam in a special position

² A disregard for minority rights that causes the rise of tyranny by the majority group usually happens in religious and/or ethnic contexts, hence the importance of religion and ethnicity in social conflicts that caused many people to fall victim. See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Minds of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mark Juergensmeyer and Margo Kitts, eds., *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Religion, Ethnicity and Self-Identity: Nations in Turmoil* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997). See also Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Scott Strauss, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

³ With regard to religious life, all of the major world religions are represented in Indonesia, along with a wide range of folk and animistic beliefs. Among these faiths, Islam embodies approximately 87% of the population, making it the largest religious group in Indonesia. The 2010 Indonesian census recorded 87.18% Muslims, 6.96% Protestants, 2.91% Catholics, 1.69% Hindus, 0.72% Buddhists, 0.05% Confucians, and 0.13% listed as “Others.” Badan Pusat Statistik, *Sensus Indonesia 2010*, www.sp2010.bps.go.id/index.php/site/tabel?tid=321&wid=0.

⁴ See Benyamin F. Intan, *“Public Religion” and the Pancasila-based State of Indonesia: An Ethical and Sociological Analysis* (New York: Lang, 2006).

in this country. At the outset, the Ministry of Religion was intended to manage the affairs of Islam only. Although subsequently its duties were broadened to undertake the affairs of non-Muslim religions as well, the Ministry of Religion has remained orientated towards the agenda of Islam.

Its focus on Islam has induced the Ministry of Religion to issue many regulations that are discriminative in nature, putting the minority non-Muslim religions, especially Christianity, at a disadvantage. The discriminative regulations have impacted non-Muslim minorities as well as minorities within the Muslim belief itself, such as the Ahmadiyah and Shia sects, so much so that in the author's opinion, the intolerance and violence betrayed by Islam towards the Muslim minorities are even more severe than that towards non-Muslims.

It should be noted that the discrimination and violence against religious minorities in Indonesia has become increasingly problematic. Early in 2009, in his reflection essay entitled "The Re-shaping of the Indonesian Identity" ("Merajut Ulang Keindonesiaan"), Syafii Anwar, from the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP), reported that in 2008 the rate of violence and violations of the freedom of religion or belief towards religious minorities had increased by a hundred percent, reaching a total of 360 violations. The violation of religious freedom and tolerance directed toward religious minorities in Indonesia still exists today. The Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace notes that in 2012 there were 264 cases of violation against the freedom of religion or belief, with 371 types of acts of violence. The highest number of violations of religious freedom included those committed against Christian congregations (50 cases), apostates in minority religious beliefs (42 cases), the Shia and Ahmadiyah congregations (34 and 31 cases, respectively).⁵ Religious violence and violations against religious minorities resulting in many human rights issues in Indonesia were highlighted in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council under the United Nations on May 23, 2012.

⁵ Out of the 371 acts of violence, 226 were perpetrated by Indonesian citizens and 145 by the state, involving state officials as its initiators. The most conspicuous of the 226 violations committed by Indonesian citizens comprised 169 cases of criminal offense, 42 cases of religious intolerance, and 15 cases in which violence was condoned. Out of the 145 violations committed by the state, 117 were actually perpetrated by the state and 28 were not prevented by the state. The state institutions involved in the highest number of violations of religious freedom included the police (40 cases), the District Administrator (28 cases), the City Administrator (10 cases), the Ministry of Religion (8 cases), the Subdistrict Administrator (8 cases), and the Office of the Attorney General (6 cases). Bonar Tigor Naipospos, ed., *Presiden tanpa Prakarsa: Kondisi Kebebasan/Beragama Berkeyakinan di Indonesia 2012* (Jakarta: Pustaka Masyarakat Setara, 2012), 31–49.

The problem then lies in the question of how one should bridge the gap between the “freedom” aspired to by the founding fathers of this nation and the reality of religious violence and violations against religious minorities in Indonesian politics—between “what ought to be” and “what is.” In this article, the author attempts to bridge that gap by referring to the threads of Christian witness in Indonesia. Taking on this role has never been easy for Christians in Indonesia, due to the 350 years of Dutch colonialism in its history, although it was also the Dutch who brought Christianity to Indonesia. History has proved that for the sake of freedom and the upholding of human rights, Indonesian Christians have stood up against the Dutch colonialists in spite of the price they had to pay. They lost not only their comfort zone, but even their own lives.

It is the hope of the author that in this way the principles that founded the Christian witness in Indonesia will bring a normative lead to the realism of Indonesian politics (“descriptive”) in order to align them to the aspiration of the founding fathers (“prescriptive”) as expressed in the Constitution. To achieve this purpose, the author will first elaborate on the difficult struggles the Indonesian Christians have gone through in fighting for freedom and the defense of human rights, drawing a connecting line between them. Secondly, the author will elucidate the various discriminative regulations issued by the Ministry of Religion in order to restrict the freedom and rights of non-Muslims as well as Muslim minorities. Next, the author will present a critical and reflective evaluation of the Ministry of Religion’s discriminative attempts from the perspective of Christian witness in Indonesia. And lastly, the author will summarize the discussion by recommending a number of practical strategies for protecting the freedom and rights of minorities in Indonesia.

II. *The Witness of Protestant Christians in Indonesia*

We mentioned already that it had not been easy for Protestant Christians to exist and bear witness in Indonesia due to 350 years of Dutch colonialism. The question arises as to how the Protestant churches that used to be regarded as a “colonial church” could change and become an “ethnic church” and eventually an “Indonesian church.” The following account will show that it is only by the grace of God that the Indonesian Protestant churches have been able to turn the country into a mission field in which they could bear witness to the gospel and struggle for the fulfillment of their calling.

1. *Paradigm Shift*

Christianity first came to Indonesia in the sixteenth century A.D. through Portuguese missionaries who promulgated Roman Catholicism in certain parts of the country. They were followed by Dutch missionaries who introduced Protestantism at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁶ At that time, Islam was also at the peak of disseminating its teaching in Indonesia, forcing the Hindu religion to move from Java to the island of Bali.⁷ Thus, before Islam's influence spread all over Indonesia, Christianity was already present and taking root in regions yet unreached by Islam, such as Moluccas (Maluku) and Timor in the eastern part of Indonesia. The Dutch had succeeded in removing Portuguese power in those regions and converted its inhabitants from Catholicism to Protestantism.⁸

The propagation of the Protestant mission through Dutch colonialism in Indonesia comprised two stages: first, through the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC, United East-Indies Company) in 1602–1799, and second, through the Dutch East Indies in 1800–1942. The presence of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia through the VOC was motivated mainly by their interest in spices. At the outset, the contract between the Dutch government and the VOC did not mention Christianity, but since 1623 the VOC was constrained to involve itself in the propagation of Christianity.⁹ Thus, Christian missions was included in the VOC's organizational structure, first as part of the Department of Trade and Colonies, and later as part of a new department called the Department of Education, Worship and Industry.¹⁰ The VOC's commercial motive had accordingly been inseparable from evangelistic mission, since at that time the Dutch government embraced the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* (wherever you conquer, your religion should reign). Article 36 of the Dutch Statement of Faith stated that the government was obliged to “preserve the holy Church, oppose and eradicate all forms of false religion and idol worship, abolish the kingdom of the

⁶ See Th. Müller Krüger, *Sedjarah Geredja di Indonesia*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1966).

⁷ Islam first entered Indonesia around the thirteenth century. When Marco Polo visited Aceh at the end of the thirteenth century, he observed the presence of Islam at some trading centers. T. B. Simatupang, “Doing Theology in Indonesia Today,” *CTC Bulletin* 3.2 (1982): 22.

⁸ T. B. Simatupang, “Dynamics for Creative Maturity,” in *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 91.

⁹ Karel Steenbrink, “The Arrival of Protestantism and the Consolidation of Christianity in the Moluccas, 1605–1800,” in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 99–100.

¹⁰ Gerry van Klinken, *Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation: Christians in Indonesia, A Biographical Approach* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), 9–10.

antichrist and advance the kingdom of Jesus.”¹¹ Consequently, the unification of the church and the state at that time had brought about the establishment of a state church in Indonesia during the VOC era.¹²

Existing under the shadow of colonialism, the Protestant mission had no intention of contextualizing its theological teaching. The theology being taught was fraught with a western-oriented way of thinking. “Thought patterns brought by European missionaries or by the western church,” as John M. Prior and Alle Hoekema have put it, “were considered normative. Missionaries were often afraid of heterodox thinking by indigenous believers and suppressed their ideas.”¹³ In other words, the Protestant mission rejected the various attempts for an “indigenous theologizing.”¹⁴ It is unsurprising that until the year 1800, although Christianity had existed in Indonesia for about 200 years, it had not been owned by the churches in Indonesia. Th. Müller Krüger, the first dean of the *Hoogere Theologische School* (HTS),¹⁵ called Indonesian Christianity of the time “the Church of people under age.”¹⁶

After the VOC went bankrupt on December 31, 1799, the Dutch government took over all of its territories and placed them under the authority of the Dutch East Indies while continuing the propagation of the Christian mission.¹⁷ Starting to govern Indonesia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Dutch East Indies, following its predecessor, adopted a state church policy. However, a fundamental difference existed between the two. During the VOC era, the mission of the state church was part of one of the departments of the VOC and therefore remained under colonial power and depended fully on it. But in the era of the Dutch East Indies, the state church was more independent and self-reliant in carrying out the Protestant mission. By the decree of King William I, the Dutch East Indies established the state church under the name “the Protestant Church of the Netherlands Indies,” in which various Protestant denominations, including Lutherans, came together. The self-reliance of the Protestant Church was reflected in its openness and freedom to invite various missionary societies

¹¹ Krüger, *Sedjarah Geredja di Indonesia*, 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³ John M. Prior and Alle Hoekema, “Theological Thinking by Indonesian Christians, 1850–2000,” in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Aritonang and Steenbrink, 749.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ HTS was established in Bogor in 1934 and was moved two years later to Jakarta. In 1954, the name of the school was changed to Sekolah Tinggi Teologia (STT, Higher Theological School). See *Ibid.*, 757.

¹⁶ Th. Müller Krüger, ed., *Indonesia Raja* (Bad Salzuffen: MBK-Verlag, 1966), 99. Quoted in Simatupang, “Dynamics for Creative Maturity,” 91.

¹⁷ See Thomas van den End, “The Colonial Era: 1800–1900,” in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Aritonang and Steenbrink, 137–40.

from Europe to assist local churches.¹⁸ From the year 1800 to 1900, fifteen missionary societies had started working in the Netherlands Indies.¹⁹

The independence of the Protestant Church was also reflected in its main mission to create independent local ethnic churches by pioneering the formation of what the eminent Protestant T. B. Simatupang calls “proto-churches.”²⁰ Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century the Protestant Church opened up itself to “indigenous theologising” by allowing Indonesian Christians to get involved in ecclesial offices as *assistant pastors* or *evangelists*, and then as *pastors*.²¹ Although the Indonesian Christians holding ecclesial offices remained subordinate to the European missionaries, their presence, which Simatupang deems as “proto-theological awareness,” was significant for the establishment of self-reliant local ethnic churches in the Netherlands Indies.²² History notes the self-reliance of the local ethnic churches in the twentieth century when the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (*Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa*) was founded in 1934 in North Celebes, the Protestant Church of Moluccas (*Gereja Protestan Maluku*) in 1935, and the Timor Evangelical Christian Church (*Gereja Masehi Injili Timor*) in 1947. Other ethnic churches such as the Chinese-speaking churches, the Javanese churches, the Borneo Evangelical Church (*Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis*), and the Batak Protestant Christian Church (*Huria Kristen Batak Protestan*) were also founded during this period.²³

Nevertheless, the founding of the Protestant Church by the colonial government that was represented by the Dutch East Indies had made the former’s independence and self-reliance limited. Although the Protestant Church refused to accept aid from the colonial government for evangelistic work, the colonial government bore all of the operational costs of the Protestant Church. This situation caused concern among the missionary societies.²⁴ Another problem that also caused their concern was the large number of Protestant ministers who adopted liberal theology that basically neglects mission work.²⁵ This situation resulted from the composition of the founders of the Protestant Church, which comprised many denominations that were

¹⁸ John Titaley, “From Abandonment to Blessing: The Theological Presence of Christianity in Indonesia,” in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C. H. Kim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 75.

¹⁹ Van den End, “The Colonial Era: 1800–1900,” 141.

²⁰ Simatupang, “Dynamics for Creative Maturity,” 92.

²¹ Prior and Hoekema, “Theological Thinking,” 751.

²² Simatupang, “Dynamics for Creative Maturity,” 92.

²³ Titaley, “From Abandonment to Blessing,” 75.

²⁴ Van den End, “The Colonial Era: 1800–1900,” 159.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

united by the colonial government, as discussed above. The fact that many of its ministers adopted liberal theology had caused the Protestant Church to function basically as “a government agency for the fulfillment of the religious needs of its Protestant subjects. As such, it was not supposed to do any missionary work.” Thomas van den End adds, “Even if the government had allowed it to do so, the leadership of the church would not have felt an inner urge towards mission.”²⁶ So it was the missionary societies that were most engaged in evangelism and the founding of churches. The German *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*, for example, pioneered mission work in South Borneo from 1835, and in North Sumatra among the Batak tribe since 1862, and founded churches in those places.²⁷ Similarly, the *Zending der Gereformeerde Kerken (ZGKN)*, the mission of the Dutch Reformed Church founded by Abraham Kuyper, pioneered mission work and founded a church on the island of Sumba.²⁸

Overall, the Protestant mission, being guided by the power and interests of the VOC, was deemed not only ineffective but also contra-productive to Christian mission itself. By remaining silent in the face of the ruthlessness of Dutch colonialism, evangelism had become a large stumbling block to those who embraced the Christian faith, particularly when it was carried out with an orientation towards political and economic gain for the Dutch colonial government. Furthermore, most converts of Protestantism were not true Christians but only nominal ones. Krüger wrote that in 1615 the Reverend Wiltens, one of the first pastors stationed in Maluku, had complained about the huge number of Protestant Christians who were “Christians in name only.”²⁹ In turn, nominal Christianity then produced syncretism. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the Moluccas a so-called *Ambon religion* appeared that was “a mixture of Christianity ... and traditional religion.”³⁰ It should be noted that nominal Christianity had in turn brought about not only a syncretism of beliefs but also hypocrisy, both of which were dangerous to the Christian faith. In short, the Protestant mission under the VOC was in fact committing suicide.

The Protestant mission being carried out during the Dutch East Indies era was far better compared to the one during the VOC era. The Protestant churches, identified previously as “a colonial church,” had changed into “an

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁸ Thomas van den End, “The Last Decades of the Colonial Era: 1900–1942,” in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Artonang and Steenbrink, 167.

²⁹ Krüger, *Sedjarah Geredja di Indonesia*, 31.

³⁰ Steenbrink, “The Arrival of Protestantism,” 109.

ethnic church”—also known as a group of protochurches. By engaging in “indigenous theologising,” Christian mission had focused its attention on efforts to gain an understanding of the religion and culture of its target people. This understanding is important not only to enhance the effectiveness of evangelism, but also to lead those evangelized to a genuine conversion. The Protestant mission during the Dutch East Indies era believed that genuine conversion could not be achieved without conversion in the heart of Christian individuals. Aside from the work of the Holy Spirit, in order to have genuine conversion of the heart of Christians, it is extremely important for the gospel to be proclaimed, as the Third World Missionary Conference in Tambaram (1938) has put it, “in terms and expressions that make its summons intelligible in the context of life as actually lived.”³¹

In addition, during the Dutch East Indies era the Protestant mission was more independent and self-reliant, whereas during the VOC era it depended completely on colonial rule. This change happened not due to the transfer of power from the VOC to the Dutch East Indies, but because a change in political climate had occurred in the Netherlands. It was previously mentioned that the unification of the church and the state by the Dutch colonialists followed a policy that applied in the Netherlands. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, in line with the increasing pluralistic nature of the Dutch society, there was a shift in church-state relations from “unification” to “separation,” particularly during the administration of Abraham Kuyper as Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901–1905).³² In spite of the better position the Protestant Church was in as compared to that during the VOC era, its condition as a state church still created problems. As a state church, the Protestant Church and the Dutch colonial government were taking advantage of each other in the process of the *politization of religion*, in which religion was used to legitimize the state’s political agenda, and in the process of the *religionization of politics*, in which the state was used to legitimize the agenda of religion. But eventually, based on what the Protestant Church had experienced, it was religion that was most disadvantaged from those processes, and the state benefited most. In the end, the Protestant Church had become not only “a government agency,” but also refrained from its mission to engage in evangelism and the founding of churches.

The Protestant mission in Indonesia only truly freed itself from colonial rule when the Dutch colonialism of the Netherlands Indies ended with

³¹ John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul J. Visser, eds., *The J. H. Bavinck Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 117.

³² Klinken, *Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation*, 9–10.

the Japanese occupation of Indonesia in 1942. The three-and-a-half year Japanese occupation became a blessing in disguise for the development of the Indonesian churches. In order to pursue their agenda of establishing “the Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere,” the Japanese administration expelled the Dutch and replaced the European leadership of the churches with that of local Christians.³³ Simon Marantika, for example, was appointed Chairman of the Synod of the Protestant Church of Maluku in 1942.³⁴ The transfer of church leadership into the hands of local Christians made them aware of their responsibility to the faith they embraced.³⁵ This experience, in spite of the difficulties, in fact became a blessing for the churches as it increased their fighting spirit in preparing them for self-reliance later on. After Japan was defeated and the Second World War ended, the Indonesian churches had to deal once again with their European counterparts. However, this time they did not treat their fellow European pastors as masters but as equals. The realization of becoming a self-reliant church, freed from colonial rule, reached its peak at the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945.

2. The Nationalist Movement

After Indonesian independence was declared, the Protestant churches underwent a drastic change: they no longer depended on overseas mission organizations, but became independent and self-reliant with a national profile. During this independence era, the main struggle of the Protestant churches was to get themselves involved in the nationalist movement. Whereas the Catholic churches had participated in the nationalist movement almost without obstruction, the Protestant churches, being ethnic-based, had to find a common solution to the problem: in what way could the Protestant churches—such as the Protestant Church of the Moluccas, the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church, and the Batak Protestant Christian Church, to name a few—become an Indonesian church that viewed “the whole of Indonesia” as “one field for the common calling of all churches to witness and service”?³⁶

History notes that from the very beginning, Protestant Christians had played a pivotal role in the nationalist movement. During the pre-independence period, they already participated in promoting national unity in several

³³ Thomas van den End, “Indonesian Christianity during the Japanese Occupation, 1942–1945,” in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Aritonang and Steenbrink, 179.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁵ Titaley, “From Abandonment to Blessing,” 76.

³⁶ Simatupang, “Dynamics for Creative Maturity,” 108.

ways. One way was to involve themselves in regional fights against the Dutch colonialists, such as done by Thomas Matulesy, also known as Pattimura (1783–1817), who led an insurgece against the Dutch in his hometown of Saparua in the Moluccan islands. Simatupang notes that when Pattimura was hunted down by the Dutch soldiers and had to flee from Saparua, he managed to leave a Bible on the pulpit of the church, opened to Psalm 17, which begins with this ringing sentence, “Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry!” He thereby intended to convey a message to the invading Dutch commander that he was fighting for justice.³⁷ In this sense, Simatupang considers Pattimura, who was later honored as a national hero, one of the “early Christian nationalists.”³⁸

Another significant measure in promoting national unity was pioneered by the younger generation of Christian Protestants. While each of the Protestant churches at the time maintained its ethnic identity, their younger generation—naming themselves ethnically Young Batak, Young Minahasa, Young Ambon, and Young Timor, for example—had participated in a national Youth Congress held on October 28, 1928.³⁹ In this meeting, representatives of the Indonesian youth unanimously pledged allegiance to Indonesia known as the *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge), in which they acknowledged that they belonged to One Nation, Indonesia; to One Motherland, Indonesia; and to One Language, Indonesian.⁴⁰ However, the Protestant churches responded negatively towards this pledge, since at that time these churches were still under missionary leadership that was, to some extent, protected by the Dutch colonial government. Those who took part in the nationalist movement were “alienated from their churches”⁴¹ and “regarded by the church as no longer good Christians.”⁴²

Nevertheless, the ambiguity between Christianity and nationalism ended with the establishment of *Christen Studenten Vereniging* (CSV, Student Christian Movement) in 1932. It was CSV that made it possible for students to be both nationalist and Christian at the same time. CSV was the pioneer of *Dewan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia* (DGI, Council of Churches in Indonesia), which appeared later in May 1950, with the intention of founding the

³⁷ Simatupang, “Doing Theology in Indonesia Today,” 23.

³⁸ R. A. F. Webb, *Indonesian Christians and Their Political Parties, 1923–1966: The Role of Partai Kristen Indonesia and Partai Katolik* (North Queensland: James Cook University, 1978), 24.

³⁹ October 28 has been nationally commemorated as *Hari Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge Day).

⁴⁰ Simatupang, “Dynamics for Creative Maturity,” 93–94.

⁴¹ Simatupang, “Doing Theology in Indonesia Today,” 24.

⁴² T. B. Simatupang, “This Is My Country,” *International Review of Mission* 63.251 (1974): 315.

Gereja Kristen yang Esa di Indonesia (the Single Christian Church in Indonesia). One of the reasons for founding DGI, says Simatupang, was the growth of “a national consciousness, in the sense that the ethnic churches were seen as being called to grow into one church in order to express together the Christian presence in the nation.”⁴³ CSV was also the pioneer of *Hoogere Theologische School*, founded in 1934, “with the clear purpose of preparing leadership for the churches of the future in Indonesia.”⁴⁴ In short, nationalism and the church were then reconciled.

The Protestant Christians also founded *Partai Kristen Nasional* (PKN, the National Christian Party), later renamed *Partai Kristen Indonesia* (Parkindo, the Indonesian Christian Party), on November 10–11, 1945. According to Martinus Abednego, one of its founders, *Parkindo* as “an organisation of the Protestant Christians from various Protestant churches” functions as “a working communion to struggle on the calling and responsibility of the Protestant Christians to the nation and the country.”⁴⁵ Thus, the presence of *Parkindo* disclosed the commitment of Protestant Christians to contribute to the nation and the state.

Furthermore, Protestant Christians had also participated in the reconciliation process between Indonesia and the Netherlands to end the war. Johannes Leimena and Simatupang were among the Indonesian delegates meeting with the Dutch at the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table Conference in The Hague in late 1949 to finalize the settlement of the war and to achieve constitutional acknowledgement of Indonesia’s independence (1949).⁴⁶

The pinnacle of the Protestant Christians’ contribution to national unity could be seen in the strategic role they played in the formulation of *Pancasila*, Indonesia’s national ideology, whereby a united Indonesia could be accomplished. From May 29 to June 1, 1945 *Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* (BPUPKI, the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence) met to discuss the formulation of Indonesia’s ideological basis of the state (*Weltanschauung*). The discussion reached a deadlock due to the ideological confrontation between *golongan Islam* (a Muslim nationalist group), who wanted Islam to be the ideological basis of the state, and *golongan kebangsaan* (a secular nationalist group), who wanted Indonesia to be a secular state in which religion would be

⁴³ Simatupang, “Doing Theology in Indonesia Today,” 25.

⁴⁴ Simatupang, “This Is My Country,” 315–16.

⁴⁵ Martinus Abednego, *Suatu Partisipasi* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1976), 39. Quoted in Jan S. Aritonang, “Independent Indonesia (1945–2005),” in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Aritonang and Steenbrink, 190–91.

⁴⁶ Simatupang, “Dynamics for Creative Maturity,” 100–101.

separated from the state. Sukarno's address to the meeting about *Pancasila* on June 1, 1945 was well received by both parties and succeeded in breaking the deadlock.

However, on June 22, 1945 *Pancasila* was reformulated in a document known as the Jakarta Charter (*Piagam Jakarta*). In this document the first principle of *Pancasila*, namely, the principle of Lordship, was reformulated by adding the clause "*dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya*" (with the obligation to carry out the Islamic law by its adherents) after the word "Lordship." Although it has been repeatedly asserted that the clause known as "the seven words" would apply to Indonesian Muslims only and not to other religious groups, it soon attracted rigorous objections, especially from the Christian side. Latuharhary, a strong Protestant figure and member of BPUPKI, expressed his objection by stating that the seven words "could have considerable consequences regarding other religions, and moreover could lead to difficulties in connection with the *adat-istiadat* (customary law)."⁴⁷

On August 18, 1945, one day after the Proclamation of Independence, in the first meeting of *Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* (PPKI, the Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence),⁴⁸ the Jakarta Charter was abrogated. Shortly before the opening of PPKI's formal meeting, Muhammad Hatta, who later became the first Vice-President of Indonesia, proposed changes to the draft of the Preamble of the Constitution. Hatta had been informed by a Japanese navy officer that in the eyes of Christians, the seven words were "discriminatory against all minority groups," since these words served only part of the Indonesian people.⁴⁹ If these words remained, Christians living predominantly in the eastern part of Indonesia would not join the republic. Their agreement then resulted in the removal of the seven words from the preamble and the body of the constitution. In short, through the Christians' contribution, *Pancasila* treats Indonesian citizens with equal rights without prejudice to religion, race and ethnic background.

The persistent struggle of the Protestant Christians against Dutch colonialism and in materializing Indonesian independence should be appreciated. Their immense sacrifice had primarily cost them their comfort zone since at the time Protestant Christians received special privileges from the

⁴⁷ B. J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 28.

⁴⁸ PPKI was founded on August 7, 1945 to replace BPUPKI and was led by Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta as its chairman and vice-chairman, respectively.

⁴⁹ Deliar Noer, *Partai Islam di Pentas Nasional, 1945–1965* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1987), 40.

Dutch colonial government. And aside from putting their lives at stake, they were criticized for not being good Christians by their churches because they dared to oppose the colonial government who had brought Christianity to Indonesia.

The Protestant Christians' persistence in materializing the independence of Indonesia was attributed to their conviction that independence is a gift of God, and as such Indonesia has to treat all of its citizens equally without differentiating between people according to their religious background.⁵⁰ For this reason, the Protestant Christians insisted on the removal of the seven words from the *Pancasila*, otherwise they would separate themselves from this republic. For them, Indonesia should not allow any discrimination against certain citizens and must guarantee the freedom and rights of the minority. They would therefore prefer the leadership of a Muslim president who upheld freedom and human rights to that of a Dutch governor-general who was a Christian but did not resist violence and violations against freedom and human rights.

Nevertheless, Christianity's struggle for Indonesia to extend equal treatment of its citizens still had a long way to go. The state's policy declared through the Ministry of Religion in giving Islam a privileged status in fact disregarded the freedom and rights of non-Muslim minorities, especially Christianity, as well as Muslim minorities, as the following discussion will indicate.

III. *The Ministry of Religion and the Rights of Minorities*

In the early years of Sukarno's administration (1945–1965), Islam received various concessions from the government. In order to compensate Muslim nationalists for their legislative "loss" of the Jakarta Charter, on January 3, 1946 a special Ministry of Religion was established in the executive branch of the Old Order government, in spite of the criticisms raised against it. Latuharhary from the Protestant side argued that this ministry "might give rise to feelings of offence and dislike," and he suggested that "religious affairs be handled by the Ministry of Education."⁵¹ Another sharp judgment came from J. W. M. Bakker, S.J., a Catholic writer, who thought that this ministry had from the beginning turned out to be "a bulwark of Islam and an outpost for an Islamic State."⁵²

⁵⁰ T. B. Simatupang, "Christian Presence in War, Revolution and Development: The Indonesian Case," *Ecumenical Review* 37.1 (1985): 81.

⁵¹ Aritonang, "Independent Indonesia (1945–2005)," 190.

⁵² J. W. M. Bakker, "De Godsdienstvrijheid in de Indonesische Grondwetten," *Het Missie-*

The Ministry of Religion was initially intended to administer the affairs of Islam only. Although it was later expanded by providing sections for non-Muslim religions—Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu-Buddhist—the ministry’s existence, as Clifford Geertz has put it, “is for all intents and purposes a *santri* [devout Islam] affair from top to bottom.”⁵³ Thus, by giving Islam special privileges, the presence of the Ministry of Religion had in the first instance discriminated against non-Muslim minorities and Christianity in particular by disregarding their freedom and rights, as denoted in the following discussion.

1. *Christianity (Non-Muslim Minorities)*

The state’s concession to Islam as a majority religion that demands privileges has naturally caused discrimination against non-Muslim minorities, especially Christians. On September 13, 1969 the Minister of Religion, together with the Minister of Internal Affairs, issued *Surat Keputusan Bersama* (SKB, the Joint-Decision Letter) No.1/BER/MDN-MAG/1969 regarding the construction of worship places, in which it is stated that the construction of every worship place would require permission from the Head of the Local Government (Article 1), and prior to issuing the permission the official in charge may request the opinions of representatives of local religious organizations and spiritual leaders (Article 3).⁵⁴ The decree was issued in response to the large number of conversions from Islam to Christianity in certain areas of the country. Although it was supposed to apply to all religious groups, for the afore-mentioned reason the decree was, in reality, enforced to regulate only the construction of worship places for non-Muslims, especially Christians.⁵⁵ This decree, and particularly Article 3, has made it difficult, if not impossible, for non-Muslims and Christians to build their worship places in a community where Muslims are a majority.

The decree has also been used as an excuse for closing churches or even destroying and burning them. From 1969 to 2001, the number of closings, burnings, and/or demolitions of churches has increased yearly, from only two during Sukarno’s presidency (August 17, 1945–March 7, 1967; averaging 0.008 per month) to 456 during Suharto’s rule (March 7, 1967–May 21,

werk 4 (1956): 215. Quoted in Boland, *The Struggle of Islam*, 106.

⁵³ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 200. The *santri* are Muslims who follow the Islamic orthodox teaching and practices more strictly and carefully. Intan, “Public Religion” and the Pancasila-based State of Indonesia, 36.

⁵⁴ Weinata Sairin, ed., *Himpunan Peraturan di Bidang Keagamaan* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1996), 3–6.

⁵⁵ T. B. Simatupang, *The Fallacy of a Myth* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1995), 198.

1998; averaging 1.19 per month), and subsequently from 156 during the Habibie administration (May 21, 1998–October 20, 1999; averaging 9.18 per month) to 232 during Abdurrahman Wahid’s presidency (October 20, 1999–July 23, 2001; averaging 11.048 per month).⁵⁶ The largest number of churches being demolished occurred during Wahid’s presidential term because of the efforts made by certain groups to discredit his vision of a tolerant Islam.

In the Situbondo incident on October 10, 1996, known as “Black Thursday,” 24 churches were demolished and burned by a total of 3,000 people. Among the victims was a pastor of the Pentecostal Church of Surabaya (*Gereja Pentakosta Pusat Surabaya*), who together with his wife, child, nephew, and an evangelist of the church died when their church in Situbondo was burned.

During the Reformation Era after Suharto, the SKB was revised in 2006 and renamed the *Peraturan Bersama (PERBER, Joint-Regulation)* of Two Ministers. However, there are basically no differences in the content of the *PERBER* as compared to that of the SKB. The new regulation imposes restrictions on religious freedom, particularly in the building of worship places. It requires at least 60 signatures of adults living in the proximity of the location where the new place of worship is to be built, indicating their approval of the building project. In addition to that, another 90 signatures of adult members of the congregation are required, indicating that they live in close proximity to the location of the new church. Following the implementation of the *PERBER*, the closing and destruction of worship places that belong to the minority religious groups still continue. A couple of days after the *PERBER* was promulgated an angry mob expelled Christians from a Pentecostal church in Bogor and then closed it.⁵⁷ The Jakarta Christian Communication Forum observed that 67 churches had become victims from March 21, 2006 to August 17, 2007.⁵⁸ Although the Ministerial Joint-Regulation proves to be counterproductive and controversial and has even instigated religious violence, astonishingly it is still retained.

It is certainly regrettable that the presence of the SKB and *PERBER* has created such a negative impact on certain groups within the society. These two products of the law have made the building of a place of worship in a religious

⁵⁶ Paul Tahalele and Thomas Santoso, *The Church and Human Rights in Indonesia: Supplement* (Surabaya: Surabaya-Indonesian Christian Communication Forum, SCCF-ICCF, 2002), 1.

⁵⁷ N. Hosen, “Substantive Equality and Legal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Case Study of Joint Ministerial Decrees on the Construction of Worship Places” (paper presented at the Commission on Folk Law and Legal Pluralism International Conference, Depok, 29 June–2 July, 2006), 6. Quoted in Salim, “Muslim Politics in Indonesia’s Democratization,” 121.

⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion of *PERBER*, see Benyamin F. Intan, “Peraturan Bersama Kontraproduktif,” *Seputar Indonesia* (21 September 2010).

country such as Indonesia far more difficult than the building of a massage parlor. Even more ironical is the fact that while churches can be built only with much difficulty, they can be closed, demolished, and burned with ease.

Apart from the problem of church construction, the problem of religious propagation has become a very serious issue for non-Muslims, particularly Christians. The rapid growth of adherents to Christianity has caused concern on the part of Muslims, who in 1978 again urged the Ministry of Religion to issue the Ministerial Decision no. 70/1978 on “the Guidelines for Evangelism.” Section (a) of Article 2 of the Guidelines states that religious evangelism aimed at people who already belong to a certain religion is prohibited by any means.⁵⁹ The decree does not specifically indicate which religions are involved, but obviously it is targeted at Christian evangelists. Moreover, in order to tighten the state’s control on evangelistic activities, the Minister of Religion issued the Ministerial Decision no. 77/1978 concerning “Foreign Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia.” This decree is implemented to ban foreign missionaries from working in Indonesia (Article 3, section 1). Any foreign aid in the form of workers, materials, or finance must receive prior approval from the Minister of Religion, who will also adjudicate on granting the permission for it (Article 2).⁶⁰

In their response to the decrees, DGI (the Council of Churches in Indonesia) and *Majelis Agung Wali Gereja Indonesia* (MAWI, the Supreme Council of Indonesian Bishops) queried the Ministry of Religion’s decision to promulgate the decrees before discussing them with all religious groups, if indeed the Ministry was intended to serve all religions. They submitted strong objections to the Minister of Religion, the Vice-President Adam Malik, and even to President Suharto, asking that the regulations be revoked, based on the fact that they contradict Article 29 of the Constitution, in which religious freedom is guaranteed. Moreover, any elaboration of Article 29 of the Constitution has to be conducted by the legislature arm in cooperation with the executive arm of the government, namely, the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (DPR, the People’s Representative Council) and the President, not by Ministerial Regulations with guidance from the President. On the basis of these considerations, the regulations had, in their opinion, no legal basis at all.⁶¹ The Christian daily newspaper *Sinar Harapan* expressed this concern in its editorial: “We do not have to become an expert on the comparative study of religion in order to know that every major

⁵⁹ Simatupang, *The Fallacy of a Myth*, 202.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 204–5.

⁶¹ Ramlan Surbakti, “Interrelation between Religious and Political Power under New Order Indonesia” (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1991), 153.

religion cannot accept becoming a religion which is not universal. ... This means that the freedom for propagating religion to all persons is an intrinsic part of the universality of religion.”⁶² In response to the concerns of DGI and MAWI, the government later issued the Joint Decision of the Minister of Religion and the Minister for Home Affairs no. 1/1979 concerning “the Guidelines for Evangelism and Foreign Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia,” which reinforces the Ministerial Decision no. 70/1978 but without section (a) of Article 2 and made the application of the Ministerial Decision no. 77/1978 less restrictive.⁶³

The presence of the Ministry of Religion apparently poses problems, not only to Christians or non-Muslim minorities but also to Muslim minorities.

2. Muslim Minorities

Towards Muslim minorities, the Muslim majority has used the Ministry of Religion to promote their idea of the Islamization of Muslims. “It is not yet necessary,” Boland comments, “to call non-Muslims to Islam (*mendakwahi*). First call the Muslims to Islam, so that they do not use the term ‘Muslim’ too lightly, but will become true Muslims.”⁶⁴ With the purpose of forcing *abangan* (nominal) Muslims⁶⁵ to recommit themselves to the Islamic religion, Muslims attempted to use the Ministry of Religion to prohibit the religious practices of the *abangan*, known as *kebatinan* (mysticism).⁶⁶ In 1961, the Ministry proposed a minimum definition of religion which contains the following necessary elements: “A holy scripture, a prophet, the absolute lordship of *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (God), and a system of laws for its followers.”⁶⁷ These requirements automatically exclude various mysticisms. Niels Mulder observes that not a single criterion of the requirements can be fulfilled by the religious sects and mysticisms. This proves that they are the main target of those who set the criteria.⁶⁸

⁶² *Sinar Harapan*, 1978. Quoted in Surbakti, “Interrelation between Religious and Political Power,” 354.

⁶³ See Sairin, ed., *Himpunan Peraturan*, 63–68.

⁶⁴ Boland, *The Struggle of Islam*, 191.

⁶⁵ Nominal or *abangan* Muslims know very little about Islam, but still consider themselves Muslim. Their religion is actually based on a mixture of different religions, including Islam, Hindu-Buddhism, and animism. Intan, “Public Religion” and the Pancasila-based State of Indonesia, 36.

⁶⁶ *Kebatinan* is the indigenous religion of the Javanese, mostly in Central Java, who practice mystical beliefs based on a mixture of different religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and animism. Cf. Howard M. Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1995), 124.

⁶⁷ Niels Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life in Contemporary Java: Cultural Persistence and Change* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978), 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–6.

Initially, the involvement of Muslims in the definition of religion was intended to gain control over the *abangan* and to coerce them to submit to Islam as a religion. It is important to note that during the eradication of the followers and sympathizers of *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI, the Indonesian Communist Party) after September 30, 1965, more than 500,000 victims were killed, and many of the *abangan* who supported PKI or PKI-affiliated organizations, in spite of their need for protection of their lives, did not recommit themselves to Islam.⁶⁹ “The slaughter of the suspected ‘communist’ *abangan* in 1965–1966, and the pressure to show that one had become an obedient Muslim,” as Niels Mulder has put it, “boomeranged on Islam.”⁷⁰ Instead, the *abangan* were converted to Christianity and even to Hinduism. In early 1969, the World Council of Churches reported that from 1965 to 1968, 2.5 million *abangan* Muslims had converted to Christianity.⁷¹

Another way the Muslim majority uses the Ministry of Religion could be inferred from the Ministry’s prohibition of religious false teachings or heresies (*bidat*), particularly those that contradict Islamic mainstream teaching. Associated with Islam, the beliefs and practices which have been banned by the Ministry since the 1970s include, among others, Islam Jamaah, Darul Hadits, Jamaah Qur’an Hadits, Bantaqiah, Islam Alim Adil, Inkar Sunnah, Isa Bugis and Jam’iyyatul Islamiyah, JPID and JAPPENAS. The ban on these beliefs was recommended by *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI, the Council of Indonesian Ulama) which represents mainstream Islam at both national and regional levels.

The Ministry’s prohibition of Islamic heresies has unfortunately tempted certain Islamic leaders and their followers to resort to violence as a means for preserving their own existence. It is sad indeed to observe that whenever violence is used in dealing with religious heretics, the government has often remained silent and refused to get involved. This was obvious during the violent attacks perpetrated towards the Muslim sect of Ahmadiyah, which culminated in the incident in Cikeusik on February 6, 2011. Three members of Ahmadiyah died and five were seriously injured when about 1,500 people attacked their village.⁷²

The bitter fact of the absence of the government’s involvement in protecting Islamic minorities labelled as “heretics” was also seen in the attacks

⁶⁹ Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 6.

⁷⁰ Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life*, 6.

⁷¹ *Angkatan Baru*, January 23, 1969. Quoted in Allan Arnold Samson, “Islam and Politics in Indonesia” (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1972), 237.

⁷² Previous attacks against Ahmadiyah had targeted mainly buildings, including their mosques, but the Cikeusik incident involved direct attacks on the community and even murder.

perpetrated by the Sunni Islamic group towards the Shia Islamic group in Sampang, Madura, on August 26, 2012. Thousands of Sunni followers attacked the Shia group who lived in the village of Karang Gayam in Sampang. Two Shia members died, six were injured, 205 fled from their village, and 37 houses were burned.⁷³

These incidents indicate that violence towards religious minorities has happened because of the government's failure to act and its lack of stringency in establishing law and order in the settlement of religious disputes. In short, violence in the name of religion has been perpetrated openly, not only by individuals and existing religious groups, but also by the government—indirectly by allowing it to happen, and to a certain extent, directly, by initiating or encouraging it.

In the following discussion, the author will present a critical and reflective evaluation of the various discriminative actions taken by the Ministry of Religion from the perspective of Christian witness in Indonesia.

IV. Christian Witness on the Rights of Minorities

As mentioned before, when Christianity first came to Indonesia, it spread and became rooted in regions unknown to Islam, such as the Moluccas and Timor in the eastern part of Indonesia. Being previously unreached, the churches founded in those regions were often called “folk churches.” Christians in those areas “felt themselves to be *the* people.” They are the majority, and “there is no minority feeling among them.”⁷⁴ It should be noted that since the Japanese occupation and the end of Western dominance over Indonesia, Protestant churches on the whole have become strongly rooted in the nation. Christianity is thus not “a foreign religion in Indonesia.”⁷⁵

Furthermore, from the very beginning, Protestant Christians have become part of this nation in view of their involvement with the nationalist movement and the strategic role they played in the formulation of the *Pancasila* since the founding of this republic. As Simatupang has put it,

The war for independence was also a great experience for Christians in Indonesia. It was their participation in it which gave Christians the acceptance and recognition they now enjoy. Everybody knew, and we knew ourselves, that we were really a part of this nation. If it had not been for this period the position of Christians in the nation would

⁷³ The village had previously been burned on December 29, 2011.

⁷⁴ Simatupang, “This Is My Country,” 313.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 313–14.

be very different. ... No nation can understand its own life except in terms of its own historical experience.⁷⁶

It is important to note that Christian participation in the Indonesian independence war and revolution was primarily based on “national motivations.”⁷⁷ This would mean that Christians were not exclusive in their struggle. They fought for the sake of the nation, not for their own agendas. In fact, they would always put their Christian agenda under the national agenda. When the Protestant Christians attempted to eliminate the seven words from the *Pancasila*, for example, they did it not only for their own sake but for that of the nation. W. J. Rumambi, a Protestant leader who was later appointed minister in Sukarno’s Dwikora II cabinet, describes this as follows:

We view it [*Pancasila*] according to our confidence as Christians. We do it because we are also responsible for the salvation and the happiness of Indonesia. That responsibility is firstly to our Lord and then to our fellows. ... Our task as Christians in Indonesia in the political field is to join to attempt to secure the welfare, peace, justice and orderliness for the whole people of Indonesia and not only for the Christians, by words as well as by actions, based on the salvation plan of our Lord as evident in our Holy Scriptures; Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world and the saviour of Indonesia as well. That is our confidence.⁷⁸

Since they fought for the nation, even though being a minority in terms of number, the Protestant Christians did not consider themselves a minority.

The above discussion has elucidated that, from the experience of the Protestant churches during the Dutch colonial era and the experience of the minority groups under the Ministry of Religion, it is obvious that the religion-state relation is the key factor in deciding on whether or not freedom and minority rights are guaranteed. In the next part, the author will explain how a proper relation between religion and the state should look in order that freedom and minority rights are not neglected.

1. *The Proper Relationship between Religion and the State*

From the above discussion, we learn that unifying religion with the state has resulted not only in the abuse of freedom and minority rights, but has also proved to be contra-productive to religion itself. For example, the SKB and *PERBER* regulations regarding the construction of worship places have made it difficult not only for Christians to build a worship place in a

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁷⁷ Simatupang, “Christian Presence in War, Revolution and Development,” 81.

⁷⁸ Aritonang, “Independent Indonesia (1945–2005),” 198.

community where they are a minority, but also for Muslims in areas where they are a minority, such as in Timor, where Christians are the majority, or in Bali, where Hindus are the majority.

The unification of religion and state has a negative impact on the state as well. To date, the SKB and *PERBER* have caused the closing, demolishing, and burning of more than 1,500 churches with the effect of disruptions in public order and safety, which are the state's responsibility to maintain. A more serious effect arises from the regulation to collect 60 and 90 signatures as prerequisite for the building of worship places. Since the lot of the intended site for the worship place must be purchased before the building permit can be secured, in whichever religious majority area it is located, this regulation has caused the local community to be divided on the basis of the religion of its members, and has resulted in the existence of religious enclaves. Internal religious relationships have become more dominant than inter-religious relationships. This condition will eventually weaken the overall unity and harmony of the nation, and will potentially become a destructive force.

In sum, religion and the state must never be totally fused. Both the *politicization of religion* and the *religionization of politics* are counterproductive and are counterproductive for all concerned. Kuyper uses the term "sphere sovereignty" to designate the theological impossibility of unifying religion and the state since each has its own autonomy, identity, and responsibility.⁷⁹ But as both spheres receive their authority from God, Kuyper concludes that there should be "a free [religion] in a free state."⁸⁰ Without this freedom, the *politicization of religion* and the *religionization of politics* are inevitable. Because unifying religion and the state is problematic, it is not surprising that in the meeting of BPUPKI Indonesia's founding fathers rejected the idea of an Islamic state that unifies religion and the state as proposed by Muslim nationalists.

However, this does not mean that religion and the state have to be segregated. It has been mentioned before that from the very beginning, the growth of Indonesian nationalism, for example, has been inseparable from the involvement and participation of Protestant Christians as well as Islam. Its status as the majority religion has made Islam one of the most important contributors to the growth of Indonesian nationalism by promoting a national unity in opposing Dutch colonialism.⁸¹ Thus, religious contribution and participation in Indonesian nationalism are clearly undeniable. For Kuyper

⁷⁹ Abraham Kuyper, "The Antirevolutionary Program," in *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society*, ed. James W. Skillen and Rockne M. McCarthy (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 242.

⁸⁰ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 99.

⁸¹ George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952), 38.

an “irreligious neutral standpoint” as proposed by the French revolution is simply unrealistic.⁸² Nicholas Wolterstorff describes Kuyper’s view on this matter: “Kuyper’s holistic understanding of religion ... led him to reject the liberal’s *separation* view of how government should be related to religion, and to espouse the *impartiality* view. It’s not possible, Kuyper believed, for school education as a whole [for example] to be neutral with respect to the diversity of religious and philosophical perspectives.”⁸³ Consequently, it is impossible to make an absolute separation between religion and the state. For this reason, Indonesia’s founding fathers also rejected the idea of a secular state by secular nationalists in which religion and the state are separated.

The above discussion has shown that both the theocratic state and the secular state are incompatible with the Indonesian context. The solution for Indonesia is that it should be neither a secular state nor a theocratic state, but a *Pancasila*-based state. Being a non-secular state means that Indonesia acknowledges the role of religion in the life of the nation. On the other hand, being a non-theocratic state implies that in Indonesia religion does not have the right to control the state. Nevertheless, the state acknowledges the social role of religion since the various religions in Indonesia have made significant contributions to the nation’s fight for independence. By virtue of the first principle of *Pancasila*, “The Principle of One Lordship,” the state recognizes unequivocally that it will be based on religious beliefs, and that the Indonesian society believes in “the Lordship.” This “religious state,” according to Sukarno, should promote what he calls “the interests of religion.”⁸⁴ In the words of Simatupang, a *Pancasila*-based state is responsible “not only for ensuring religious freedom, but also for promoting the role of religions in society.”⁸⁵ In this religiously accommodating state, religious communities not only maintain their autonomy, but are also encouraged to make an indispensable contribution to the nation’s public life in accordance with their particular beliefs.

In short, within a *Pancasila*-based state, although religion and the state are separate from each other, they have a mutual responsibility for one

⁸² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 106.

⁸³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Abraham Kuyper’s Model of a Democratic Polity for Societies with a Religiously Diverse Citizenry,” in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Work*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 198 (Italics his).

⁸⁴ Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 124. Cf. Sukarno, “Lahirnya Pantja Sila,” in *Pantja Sila: The Basis of the State of the Republic of Indonesia* (Jakarta: National Committee for the Commemoration of the Birth of Pantja Sila, 1964), 29.

⁸⁵ Robert Lumban Tobing, “Christian Social Ethics in the Thought of T. B. Simatupang: The Role of Indonesian Christians in Social Change” (PhD diss., The Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver, 1996), 166.

another. The issue is then of how religion should fulfill its responsibility towards the state and the state towards religion without being trapped in the discourse of the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics. The author suggests that this is where the Ministry of Religion should function, as discussed below.

2. *The Ministry of Religious Affairs*

Before discussing the role of the Ministry of Religion, we should first be clear about the vision and structure of the Ministry. Above, we mention that despite the added sections provided for non-Muslim religions, the presence of the Ministry remains oriented mainly towards the agendas of Islam. As Arskal Salim notes,

The minister has always been a Muslim, and the Islamic section of the ministry the largest. At present each religious section has one director-general, except for the Islamic section, which has two—one for Islamic affairs and one for Islamic institutions. For decades the ministry has been the locus of the internal strengthening of Islamic institutions, the Muslim community and the spread of Islam (*dakwah*).⁸⁶

Therefore, the Ministry of Religion needs to be transformed in its character and structure, from initially serving mainly one religion to becoming a *Pancasila*-oriented Ministry that serves all religions equally and objectively. If this substantial aspect could be handled, then the name “Ministry of Religion” (Kementerian *Agama*) should be changed to “Ministry of *Religious Affairs*” (Kementerian *Keagamaan*),⁸⁷ and the position of Minister of Religion should be open to non-Muslims as well.

The main task of the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding the religion-state relationship is primarily to create freedom for religion and the state and to attempt to prevent efforts to *religionize politics* and *politicize religion*. Accordingly, the Ministry must revoke all Ministerial Decisions that have been problematic—such as the prohibition of religious mission, the redefining of religion, the prohibition of heretics, the construction of worship places—and cease the issuance of such regulations. Speaking from a Christian background, Kuypers wrote on this matter,

⁸⁶ Arskal Salim, “Muslim Politics in Indonesia’s Democratization: The Religious Majority and the Rights of Minorities in the Post-New Order Era,” in *Indonesia: Democracy and the Promise of Good Governance*, ed. Ross McLeod and Andrew MacIntyre (Singapore: Institute of South-East Asian Studies, 2007), 116.

⁸⁷ See Simatupang, *The Fallacy of a Myth*, 206–7.

[the] Churches flourish most richly when the government allows them to live from their own strength on the voluntary principle. And that therefore neither the Caesaropapy of the Czar of Russia; nor the subjection of the State to the Church, taught by Rome; nor the “Cuius regio eius religio” of the Lutheran jurists ... but that only the system of a free Church, in a free State, may be honored from a Calvinistic standpoint. The sovereignty of the State and the sovereignty of the Church exist side by side, and they mutually limit each other.⁸⁸

When dealing with the responsibility of the state towards religion, the Ministry must retain the state’s primary task to establish public order, which includes public justice and public morality. Whenever the Ministry applies its regulative function towards a certain religion because its religious manifestations disrupt public order, then the Ministry must realize that its existence, while always dominant “at” the boundaries of the spheres, must never be dominant “across” the boundaries and “within” every sphere.⁸⁹ This means that when dealing with disrupting religious manifestations, the Ministry is only allowed to prohibit manifestations or interpretations of that religion and not to prohibit the religion itself. In other words, it should be noted that such a regulative function of the Ministry should be based not only on considerations of public justice and public morality, but mainly and primarily upon the requirement that the Ministry must secure the fundamental rights and freedom of human life. For this reason, when different religions clash, then the Ministry, in Kuyper’s words, has to compel “mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each; [and] to defend individuals and the weak ones, in those [religions], against the abuse of power of the rest.”⁹⁰ In this sense, the Ministry’s intervention might not be imposed permanently and should be removed as soon as possible in order for the larger measure of freedom to be assured.

On the other hand, when dealing with the responsibility of religion towards the state, the Ministry has to realize that whereas religions have no intention of interfering in the state’s internal affairs, they have to play an important role in the nation’s socio-political life. This means that the framework of a social role does not build upon the contribution of one sole religion, but has to be collectively provided by the various religions. Therefore, in their social role, religions should attempt neither to dominate nor trivialize or eliminate each other. The relationship between religions should go beyond a mere peaceful coexistence. An ideal relationship between religions would be a creative pro-existence, in which religions realize the need to care for each

⁸⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 106.

⁸⁹ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 15, 282.

⁹⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 97.

other because of their mutual dependence. Simatupang plainly affirms that a *Pancasila*-based state does not merely acknowledge the diversity of religions. “A *Pancasila* state does not emphasize only coexistence, but also cooperation among religions based on their mutual responsibility in developing culture, society and the state.”⁹¹ Cooperation between religions has become a necessity, particularly in the application of the Golden Rule: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31 NIV), similar versions of which can be found in other religions.⁹² The application of the Golden Rule as common ground will generate pro-existence as its fruit. In such a condition, “passive religions” such as Hinduism and Buddhism are not left behind. In turn, they will give their contributions.

As mentioned above, the Ministry, by virtue of *Pancasila*’s first principle, encourages religions to engage in the nation’s socio-political life. Such a social role of religions, according to Sukarno, must be restricted “in a civilized way.”⁹³ In other words, the social role of religions would be legitimate as long as it is addressed at the level of discourse that occurs in civil society. Civil society is the only channel for religion to make important contributions to the Indonesian society. In order for religions to make important contributions to civil society, they must be able to present persuasive arguments using reason as their tool. Their arguments should go through what the Protestant figure Eka Darmaputera calls the process of “objectivication,” and by this he means “a process of translating religious (exclusive) categories into objective, inclusive, and general terms.”⁹⁴ Through this process, people will accept or reject religions’ arguments not primarily because these arguments originate from this or that particular religion, but entirely because they are right or wrong based on objective norms. It is only through this process that the Ministry can assure that any intermingling between religion and political power could be avoided.

V. Concluding Remarks

By implementing the thoughts and experience of Christianity in the life of the nation and the state, we hope that there will no longer be a gap between

⁹¹ T. B. Simatupang, *Iman Kristen dan Pancasila* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1998), 169.

⁹² For the interpretation of Golden Rule in other non-Christian religions, see John Hick, “A Pluralist View,” in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 39–40.

⁹³ Sukarno, “Lahirnya Pantja Sila,” 33.

⁹⁴ Eka Darmaputera, “The Search for a New Place and a New Role of Religion within the Democratic Order of Post-Soeharto Indonesia: Hopes and Dangers” (paper presented at the Third Annual Abraham Kuyper Award, Princeton, NJ, 1 December 1999), 20.

the aspirations of Indonesia's founding fathers as expressed in the Constitution and the realism of Indonesian politics. Through a proper relationship among religions and a foundational change in the character and structure of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, each citizen could enjoy his or her freedom and fundamental human rights. Without this, Indonesian democracy will face a threat. The reputation of being the third largest democratic country in the world will remain only in memory.

The Church in Korea: Persecution and Subsequent Growth

SANG GYOO LEE

Abstract

Persecution of Christians in Korea, like that of Christians in ancient Rome, reveals that Christian teaching clashes with surrounding cultures. A survey of the persecutions of Christians in Korea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (first of Catholic Christians, then by Japanese, and finally under communism) reveals both political and religious factors. Yet, recalling Tertullian, the author reminds us that persecution is seen to result in the growth, purification, and strengthening of the church. Finally, the author recalls the amazing church growth in Korean history and concludes with a warning about the danger faced by the church in the context of economic prosperity.

Church history is a history of persecution. Each Christian church, at any time and in every place, has had to face persecution.¹ In the beginning of the church, the Romans persecuted her because of the suspicion provoked among the Roman authorities. In other words, the Christian way of life looked different from the way of life dictated by Roman customs. That was apparent from the first resistance Paul faced in Philippi in his second missionary journey.

¹ William Bramley-Moore writes, “The history of Christian martyrdom is, in fact, the history of Christianity itself,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Martyrs*, compiled by Mark Water (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), ix.

When Paul and his companions had healed a slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit, the owners, realizing that their hope of making money was gone, accused them of “advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice” (Acts 16:21). Though it was about twenty years before Nero’s imperial persecution, it revealed the cultural nature of persecution the Christians faced from the beginning. Christian teaching and Roman customs were opposed to each other both politically and socially. That was the same situation for the Early Korean Church.

In the early Korean Church, Christian teaching was both strange and unlawful for most Koreans imbued with common Confucian values; thus, they considered Christian teaching *barbaros philosophia*.² For the Koreans, Christianity was above all not oriental, but an *externa religio* and *superstitio*. From that point of view, their understanding of Christianity was the same as that of the Romans.

I. The Korean Church under Persecution

In 1784, Roman Catholicism, whose adherents were called *Chosen* at that time, was first introduced to Korea. The Korean Catholic Church suffered five major persecutions in 1791, 1801, 1839, 1846, and 1866. About ten thousand Korean Roman Catholics were executed during those persecutions. For the Korean authorities, the Catholic Church was only an ideological enemy invading their land from outside, and thus an unlawful religion, *religio illicita*. In a manner of speaking, the Korean Catholic Church, as the Goa in India, provoked persecution by engaging in political matters. In short, persecution against Catholics was a political suppression. Korean Protestantism, however, met a somewhat different situation in the late nineteenth century, about a hundred years after the first introduction of Roman Catholicism. At the time, the political concern of the Korean government was different. Still, there was a conflict of values, that is, a collision between the gospel and the Confucian value-system. The early Korean Protestants had to endure struggles among family members, specifically in regard to *jesa*, the ceremonies of ancestor worship.

After 1900, however, especially after the Annexation of 1910, the political suppression of Christianity by the Japanese authorities was resumed. This time, however, its subject was different. While the Roman Catholics had

² Regarding the concept and history of *barbaros philosophia*, see Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity*, WUNT 112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 57–84.

been persecuted by the Korean government, the Protestants were persecuted by the Japanese Imperialists. Fearing the interference of colonial policies by the Western churches, the Imperialists adopted a dual strategy against Christianity: divide-and-control, aiming at disjoining and limiting it: one part of this dual strategy was for its dispersion, the other, for its attenuation. In 1910, the year of the Annexation by the Japanese, the government of the latter calculated there were about 200,000 Christians, 300 Christian schools, 30,000 scholars, 1,900 meeting places, 270 foreign missionaries, and 2,300 Korean ministers working actively.³ The foreign missionaries were connected, either directly or indirectly, to the outer world. The Protestant churches enjoyed a good reputation among Korean people through either establishing schools and hospitals, or enlightening their spirits, such as by contributing to progress through reform of the social system, creating more class equality and supporting the emancipation of women. They had won public trust through various cultural and enlightening activities for the oppressed people. So, the Japanese authorities tried to crush the church.

The first persecution took place in the case of Haeseo Educational Coalition. As the *Seobuk* (North-West) provinces had many Christians, the church leaders of the Seocheon, Chungju, and Anak districts had proclaimed the “One church for one *Myeon* (municipal community)” movement and formed the Educational Coalition to educate their people. The Japanese government maliciously misrepresented the movement, arrested all the leaders involved, and accused them of being supporters of fundraising for the Korea Independence Army.

In December 1910, there was a more acute persecution called the Conspiracy Case. A missionary named G. S. McCune came to shake hands with Terauchi Masatake (1852–1919), the Governor General. The authorities again made this a pretext for opposition to the church, arrested over 600 people, and pronounced 105 of them guilty, for the purpose of suppressing the Christian national independence movement. In the process, Methodist pastor Chun Deogki and two laymen, Kim Geunhyung and Chung Heesoon, were tortured to death. National leaders such as Rhee Syngman and Ahn Changho fled to America, and Kim Kyoosik was exiled to China.

The 1919 Independence Movement, called the March 1st Movement, was another occasion for suppression. This was an anti-Japanese independence movement joined by over 10% of the total Korean population. While the number of Christians at that time was estimated to be about 1.5% of the population, the Christian church contributed about 25–30% of preparatory

³ Wi Jo Kang, *Politics and Religion under the Japanese Rule* (Seoul: CLC, 1977), 28.

actions by preparing and mobilizing the uprising. Among the 33 Korean leaders who signed the Declaration document sent to the Governor General, 16 were Christians. After that, greater oppression of the Protestant churches followed. From March to April 1919, 41 churches were destroyed and 2,120 Christians were jailed. According to a report submitted to the 1919 Presbyterian General Assembly, 3,804 Christians were arrested, including 134 pastors and elders. After the movement, the Japanese government tightened its control and suppression of the Korean churches.

One of the worst persecutions of Korean Christianity was related to the enforced Shinto shrine worship and the subsequent persecution of the churches for their disobedience. The Shinto shrine was a place to perform worship in Shintoism, the native Japanese national religion serving both the sun goddess and other gods, allegedly the ancestors of the royal dynasty, in addition to the emperor as the present god. The Japanese wartime government felt it necessary to unite the national spirit by enforcing its military policies. Shinto shrine enforcement was a part of the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement. The building of Shinto shrines started when the Japanese people entered Korea. Specifically, after the erection of the Chosen Jingung, the principal shrine of Korean Shintoism, on the peak of Namsan in Seoul in 1925, many Shinto shrines were erected across the whole peninsula. In 1935, there were 322 shrines; at the time of the National Liberation, the number had reached 1,141.⁴ Beginning in 1935, mission schools were also forced to take part in shrine worship. In the following year, all churches and Christian institutions had to take part in the worship or be closed down. Individuals who refused to take part in shrine worship were denounced as *unpatriotic* and suffered many disadvantages; not only were they expelled from official service, but their children were also banned from schools. Pastors were either forced to resign or ejected from their churches. Nonetheless, the pastors refused to worship the sun goddess on the grounds that it was idolatry, violating the first and the second commandments. While there was general Christian resistance, because of the fear of persecution, some Christians obeyed, and many others, even church institutions and presbyteries, were submissive to the threat by allowing their members' attendance at the shrine ceremony. Roman Catholics (1935) and Methodists (1938) succumbed to the demands. A relatively small denomination, the Holiness Church, was dissolved. At last, even the biggest denomination, the Presbyterian Church, at the 27th General Assembly in 1938, carried the motion affirming that the shrine ceremony was not a religious but a patriotic

⁴ *Bulletin of Chosen, 1925–1945* (n.p.: Office of Chosen Governor General, 1945).

ceremony. It again provoked fierce resistance against Shinto shrine worship. In the process, over 2,000 Christians were put behind bars and over 40 died in prison. Among them was the Rev. Joo Kicheol (1897–1944), a great martyr. He was imprisoned and tortured for five years and seven months, and died on April 21, 1944. Foreign Missions in Korea had to decide whether to close their schools in refusing to obey or to continue obeying the order of shrine ritual. Neglecting the order to engage in the shrine ceremony was a pretext for the Japanese to put an end to Christian education, and it was a way to stop the Korean Christian leaders' call for national independence from the Japanese regime. It made it difficult for the Missions to make a decision. There were naturally pros and cons. At last, the American Presbyterian Church of the North (PCUSA) and the South (PCUS), and the Australian Presbyterian Mission (APM) decided to discontinue their schools. The American missionary G. S. McCune was dismissed from the office as Principal of Soongsil School and expatriated from Korea because of his rejection of shrine worship. Other missionaries, such as Bruce Hunt (PCUSA) and Dr. Charles McLaren (APM) were put in jail. In addition to them, many missionaries refused to obey and supported the cause of their Korean brethren. The Japanese Imperial Government demanded further actions from the Koreans such as the raising of the Japanese flag, the bowing down toward the Japanese Royal Palace, and the recitation of the Japanese subject's vow. Shrine worship continued to be the most acute form of oppression of the Korean Church during the decade until Liberation. There were many acts of betrayal during this period, and the persecution was a phenomenon that touched all classes and constituted the harshest measures of the Japanese regime.

The second persecution the Korean Church suffered was during the rule of the Communist regime after the Liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945. Though there had been communist persecutions before the Liberation, after the establishment of the Communist government in North Korea, the persecution had become even stronger and more specifically targeted. The Supreme Leader Kim Il-sung enthroned by Soviet instructions was known to claim, "Without dealing with the Christians, there can be no communization of Korea."⁵ The national leader and Presbyterian elder, Cho Mansik, was the first to be arrested by the Communist government. At the time of the Liberation, the North Korean population was estimated at

⁵ Heungsoo Kim, ed., *History of North Korean Church after Liberation* (Seoul: Dasan Geul-bang, 1992), 17.

about 9.4 million, including 300,000 to 350,000 Christians.⁶ Kang Yangook (1904–1983), the maternal uncle of Kim, although he was an ordained minister, led the Communist persecution. The persecution began with the interruption of the Samil Independent Movement Memorial Service on March 1, 1946. Sixty pastors were arrested. Rev. Kim Injoon was tortured to death; others were known to have been banished and condemned to hard labor and later died at the Aoji Coal Mine. The Communist government enforced a Sunday election on November 3, 1946 in order to paralyze the Christians and eliminate opposing churches. Subsequently, they prevented worship services and monitored the sermons of pastors. They frequently requested political speeches supporting both the Communist regime and Kim's policy from the churches, which naturally resulted in the imprisonment of pastors and others. Realizing that mere suppression could not get full control over the Christians, Kim formed a governmental organization named "The Chosen Christian Federation," appointing his uncle Kang as the chief representative of the Federation, and aimed to make divisions among and weakening of North Korean Churches. Pastors Kim Jinsoo, Kim Whasik, Kim Injoon, and many others were arrested and martyred for their refusal to participate in North Korea's propaganda, and what became of many people is still unknown. Eventually, the North Korean Church was completely abolished. Now there are just two known churches according to the Communist propaganda.

The North Korean Christians recognized that Christianity and Communism were never compatible and that there were but three options: compromising with the Communists, dying as martyrs, or defecting from the North to the South. To live in the North with Christian identity had simply been impossible. That is why one third of North Korean Christians, about 70,000 to 80,000 people, defected to the South before the Korean War. The Christian anti-Communism was learnt from the North Korean Communist regime.

The third persecution the Korean Church suffered was during the Korean War. Since the Liberation, Korea had been divided, South and North, both politically and militarily. On June 25, 1950 the North invaded the South. From that day until July 27, 1953, during just over three years, 2,710,000 soldiers (South Koreans, United Nations, North Koreans, or Chinese) were killed. The North Korean forces, when they marched through the South, defined Christians as an anti-revolutionary, pro-American group

⁶ Regarding Korean Christian population, see Yangsun Kim, *Church History of a Decade after Liberation* (Seoul: Educational Department of the PCROK, 1956), 68, 291.

that had to be killed or deported. They burned and destroyed church buildings. Many pastors who remained in their congregations so as not to forsake their sheep were caught and massacred in the name of People's Revolutionary Tribunals. More than 9,000 people were killed merely because of the name Christian. One of the most outstanding martyrs of the period was Pastor Son Yangwon (1902–1950), known as the “Atomic Bomb of Love.” It was estimated that over 10,000 Korean Christians were killed because of their faith. That number exceeded that of the martyrs of the Roman persecution.⁷

II. *The Meaning of Persecution*

Tertullian is known for the classic definition of the persecution against Christianity and its paradoxical result: “You will continue frantically ... to kill us, torture us, and persecute us ... but the more you kill us, the more we increase, *semen est sanguis christianorum* (the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church).”⁸ That indicates that the blood of Christians is the basis of the growth of the church, which has been demonstrated over and over again in church history. Martyrdom in English is originally taken from *martyrium* in Latin and its Greek equivalent *martyrion*, which means “witness.” Thus, *martyrium* meant both witness and martyr. It suggests that witnessing the gospel is accompanied by both passion and pain. Historically speaking, persecution brought about three positive results. The first is the spreading of the gospel. One typical case was the martyrdom of Stephen, which brought about the spreading of the gospel (Acts 8:1, 4). Because of his martyrdom, the Jerusalem-centered Christians were scattered and spread the gospel to Samaria (Acts 8:5), Gaza (8:26), Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (11:19). The same process happened in the early Korean church. The early persecution period brought about various transitions for Korean Christians and eventually the spread of the gospel. The second is the purification of the church. Much like the rice-Christians of China, Korean churchgoers came into the church for extra-gospel purposes. Some attended the church to get

⁷ It is difficult to count numbers of martyrs in the Roman Empire. W. H. C. Frend, a well known scholar of Roman persecution and martyrs, argues that the number of martyrs of that period “would be not several thousand but several hundred.” W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecutions in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 413. Though Tacitus wrote in his *Annals* that Nero slaughtered a huge multitude (*ingens multitudo*) of Christians, Marta Sordi interprets that phrase as a literary expression denoting several hundred victims in order to emphasize the severe atmosphere of that period. Thus Frend sees the number of Christian martyrs in the Roman Empire would be no more than a thousand, that is, several hundred.

⁸ Tertullian, *Apology* 50.12–13 (<http://www.tertullian.org/quotes.htm>).

relief supplies; others regarded the church as a safe base for their independence activities. With the persecution, however, those with impure motives left the church. It made the church pure, standing on faith alone. The third is the establishment of a steadfast and combatant church. Beset by severe persecution and the struggles of a life-or-death situation, the early Korean church became a spiritually strong and militant church confronting persecutions with united power. The power of faith was the basis for church planting. Korean churches both kept their faith steadfast in persecutions and endured outside pressures undauntedly. In short, the persecution resulted in the inner strengthening of the Korean Church and allowed today's amazing growth.

III. *Growth of the Korean Church*

The church does not grow by chance. In the early period, the Korean Church had not only to struggle with the two basic cultures of Shamanism and Confucianism, but also to endure the ostracizing of anti-foreignism. Since the 1900s, she had suffered both from the Japanese Militarist and the Communist regimes. Nonetheless, the Korean Church outgrew her harsh conditions with unflagging energy and exerted positive influence on all spheres of Korea's society, eventually becoming the most influential religion of Korea. Christopher Dawson, an English Roman Catholic historian, wrote: "One of the criteria of a Christian culture is the degree in which the social way of life is based on the Christian faith."⁹ The Korean society was no doubt transformed gradually by Christian values based on Christian teaching. That was accompanied by the growth of the Korean Church.

The first decade (1884–1894) following the arrival of the Protestant missionaries is described as "years of struggle." At that time, there were only 500 to 600 Christians. But in 1895 the number increased to 2,500, in 1900 it went up to 12,600, in 1910 to 73,180, in 1920 to 92,510, and in 1930 the number increased to 125,479. In the year of Liberation, it was estimated at 350,000–400,000, in 1955 about 600,000, in 1965 about 1.2 million, in 1975 about 3.5 million, and according to the governmental statistics in 1980, the Protestants numbered 7.18 million. Therefore, after 1960, the number doubled every ten years. In the latter half of the 1970s, six churches were planted every day. Numerically speaking, it was reported that the Christian population had increased 600,000 per year. In the 1990s, the Korean Christians reached 11 million, being 23% of the whole population.

⁹ Christopher Dawson, "The Outlook for Christian Culture," in *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to the Renewal of Human Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 13–30.

What was the most important growth factor of the Korean Church? It is difficult, of course, to pinpoint one factor of church growth. Complicated factors explain the growth of the church. Missionaries often emphasize the efficiency of mission policies. Korean Methodist theologians tend to suggest that the enthusiasm or piety of Korean Christians was the most important factor of the growth. Others argue that the political situation of Korea was the platform of church growth. I myself once pointed out that during this period in Korea the fusion between Christianity and nationalism took place, and resistance against conversion to Christianity had been removed. Every interpretation looks plausible, in its own way. The Korean Church suffered and endured many persecutions and had gone through a path of many difficulties, on the one hand, cultivating confidence in the gospel, and on the other hand, evangelizing with both strenuous belief in the uniqueness of Christ and religious enthusiasm for souls, which was the basis for church revival. The Korean Church is a church that has experienced many persecutions and tribulations, fought against non-Christian or anti-Christian forces, and successfully survived. That steadfast faith was the basis of her amazing growth. According to Eusebius's words, the persecutions and the tribulations were all for the *praeparatio evangelica*; this is also true of the Korean Church.

At present, the Korean Church shows a tendency to decrease. Before the early part of the 1980s, the church grew numerically, but in the late 1980s, it began to decline. The phenomenon is probably connected both to the successful Korean population policy and to the rapid fall of birth rate. But the most influential factor would be the prosperity of the Korean society and the improved quality of life due to amazing economic growth. The reality of rapid socio-economic change has caused reduction of religious enthusiasm and now threatens the future of Korean churches. The warning of Max Weber that both the reception of Christian faith and the growth of the Church are closely related to the social realities of the time sounds so true in this land.

INTERVIEW

Interview of Dr. Stephen Tong

PETER A. LILLBACK

(January 29, 2015)

STEPHEN TONG: [*prayer*] Father, we ask that you may bless us and give us wisdom in discussing the things you want us to say for your church and your kingdom. Amen.

PETER LILLBACK: I have the joy of being one of the editors for the new international Reformed journal called *Union with Christ*, in English, but we actually use the Latin name, *Unio cum Christo*. We, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia (WTS), are excited to have a partnership with the Seminary in Jakarta, International Reformed Evangelical Seminary (IRES). These two seminaries are working together on this journal. And it is our hope in every one of the issues to have not only theological articles written from a scholarly perspective, but we also want to have interviews with people who are actively engaged in ministry and are making a difference for the Lord. And so in our initial journal, we wanted to have an interview with Dr. Stephen Tong, a great friend of Westminster and a theological leader in Asia and indeed around the world. And so I have the joy of asking Dr. Tong several questions and listening to his wisdom. So we are very grateful for this privilege, Dr. Tong, to ask you these questions. Because I think you are a great evangelist who loves the proclamation of the gospel, I prepared the following questions.

PL: *Why should Christians care about the work of evangelism?*

ST: For me, Christianity is good news that should be preached to anyone and everyone. Thus, we must not separate Christian ministry from evangelization.

PL: *Many pastors are very busy: they have so many things to do, they are running ministries, they have to study for sermons, and they manage churches. So, doesn't it make sense to leave evangelism for professional people such as evangelists and missionaries and to let them just study the Bible?*

ST: Why are normal pastors busy only with internal work, and not including evangelization in their ministry? This is not right. We should include evangelization in our schedule, our ministry.

PL: *So, from your perspective, how much time do you think a pastor should dedicate to evangelism in terms of his mission?*

ST: Every time he meets non-Christians it is a good opportunity to reach them, to tell them about Jesus Christ. And it cannot be planned by ourselves. When opportunities are given, we cannot just ignore them.

PL: *Should a pastor do more than just local evangelism? Should he think of himself as a missionary and reach across cultural settings?*

ST: In the case of Jesus Christ and Paul, they always made evangelization a top priority: they preached and took care of the Christians, but they also preached to and taught non-Christians. For Christian workers, I think three things must be done: to teach, to evangelize, and to pastor. If these three are done by one person, this person will be a strong servant of God; otherwise, this servant will be weak.

People try to trichotomize the ministry, but I don't think this is the teaching of the Bible. You know Paul himself was a profound theologian and was fervent in preaching the gospel.

PL: *Would you summarize for me your experience in evangelism? As you look back over your career, what things have you done that are the leading expressions of evangelism and how did you carry them out?*

ST: I was first called for evangelization. After studying theology, I became a lecturer in the South East Asia Bible College for 25 years, and I asked the school to give me the freedom to preach the gospel every year for at least 4 to 8 months. I didn't get any salary when I went to preach; I just depended on God's grace. One semester I taught; another semester I preached. I did this for 25 years, and it made me an evangelist who had the opportunity to teach theological courses. It also made me a theological lecturer who did not forget to evangelize the people. During that time, I also pastored a church for 4 to 6 months every year, while at other times, I went out preaching. So I became a person with three responsibilities: preaching and evangelism, pastoring a church, and teaching in a seminary.

PL: *I understand you've just finished evangelizing more than 100 cities in Indonesia over 2 years?*

ST: Two years and 8 months.

PL: *And in this way how many people did the gospel rallies reach?*

ST: I think overall there were 450,000, of whom about 60 to 65% responded immediately.

PL: *Some people say in our day of global communications and high technology that there are many different ways to evangelize. There's mass evangelism, but also other ways. What do you think is the most important way today to preach and to fulfill the mission of evangelism?*

ST: In evangelization, you have all kinds of methods, but the most important method must not be ignored, that is, personal contact. That is why the incarnation is a necessity. Christ, who could by all kinds of means communicate to people, did not even use angels, but himself came to the world and became incarnate. That is the reason why personal touch and personal presence are most important, and why other methods in evangelization are not as important as this. So, come in person, then you can use technological means, like internet, Radio, TV, DVD, CD. But they are also just additions to personal contact, which is the most important method.

PL: *So, with the passing of time, the incarnational model is still the best?*

ST: Yes. Personal evangelization is the foundation of other methods of evangelization. Mass evangelization can only be successful if this evangelization can reach the result of a personal contact with the gospel.

PL: *You are very much identified with Reformed theology, and people tend to say that Reformed theology focuses on doctrinal correctness, and not so much on practical theology or cultural ministry. Why is this, and do you think this is changing?*

ST: I still think we should not dichotomize these two things, because theology is the crystallization of our faith, and evangelism expresses the Word to the people with the love of God and challenges them to be responsible. If these are separated, either theology alone will cause the church to be very static, not dynamic; or evangelism alone without theology will cause the church to become weak, and have no power. But when these two are combined, they become a power both inside and out. The gospel is the power to save everyone who believes [Rom 1:16].

PL: *So you think a theologian should be an evangelist?*

ST: An evangelist without theological training is a story teller. A theologian without evangelization will be a mere dreamer rather than one who does the good work of God.

PL: *Sometimes, part of the ministry associated with your work has been identified with a very strong emphasis on the cultural mandate. What is the cultural mandate, and why do you think this is important for the work of the church?*

ST: No man can live without cultural influence. And Christ alone is wisdom above everything. So only when Christ is preeminent in all aspects of culture can Christianity say, “We are witnesses of Christ, and we are the light of the world.” So the cultural mandate lifts up Christ and his Spirit in all aspects of human life in culture. That is the reason culture should serve as a servant of the gospel.

PL: *What are some of the ways, you as pastor, theologian, and evangelist have tried to encourage the fulfillment of the cultural mandate in your ministry in this congregation?*

ST: I try to make theology return to its original path, the original wisdom according to the revelation of God, and then to influence philosophy with biblical wisdom of God, that is, philosophical understanding. This includes influence on the political realm, the management of the government: to let Christ be preeminent and sit upon his own throne above the political thrones of political leaders [cf. Col 1:16–18]. So too, Christ influences the educational world; Christ influences the economic world; Christ influences all other aspects of the cultural mandate in literature, in music, in everything. So people are brought back to right theology, right philosophy, right music, right education, right knowledge, and right science and understanding. This is the responsibility of Christ’s church.

PL: *You mention politics. Do you think that a church and a pastor should engage in politics? It is a place of great tension and disagreement; is that part of the cultural mandate?*

ST: One cannot live without any political influence. Every Christian should take care, should be aware of his or her political responsibilities. Even though we do not encourage Christians to take sides in any political party, they can have their own position and make their own decision. But they must not influence the whole church to follow them because in this case, everybody should be responsible for his or her own conscience, but in the whole church, Christ should be made preeminent. The leader should influence the political world.

PL: *What do you tell to Christians who say, “I believe in the gospel; I stay away from the gospel as it relates to politics, because I just want myself to be completely for the gospel”?*

ST: That is a very shallow position for evangelicalism. Many evangelicals do not know anything except the gospel and the preaching of the gospel. But when they deal with the unrighteousness in society, they think that it would be better if somebody were to apply the righteousness of God as the principle to judge and to govern the whole country. So in their conscience they know that Christians should have positions of responsibility as statesmen or society leaders. Everybody, deep in his or her heart, knows that the cultural mandate cannot be ignored.

PL: *Earlier in the conversation, you said we should worship with the right music. You know that music is frequently debated today. The cultural mandate regulates music as well, but how do we know which music is best for the church?*

ST: Music that is good must be from the heart, for the purpose of glorifying God, of describing the beauty of the glory of God in his creation, and of building up faith and also building up character. Those characteristics define good music. Good music is not based only on melody, rhythm, or harmony. There must be purpose in it. So, some music only raises up carnal desires. I don't think that's good music. Some music meditates on the greatness of creation and of human life and the beauty of goodness and morality; that is better music. Some music gives the highest degree of adoration to God; that is the best music. So good music must combine the natural order with melody, rhythm, style, and so on. But it must do more. It must convey the meaning of being human, man's purpose for living to glory and enjoy God's creation and appreciate himself as the image bearer of God. This is the best music.

PL: *So you think pastors, theologians, and evangelists should concern themselves with music in their ministry?*

ST: I believe so. But because so many pastors, especially those in the eastern world, do not have the opportunity to be educated, to be taught to appreciate good music, they have lost one of the most important privileges they can have in this world. This is sad. Martin Luther once said that it is a very great pity that pastors do not understand good music.

PL: *Do you think the day is coming when mass evangelism is going to come to an end? With the aging of Billy Graham and after years of your leadership, maybe no one will be able to take your place? Maybe we don't have to do it on account of technology? What do you think about the future of mass evangelism?*

ST: When I was very young, I heard this ill-conceived idea. Then I said, “No, the God of eternity is the God of ancient times and the God of modern times.” So I tried to preach with power and courage and with dependence on the Holy Spirit. I have tried to imitate what the apostles and prophets had done. So I hope I have at least postponed the end of the mass evangelism period. I have witnessed in the last 58 years that God never changes. Mass evangelism is still going on. And people still come to evangelistic meetings. In mass evangelism, the whole city will come and see some great things happen. They will experience the glory of God and hear great singing and also a great message given. And so, people will change their minds. So I don’t believe that mass evangelism will come to an end.

PL: *But it does take great gifts to be the leader of a mass evangelism movement. How does one know the calling to do that work? What is the evidence of that calling?*

ST: Probably some are now being called, but they are yet sleeping. They are not listening to God’s calling or are not believing in it. We should believe that since God is still at work, new leaders of mass evangelism will rise again.

PL: *How important do you think the theological seminary is for the integrity of the church?*

ST: A theological seminary is just like a fortress. In daily life, it is not important, but on the day of attack, it is important, for who is going on the defense? Who is going to fight for the truth? Theological seminaries are very important indeed.

PL: *So, in a theological seminary, what is the most important foundation that a pastor has to learn when studying there?*

ST: If a pastor is to be truly used as a servant of God, he should take notice of three things: How to pastor the sheep, how to evangelize non-Christians, and how to teach Christians to understand the whole teaching of the Bible. So a servant of God should have three things. In my church, I ask every servant, every co-worker to have these three things in their ministry: to pastor, to evangelize, and to teach. When all these are present and work together in a man, this man will be a strong servant of God.

PL: *So should a seminary’s curriculum teach these three areas?*

ST: Even in my church, our board of deacons is based on only three functions: pastoring, evangelizing, and teaching.

PL: *Do you think it is problematic to work with liberal theologians or pastors in denominations that have departed from biblical authority?*

ST: Since liberals are not believers, we are not going to work with them. I don't have any interest in working with people who are not believers. Paul says that believers and non-believers cannot take the same yoke (2 Cor 6:14). Liberals are dying out.

PL: *Why do you think liberalism is dying?*

ST: Because with no faith, there is no presence of God; and with no true belief, no submission to the true revelation of God. What can they bring to the world? There's no message. If there is no message, there's no attraction for people. The message is very important.

PL: *There are many Charismatics and Pentecostals in the world, and they seem to be growing in number. Do you think they are true Christians? And if they are, what's the problem with them that you are concerned about?*

ST: I believe that liberals are more honest. They want to know the true revelation of God. But because they have difficulties in believing in God, the God who reveals himself—it is indeed not easy to believe that God is a living God—they finally confess that they don't understand. But when they try to pretend that they understand theology, they actually are far away from the true path.

But Charismatics are very different. Because in the Charismatic movement, especially in its radical extreme form, Charismatics are, purposely or not, faking Christianity. So these are no true Christians. They have no true gospel, no true revelation of God, no true submission to the Word of God, no true faith in the gospel. So, this is far more dangerous.

PL: *Do you think the gospel can get through to Pentecostals or Charismatics, in spite of their emphasis on their experience?*

ST: Yes, people are of several kinds. Some are very practical and some are very theoretical. Now charismatic people, especially the audience, are very simple believers. When they are guided by the wrong leader, they will go far away from the gospel. Yet some are truly seeking to know God. Even though they are very simple in their faith, God can still give them the opportunity to understand the gospel.

PL: *Do you sometimes find that the Charismatics or Pentecostals are attracted to Reformed theology?*

ST: Yes, I believe that very fervent and honest Charismatics, though guided wrongly by their leaders, when they discover Reformed theology,

will be stronger than many traditional Reformed people.

I am not liked by Charismatic leaders, but I am deeply loved by the Charismatic audience. They truly want to understand. But after they have been deceived into thinking that the Reformed faith is wrong, they do not understand what the Reformed faith is. But when they listen to our Reformed 21 TV program, they understand. The Reformed faith is not at all what they have been told, so they try to understand it and become better Christians.

PL: *We are two years into the leadership of Pope Francis in the Catholic Church. Do you think he is a help to Evangelicals and Reformed people or a danger to us?*

ST: I have not studied this much. I have the impression that he is very aware of the social gospel. If Catholicism is not returning to the true gospel, it cannot represent Christianity. The Reformed faith is the most important representation of Christianity in its message and belief, but we should extend, widen our vision to evangelize people, lest we are limited to our own subjectivity and limited ideas. This would be a sad result.

PL: *What makes Reformed theology so biblical? Why does it have that character?*

ST: Since the Reformation, Reformed believers have been committed to God's revelation. We believe that the Word of God is living, that God is a living God. We emphasize salvation by grace. This is through the work of the Holy Spirit. So the five *solas* are the foundation of our search for the truth.

PL: *Tell us what the five solas are, and, from your vantage point, how do they touch your church? How do they impact your ministry?*

ST: We warn every person who stands in the pulpit, (1) Preach only according to the Bible [*sola Scriptura*]. (2) The purpose for this is to build people's faith upon the Word of God [*sola fide*]. If you preach the Word, (3) they can experience the grace of God [*sola gratia*]. We tell them that (4) the grace of God is only through Jesus Christ [*solus Christus*] and (5) this must glorify God, so we give all the glory to God [*soli Deo gloria*].

PL: *Tell me a little bit about the compassion ministry that you mentioned earlier. Where do we reach needy people, and is that an important part of every church? If so, how does this church try to care for those who have needs?*

ST: It is among the most important things, but the last of those. The most important thing for the church is true faith in God. So doctrinal renewal is most important; then comes epistemological renewal; after that moral, ethical renewal and ministerial renewal and cultural mandate revival. Only after these five areas are renewed comes the social work of the church.

PL: *Reformed people tend to be a minority ministering in contexts where there is a different religious majority. How does a Reformed church work from a minority position?*

ST: We should accept the fact and confess that Christians are always a minority. And we must understand two things. Jesus says that the way is narrow, the gate is strait, and people who find it few [cf. Matt 7:13–14]. So our minority status is a fact. But Jesus taught his little flock, his minority, not to fear [cf. Luke 12:32]. I personally believe the minority must not feel inferior. When a minority holds on to the truth and does so for the majority's benefit, it at the same time gets rid of the status of being a minority. Instead, it will be appreciated by many people. Even though this is difficult, we should depend on the Holy Spirit and divine blessings to do it.

PL: *What should the church, as well as Western secular culture, do in the face of Islam and Islamic terrorism? What should the church and secular culture do to address this?*

ST: In worship, we cannot cooperate. But in doing good things for the benefit of the majority, we can do good works together. As members of society, we should be open to God's common grace for everyone. But when it comes to the faith, we should follow carefully only what the Bible teaches us. So, we in Indonesia, as a Reformed church, are a minority among a Muslim majority. Nevertheless, we try to make friends with Muslims but hold onto the finality of Christ, that true salvation is only in Jesus Christ [cf. Acts 4:12]. We do not know what their response or reaction will be, but we hold on to this principle always, no matter what happens to us, and we depend on God.

PL: *I think, throughout the years, you mentioned to me that there have been threats to your life as you proclaim the gospel boldly. How have you personally found courage to keep preaching when you know there are people who oppose you so much that they even declared they want to harm you?*

ST: I believe that if I do not do this, I should die. So I can only beg God and walk and preach and believe what the Bible teaches us. Then I entrust myself to God. During the first period of my ministry, I had already prepared myself to be a martyr. But to date, nothing has happened to me. I believe that we must be courageous and not be afraid of harm that might come to us. If any harm does come to us, we are thus prepared already. So if I have been preaching boldly in this country for 58 years, but nothing has happened, it means that God is protecting me until my time is up. And when that time comes, it will be a blessing for me, even if it comes with difficulty.

PL: *To finish, let me ask some questions about your ministry over the years. If you were to sum up your ministry, how many times have you preached, and to how many people have you preached?*

ST: Roughly, I have preached about 32,000 times to 35 million people. Among those meetings, I think about a third were evangelistic meetings or gospel rallies.

PL: *You are at present actually kept from preaching in China. How did that come about, and why is it that so many people in China know you?*

ST: I don't understand. I know that some people who hate me are afraid of my influence on the multitudes, probably because I usually attack opposing views and am a very outspoken critic of communism and atheism. Those who are opposed are wrong in their dealings with Christians or Christian ministry. They collect information on them, and report them to the authorities, and clearly they don't like me either. In 1996, I was in Wen Zhou and 10,000 people had gathered. Overnight, a pilot flew from Beijing to Wen Zhou to inform the local committee not to let me go up to preach. There was great tension. They came to my hotel and said, do not try to disobey us. You cannot go and preach. I asked, can I go and pray for the crowd? They replied, you cannot even go to pray; you cannot appear; you must just leave this place. So I left Wen Zhou, and I went to Beijing and Shanghai to see historical sites as a tourist, and then I returned to Jakarta. That is what happened in China.

PL: *But nevertheless, many people came to know your ministry: How many Chinese people have heard your preaching?*

ST: Even though I cannot preach in China, I have preached in Moscow (Russia), Minsk (Belarus), Ukraine, and Romania. I even preached in the central Communist party political hall in Moscow, which we rented to evangelize people there. But in China, I am not allowed. But I don't worry because everything is in the hand of God. In my experience, China is the country that does not want me to preach, but it is where I have the biggest audience.

PL: *How big is your audience there, do you think?*

ST: China now has 130 million Christians, among them probably twenty to twenty-five percent call themselves Reformed. Among them, most have listened to my preaching and have been influenced by my ministry.

PL: *So, 10,000 people didn't get to hear you, but God let you be heard by 25 million people instead?*

ST: I don't know why, but I just praise God, because the gospel cannot be bound or constrained by any political boundaries.

PL: *So how does your message get into China?*

ST: I preach in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Jakarta, other places, and in the US. And when people go to see their friends, their relatives, they bring my teaching in. In China, people copy my messages without copyright. They humorously say "to copyright" means "to copy is right." We leave it all to the Lord, and in this way the gospel is widely spread without our intention and planning. Praise be to God.

PL: *How many books do you have in print now?*

ST: When I preach, people take notes of my teaching, they transcribe it, and print it, in Indonesian, English, and Chinese. Most books are in Chinese and Indonesian. I think there are about 150 books altogether.

PL: *Finally, I want to thank you so very much for that warm fellowship that is between the church here and Westminster Seminary. As you know, Westminster is very grateful that you have received an honorary doctor from us and that we are able to say, you are a Westminster man.*

ST: I am not worthy. I am praying that WTS can keep its original vision and original burden from God, just like Dr. Machen and also like Professor Van Til. They were truly men of God.

PL: *We are proud there is a Stephen Tong chair of Reformed Theology, which Dr. Jeffrey Jue, who is the provost of the Seminary, holds. We celebrate the partnership of our seminary with you. And so as we wrap up, I'd like to recognize Dr. Benyamin Intan, Dr. Paul Wells, and myself in our new international Reformed journal entitled Unio cum Christo. Would you take a moment to pray for this interview, the new journal, and the ministry that we share as we conclude?*

ST: Let us pray. [*prayer*] Father, we thank you for giving us the opportunity and the privilege to be your children and also to have fellowship in the love of Jesus Christ. We pray for Westminster; we pray for the Reformed movement in the whole world; we pray for the faculty, the students who study Reformed theology everywhere. We pray that you anoint all your servants, all the students who are so eager to understand your Word, and so courageous to defend the faith. This kind of leader is so important in the 21st century. We ask that you always anoint them. Give them the power, the courage, the wisdom, and the love to preach the gospel and to maintain the

Christian faith and to glorify your name. We commit all these into the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please Lord, raise up more people to work for you, to evangelize, and to keep the true faith, and to pastor in your church. Hear our prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. We also pray for the journal that will be printed this year, that it will be a great blessing to strengthen many pastors and to guide many people into the truth of your eternal words.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we pray. Amen.

PL: *Well, Dr. Tong. Thank you for being the first person to be interviewed in our new journal. You are a great role model for all of us in the ideal of being a theologian, pastor, and also evangelist, all at the same time. And we pray that this will be the vision we all will share together in the years to come.*

ST: May all the glory be to God. I am not worthy at all.

PL: *Thank you.*

Book reviews

William Horbury and Brian McNeil, eds. *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Repr., 2008. Pp. xxi + 217.

This volume comprises eleven essays, plus two introductory essays, related to suffering and martyrdom. Seven of the essays speak to New Testament texts and themes, three cover pertinent issues in early Judaism and Christianity, and the final essay deals with dogmatics. The occasion for this volume, which was originally published in 1981, is to honor G. M. Styler, the long-time secretary of the historic Cambridge New Testament Seminar, which C. F. D. Moule sketches in his first prefatory essay. Moule's second prefatory essay serves as a general introduction to the volume, and concludes with some questionable comments that speak of the universality of Jesus's suffering for all humanity in contrast to an exclusive, vicarious suffering on behalf of some. He further suggests that no courageous witness to truth is far from the cross of Christ, even if it comes from outside the bounds of confessing Christianity (p. 8). However, he provides no supporting argument for these remarks.

The first substantial chapter is by J. C. O'Neill and asks whether Jesus viewed his own death as a vicarious sacrifice. The author (rightly) concludes in the affirmative, though this essay is not without problems. O'Neill's approach seeks to adjudicate between the text of the Gospels and what the historical Jesus "actually" said. This approach, however, is riddled with difficulties, and is unnecessary for those who view the texts as divinely given; attempting to get "behind" the text is not where exegesis should tarry. Practically, it is not possible to splice off portions of the Gospels as more or

less authentic, since all the details in the Gospels are mediated through the theological presentation of the Evangelists. Additionally, the author views the ransom terminology (*lytron*) from the so-called ransom logion (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45)—two of the most important texts in which Jesus speaks of the purpose of his death—as corrupted, opting instead for variant readings. However ingenious his arguments are, his view is not persuasive, not least because of the dearth of textual evidence supporting his view. Additionally, the author concludes that Jesus’s words on suffering were originally intended only for a limited number of his closest disciples. Therefore, says the author, the historical Jesus never intended for all his disciples to have to take up their crosses and follow him. The author’s discussion on the atonement is similarly in need of greater nuance, since he ascribes some sort of atoning power even to the death of martyrs (though he also maintains some sort of uniqueness for the death of Christ).

The second essay by Brian E. Beck focuses on Jesus’s death as martyrdom in Luke’s Gospel. Beck reads the suffering of Jesus more in light of the Wisdom of Solomon than Isaiah 53, and therefore sees little emphasis on expiation in the suffering of Jesus (pp. 43–44). Beck concludes that Jesus’s death in Luke is to be viewed from one perspective as martyrdom, but also entails other themes. However, among these other themes Beck does not see substitutionary atonement as a Lukan emphasis. Unfortunately, he does not deal adequately with the covenantal words of institution in Luke 22, which must be considered for a full picture of Luke’s understanding of the death of Christ. Though the parallels to martyrdom traditions are noteworthy, it would be wrong to discount notions of substitution in Luke. The author concludes with some thoughts about the uniqueness of Jesus’s messianic martyrdom, but this uniqueness is not satisfactorily explored in his essay.

The third essay, by Barnabas Lindars, focuses on the Gospel of John. More precisely, Lindars uses the Gospel as we have it to reconstruct the persecution faced by the Johannine community. Here source criticism is key, as Lindars reads John 15:18–16:4a in light of the perceived development of persecution that arose between the posited first and second version of John’s Gospel. Lindars believes much of John 15–16 goes back to Jesus himself, though we can also identify later redactional elements. Lindars would even have us imagine John at work in his study, reworking the Gospel traditions and other sources that made their way—fully integrated, yet identifiable (?)—into the final version of the Gospel (p. 55). This line of investigation, however, yields limited fruit. If one were to doubt a complex literary history of John, then much of his discussion is unnecessary.

Nevertheless, Lindars does provide some helpful structural observations on portions of the Farewell Discourse. All told, Lindars sees the most dire warning of Jesus in his selected text to come in 16:2c-d (“when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God,” p. 65), and he argues for a positive place of martyrdom in the framework of Jesus’s own sacrifice (p. 66).

The volume then turns its attention to Paul. In the fourth essay, Morna Hooker looks at suffering in light of her understanding of Paul’s theology of “interchange,” which sounds something like participation or union. Interestingly, Hooker believes Paul saw Jesus to be a representative, but not a substitute, averring that substitution is not central to Paul. Readers of this collection will likely not be surprised that Hooker does not base her conclusions on the so-called “disputed” Pauline epistles, which means the testimony of books such as Ephesians and Titus are not adequately considered, without which I do not believe our understanding of Paul’s theology is sufficiently robust. Hooker’s essay concludes that we must suffer with Christ, which can be affirmed, even if her scope remains limited, and some unnecessary dichotomies remain in her articulation (e.g., representation vs. substitution). Hooker implies that to believe in Jesus as a substitute would negate the need for Christians to suffer (p. 82), but rightly understood, this does not follow.

In the fifth essay, W. F. Flemington focuses on “filling up the sufferings of Christ in my flesh” in Colossians 1:24, a text which Hooker also mentions briefly. Flemington focuses particularly on the phrase “in my flesh,” suggesting it has often been overlooked in explanations of the passage. Flemington proposes that Colossians 1:24 means we must participate in Christ’s sufferings—what is lacking is not Christ’s afflictions, but “the afflictions of Christ as they are reflected and reproduced in the life and behavior of Paul” (p. 87), and also all those who are “in Christ” (p. 88).

The sixth essay, by E. Bammel, considers the term *sainesthai* (“to be troubled”) in 1 Thessalonians 3:3. Bammel studies the term in its Jewish context, concluding that it means to be troubled about the turmoil of the last days. For Paul, it is not inevitable that Christians will be shaken or troubled at the end; instead, they are to stand firm (*stēkein*, pp. 98–99), as the Thessalonians indeed seemed to have done.

The seventh essay, by J. P. M. Sweet, considers the concept of witness in Revelation. Sweet summarizes Christ’s death under the double rubric of sacrifice and victory, and looks at the suffering of Christians in Revelation in light of these themes. Sweet argues that Christian witness leads to suffering in Revelation (cf. Rev 11), but the raising of the two witnesses in Revelation 11

shows us that their vindication, not death, is the last word, inasmuch as their situation echoes that of Christ (p. 108). In the end, Sweet leaves room for mystery in how victory comes through sacrifice.

The eighth essay, by G. W. H. Lampe, marks a shift in focus that goes beyond Scripture to early Christianity, and considers notions of inspiration and pneumatology in relation to early Christian martyrdom. The key claim for early Christians was “Jesus is Lord,” and Lampe posits a more offensive, rather than defensive, posture of early Christian martyrs. Lampe argues that the Holy Spirit was understood to inspire martyrs to profess Jesus as Christ, which follows on the understanding of the Old Testament prophets as (inspired) martyrs.

The ninth and tenth essays may be best suited for those with specialized interests, since the essays consider martyrdom in the Odes of Solomon (Brian McNeil) and in the circa fifth century Jewish poet Yose ben Yose (William Horbury). The latter of these two is particularly noteworthy as an in-depth study (40 pages) that compares and contrasts the understanding of suffering and martyrdom of an early Jewish poet to that of the New Testament. The final essay by Nicholas Lash asks: “what might martyrdom mean?” The author identifies some salient issues worthy of discussion, such as the need for New Testament scholars to address what the text means for today. Lash further challenges New Testament scholars on the issue of truth, asking whether they can answer the question “Was Jesus right?” Though in places Lash’s own discussion leaves something to be desired, he helpfully notes the importance of finding answers that are relevant for the living, Christian community (p. 196).

All told, this volume will be of limited benefit today. To be sure, it will be of use to those who are studying, most likely in a scholarly fashion, the specific texts and issues addressed, but it will not serve well as an integrated and systematic account of the issues. This is in large part due to the nature of the essays, which are narrow in scope and often exploratory. The essays on the Gospels appear to be particularly dated, whereas the studies on Paul and Revelation will likely be of greater relevance. Additionally, these essays do not represent a unified theology of the issues, and this reviewer saw the need for more integration and theological precision throughout. Indeed, many of the questions posed in the volume, while valid, have been sufficiently answered elsewhere. Thus, for example, one will find more thorough discussions of the atonement in scripturally faithful biblical and systematic theology texts. These discussions would also benefit by being placed in the already/not-yet framework of New Testament eschatology that is now standard fare in much scholarship.

In *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, the reader encounters a collation of scholarly essays from some great minds of twentieth century New Testament scholarship whose vast learning is evident with each turn of page. However, for those wanting an integrated understanding of the issues canvassed, this work should be supplemented with studies that take more of a synthetic and biblical-theological approach and which consider a more complete range of relevant texts.

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Shelly Matthews. *Perfect Martyr: The Stoning of Stephen and the Construction of Christian Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. viii + 226.

Bryan M. Litfin. *Early Christian Martyr Stories: An Evangelical Introduction with New Translations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. Pp. vii +180.

Both of these volumes tell the stories of early Christian martyrs, but from different angles. While Shelly Matthews focuses on Stephen, Bryan Litfin deals primarily with the church fathers. While Matthews explores early Jewish opposition, Litfin uncovers the widespread antagonism of the Roman Empire. While Matthews is greatly skeptical about the historicity of Stephen's account, Litfin is much more confident about the historical reliability of the sources. Finally, Matthews deals with the canonical Acts but places it in a second century setting and interacts with patristic interpretations of Acts. Litfin, apart from a foray into the Maccabean Martyrs, deals with Christian martyrs up to the time of Augustine, paying attention to the integration of the Bible in these accounts.

Matthews is now a professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School. Besides her focus on New Testament studies, she also has interest in Patristic studies. Her involvement in the Jesus Seminar is perhaps reflected in some of the views argued for in *Perfect Martyr*, such as her skepticism toward the historicity of Stephen's account and the emphasis on Jesus's teaching on love for enemies. The research of her book grew out of her involvement in a group of the Society of Biblical Literature, studying violence and the publication of *Violence in the New Testament* (2005) of which she was one of the editors.

Matthews proposes new and radical views on a topic not often dealt with, the martyrdom of Stephen. Some of her proposals challenge well established

ideas in Acts scholarship, which she finds ungrounded. Building on recent attempts to date Acts in the second century, she suggests even a later mid-second century date (pp. 5–6). Given that the martyrdom of Stephen is found only in Acts, its historicity is questionable. The name Stephen itself, meaning “crown,” might have merely a symbolic meaning in relationship to martyrdom (pp. 65–66). The author argues that Acts promotes a pro-Roman apologetic tone and an anti-Jewish stance. Thus, in light of other martyrs’ stories (ch. 3), the narrative of Stephen’s martyrdom downplays Roman involvement and overplays the antagonism between Christians and Jews (p. 77; for “Jews as Christ killers” in Acts, see pp. 58–59).

Matthews’s analysis is well argued, well documented (showing deep familiarity with Acts scholarship), and not without nuances. For instance, while she argues that Acts defines Christian identity by antagonizing Jews, she rejects anti-Semitic charges against Acts since it opposes Jews on “religious,” not “racial” grounds (p. 31). Also, while expressing concerns about the “rhetoric” of Acts, she does not want to ascribe “malicious intentions” to its author (p. 133). Further, the author makes a helpful distinction—being sensitive to the genre of martyrdom—between “persecuted prophet (an in-group phenomenon)” and “martyrdom (death at the hands of an external enemy)”; Stephen’s partakes of both and marks a transition from Judaism to Christianity (p. 133, cf. p. 85). A last example is the treatment of the textual crux of Luke 23:24a as background for Acts 7:60. The author tends in the direction of accepting Jesus’s prayer as part of Luke’s text (pp. 101–3), but does not consider it an “*ipsissima verba* of Jesus” (p. 186, n. 75).

A few points of criticism are in order. First, though a mid-second century date is argued here by a series of considerations and is carried by the wind of recent scholarship (e.g., Richard Pervo), a few factors against such a late date can be advanced. Stephen’s martyr story differs from later full blown martyr stories (p. 5). The affinities between Acts and the Acts of Paul are questionable (p. 6). She contends that Luke-Acts responds to “marcionite ideas” before Marcion (pp. 43–47, esp. p. 46; for Marcion’s influence on Luke-Acts, see the earlier works by John Knox), but is not arguing for the early presence of heresy (following the lead of Walter Bauer) opening the door for an earlier date for Acts? Irenaeus and Tertullian’s use of Luke-Acts to combat Marcion does not necessarily mean that this double work was written in reaction to him (p. 45). In general, some of Matthews’s arguments about the date of Luke-Acts are based on broad patterns rather than specifics.

Second, one major element of the study is to show that Stephen’s prayer, “Father, forgive them” (ch. 4) serves primarily to characterize Stephen’s

perfection. Thus, “love for enemy” is as an identity marker that distinguishes Christians from Jews, especially Christian martyrs (p. 119). It can only be suggested by contrast that such a prayer, in the eyes of the author of Luke-Acts, had some positive effects in conversions (Luke 23:43, 47; and Paul’s conversion; cf. Acts 2:37; this contrasts with Matthews’s statement that “this prayer has no merciful effect,” p. 82). Stephen’s episode is clearly pivotal in the plotline (pp. 73–75), yet greater insistence could be placed on its role in the spread of the gospel (Acts 1:8). Is not the author of Luke-Acts more concerned about this than Jewish antagonism? Another concern of the book is the use of Isaiah 6 in Acts 28 as a call to Jews to turn to Jesus rather than a call to repent of sins (p. 33). Again, if we follow the logic of Luke-Acts that Jesus is the promised Messiah, Jews ought to repent for not acknowledging him. Note that the exclusivist tendencies of Luke-Acts are all the more problematic for Matthews because she seems to understand Paul as teaching two ways of salvation, one for the Jews and one for the Christians (p. 176, n. 50).

Third, the question of the historicity of Luke-Acts requires some comments. Matthews has a point when she states that “each decision about what is kernel and what is chaff seems in the end arbitrary” (p. 19). In other words, it is difficult to distinguish between redaction and supposedly more reliable historical sources. However, should we conclude that Stephen is a mostly fictional character (p. 15)? The more basic question is whether Luke-Acts is reliable or not. Matthews contends that the preface of Luke-Acts “conforms quite closely to what an elite male Romanized reader would wish such origins to entail” (p. 22), thus, “surety” and “truth” are interpreted in the way that does not require much in terms of historicity. A more traditional understanding of Luke 1 leads us to expect greater historicity in Luke-Acts. “Among us” (v. 1) implies that the author was writing in a time not too distant from the events. Verse 2 implies contacts with “eyewitnesses [*autoptai*]” and others (“ministers of the word,” *hupēretai tou logou*) knowledgeable about the events, possibly apostles (cf. Ned B. Stonehouse’s work). The purpose of the work is to produce “certainty [*asphaleian*]” (v. 4).

While consideration of the preface is relevant for the question of historicity, it is also pertinent to the question of purpose. Matthews proposes that the twofold volume helps to define Christians as the people of God (contra the Jews, p. 36), serves as an apologetics for Romans (pp. 42–43), and counters “marcionism” (p. 47). Recent studies indeed suggest multiple purposes for Luke-Acts, but the apologetic one should not be overemphasized. Further, the emphasis of Luke 1:4 on certainty might suggest a pastoral purpose. Could it be that Stephen’s account, in addition to helping forge

Christian identity and explain the spread of the gospel, provides pastoral instruction for future martyrs?

The second book, *Early Christian Martyr Stories*, is an anthology, written by Bryan Litfin, professor of theology at Moody Bible Institute, who holds a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. Specializing in patristics, he studied with Robert Wilken. He previously wrote a popular introduction to 10 church fathers, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers* (2008). In contrast, this new book offers longer selections of texts. Also, while other anthologies of church fathers exist, this one is unique in its focus on martyr stories. The title and subtitle of the work reveal much about its scope and content. The “evangelical” side indicates the orientation of the author and of the intended audience, and that this history of martyrdom is presented from a theological perspective. As an “Introduction,” the book does not deal in scholarly issues, and the “New Translations” by the author are in a casual, accessible, and attractive style.

The texts selected constitute a unified and self-contained narrative, from the Roman opposition to the early church to the reconciliation of Empire and church by the time of Augustine. The selection includes significant episodes for Western culture and the identity of the universal church. We find Peter’s question to the Lord, *Quo vadis?* before his martyrdom (p. 33), the martyrdom of Polycarp (p. 62), the moving story of the young noble woman martyr Perpetua (ch. 8), the famous saying of Tertullian about the blood of martyrs in its proper context (pp. 121, 123), and Constantine’s famous vision of the cross in the sky (p. 154).

A few areas of possible improvements could be noted. The relationship of the *Acts of Peter* to Gnosticism could be clarified (pp. 29–30). Many consider such Acts as reflecting ascetic anti-Gnostic tendencies. The translations are readable and the historical and theological notes helpful, but the reader would also benefit from specific references to the original texts upon which these translations are based. By starting with the story of a missionary martyred in Lebanon (p. 1) and asserting that “the martyrs belong to Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox alike” (p. 174), the author hints at the broader relevance of these stories; the book, however, is unfortunately more focused on a North American Evangelical audience.

A strength of the work is its elucidation of the Roman context (Litfin might have benefited here from his teacher, Wilken; see, e.g., p. 7, n. 6). The introduction helpfully clarifies that persecution in the first three centuries was more sporadic than constant (pp. 3–6). It also shows that Christianity clashed with the religious worldview of the Empire (pp. 6–10). While this feature makes the Roman context distant from that of the West today, it

would be worth exploring how in many countries persecution of Christians is by religious people and that even in the West secular philosophies hostile to Christianity are not without religious commitments. Another aspect of Roman culture is the prevalence of courage in the face of violence and suffering. This is reflected in the story of Perpetua and Tertullian's argument that "the martyrs' deaths are as noble as pagan examples" (pp. 121–22).

To appropriate these early martyr stories, one has to consider their diversity. The theme of the burial of martyrs highlighted in the introduction (pp. 11–16) illustrates this diversity and the potential for further reflections. In the *Acts of Peter*, Peter is indifferent to his own burial, showing a distorted view of Christianity (p. 35). By contrast, Polycarp's bones were treasured by his followers (p. 63). At times, persecutors desecrated the martyrs' bodies, like those of the martyrs of Gauls (pp. 85–86). The Peace of Constantine also addressed the question of Christian cemeteries (p. 165). While reverence for the martyrs' bodies could unhealthily be turned into a cult, this respect teaches about the Christian's hope of the resurrection and union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The various views and experiences of early Christian martyrs can thus assist in addressing current issues.

Both works provide a better understanding of early Christian martyrs. Matthews focuses on Stephen, but also deals with John the Baptist and James, the brother of Jesus. She includes a discussion of extracanonical and patristic texts. One could consider other New Testament texts to provide a more comprehensive picture of early persecution; for instance, a discussion of Hebrews, which has been compared with Acts 7, would be worthwhile. Litfin's work documenting Christianity's acceptance in the Empire after severe opposition from the Romans complements Matthews's focus on Christianity's parting from Judaism and her comment (p. 173, n. 22) that "the notion that evangelical witness concerning Jesus leads to death is clearly expressed" in Acts 22:20 encapsulates the witness/martyrdom theme.

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Robert Bartlett. *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. xviii + 788.

The saint industry may be on the wane in the Western world, with Christianity under the cosh of secularism, and in the Muslim world images and other monuments being wiped out wherever extremism is in control. The

Baalshamim Temple at Palmyra is the latest victim. Elsewhere in the developing world, however, it is very much alive and active, which is perhaps why, in his pontificate, John Paul II made more saints than his predecessors for several centuries. The martyr theme gets our attention for another reason, because of militant Islam, marking those who die in armed struggle, which is just the opposite of Christian martyrdom and its submission to violence. So although it may seem quirky to consecrate so many pages to this subject, it is certainly relevant.

The author teaches at St. Andrews University in Scotland and is a specialist on the Middle Ages, as demonstrated by his previous publications such as *The Medieval World Complete* and *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages*. This is an impressive book, readable, well documented, and admirably illustrated, with all you would want to know about the subject of saints, martyrs, and the miraculous from the time of the early church onwards. It comes with a glossary, a multilingual bibliography of almost a hundred pages, and an index of fifty. As such it is an excellent source book, a sort of encyclopedia on the subject. And what stories it recounts—everything from the wonderful to the bizarre to the grotesque, showing that history can rival fiction any day. If you hadn't heard about St. Guinefort, the greyhound dog-saint, here is the place to go! (p. 185).

Two major sections are presented by Bartlett. Firstly, he describes the “developments” of the subject until the time of the Reformation; and, second, he deals with “dynamics,” the main themes and practices woven around saints and martyrs. Like Paul Tillich's symbols, saints are either dead or alive, and the real life of dead saints is when they are active, commemorated and expected to do great things, particularly in the realm of healing and other privileges, or of obtaining forgiveness. The book includes a vast range of subjects: canonization, devotion, relics, images, shrines, miracles, saints' days, church dedications, hagiography, and sermons. The research is meticulous. It concludes with some evaluation, a critical step-back from the subject and limited comparisons with other religions, including Judaism and Islam. The tone of the author is moderate, occasionally humorous or tongue in cheek, and, commendably, mockery is not part of his narrative, nor does he stray into the somber regions of psychoanalytical interpretation of saintly activity, a great temptation when anything sexual is involved.

Bartlett's title refers rather imprecisely to Augustine (*The City of God* 22.9), who asks the question: “Why do the martyrs who were slain for this faith which proclaims the resurrection possess such power?” Miracles and other wonders done by saints and martyrs are cloaked in mystery, as Augustine

recognizes, and we cannot comprehend them (p. 3). Whether power comes from their prayers, or from some other operation, is a profound mystery. Precisely at that point arises the problem for the Reformation: Are these manifestations any more than superstition, or worse, as something that defects from the unique mediation of the *solus Christus*?

The development of this problem is described in the first chapter “Origins (100–500),” with the growth of regular ceremonies for the dead, allied with expectations of help. To begin with, all Christians were “saints” (p. 15). The Roman persecutions produced martyrs, who received hallowed status and were commemorated. When martyrdom stopped, saints grew apace and the martyr saints were joined by “confessor saints,” exemplars who had lived in a heroic way, for example, St. Antony of Egypt and St. Martin of Tours (p. 17). Saints were generally masculine, but female saints increased over time until the end of the Middle Ages. Many were clergy, and virginity was a plus for sainthood, but not a necessity. More cynically, we could say that saints were often monks and were promoted by monks, which might not be the whole truth but is not far from it.

Relics play a crucial role in the development of the cult of saints. Particularly from the turning point in the fourth century when Christianity became an official religion, remains of martyrs and artifacts began to be transferred from cemeteries outside towns, where churches were erected (including in Rome St. Peter’s or St. Paul “outside the walls”), to edifices in town. The presence of relics became generalized through “contact relics”—objects associated in some way with saints or martyrs, the most celebrated of these at present being the Turin shroud or the blood of Christ exhibited at Bruges in Belgium. To the celebration of the martyrs was added the expectation of extraordinary help, and healing became their work. Out of this popular piety, encouraged by the church institution, grew hagiography of the lives of the saints, with miracle episodes of various hue. The literature embodied the lives of the saints and made good publicity.

Considering the importance of this foundational chapter for the rest, “the head of an enormous stream” as the author puts it (p. 26), the contours of the development from the origins could have been drawn with greater precision. For instance, we are told that the origins of the cult of the saints lie in the early centuries of Christianity (p. 3), but how early? What is the evidence? Where are the texts? Again, “Christians prayed *for* their (ordinary) dead, but they prayed *to* the martyrs” (p. 3). But from when on? From “at least the second century” some were regarded in a class of their own, we are told. The lines are not clearly drawn between the apostolic witness and what followed, or how soon such practices arose, even though it is

recognized that the fourth century was a “religious revolution” in this domain. In spite of the detail, this is rather imprecise history. It is interesting to note that Philip Schaff’s classic text on the worship of martyrs and saints in the old *History of the Christian Church* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, III § 84, to which the author makes no reference), is much more precise in drawing the contours of development, but no doubt this is no longer considered “history” in academia.

Following the first “religious revolution” of the fourth century, and leaving aside the Byzantine iconoclastic parenthesis in the East (pp. 475–480), the major opposition against saintly intervention in human affairs, before the Enlightenment, was the counter revolution of the Protestant Reformation (chap. 4). Bartlett’s presentation is brief, seven pages, considering the amount of artillery the Reformers lined up on this subject, and the result, that more or less ridded northern Europe of the practice, and divided the north and the south (p. 90). Theological motives are hardly developed here, as elsewhere. Quoting Calvin’s *Treatise on Relics*, that “the greedy desire to have relics is scarcely ever without superstition, and, what is worse, it is the mother of idolatry,” Bartlett correctly comments “so this kind of worship is superstitious, that is, fatuous and foolish, and it is idolatrous, turning us away from God to inappropriate objects” (p. 89). The genuineness of relics may be open to historical criticism, but the main concern is that saint and relic worship is essentially pagan, a theme that became prominent in later secular criticism (pp. 609–18).

The Reformers, who were in some sense biblical humanists, thought that the corruption of the worship of God could only be harmful for man, his salvation, and humanity. The problem with the medieval syndrome of saint worship was theological, but also anthropological, making sainthood an inverted humanity, with extreme suffering and powers of resistance in the face of horrendous torture achieving transfigured magnificence. At the same time, saints were proximity figures, “being like us” (p. 609). The abuses embraced, for example, by the virgin martyrs (pp. 535–41), make saints superhumans, capable of resisting the unthinkable, at the same time macabre and radiant. The grotesque reliquaries and the shining statues stand side by side. For the Reformers, this freak show had little to do with biblical spirituality, and was part of the merit system of works salvation, “the treasure of the church,” which was their major enemy. The chief matter, says Calvin, concerns Christ as mediator (*Institutes* 3.20.19–20), “how we should call on God in prayer ... and George and Hippolytus and such spectors leave nothing for Christ to do” (*Institutes* 3.20.27). Without this context, any analysis of the Reformers, albeit a historic one, remains incomplete.

The concluding reflections of the book are in a way the most engaging. Bartlett draws comparisons and contrasts between saints and martyrs in Christianity and various religious traditions. “The functional equivalences between polytheistic pagan religion and the cult of the saints were many” (p. 614)—a theme taken up by David Hume, who, prefiguring Nietzsche perhaps, considered Christian saints rather wimpish alongside heroic pagan deities. The Christian cult of the saints has been “adaptable and malleable,” and “it is only the Protestants of Europe and their overseas descendants who have ever really turned their backs on the saints” (p. 637). Bartlett does not reflect on whether this is a good or a bad thing, but simply concludes that saints “have shaped the lives and imaginations of millions, and still do.” True, but the sad reality is that these practices have kept those millions in the thrall of superstition, false religion, and the ignorance of God and, as Karl Barth would have said, in the grip of idolatrous natural religion. Only where the five *solas* of the Reformation have held sway has there been the freedom to meet God as he met us, in the man Christ Jesus.

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Martin I. Klauber, ed. *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*. Reformation Historical-Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014. Pp. viii + 414.*

The contributors to this collection of essays, with a few European exceptions, come largely from a North American Reformed background, and the seminal influence of the re-evaluation of post-Reformation scholasticism by Richard A. Muller is much in evidence in this volume. Edited by Martin I. Klauber of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, it is valuable for anyone interested in Reformed theology in the 17th century, particularly in France and in Europe at large.

Since there is little published and accessible material in English on the subject, this work is a boon for those interested in the development of Reformed theology in France in the century after Calvin. The contributions cover the period of the accession of Henri of Navarre to the French

* This review first appeared in a shorter version in *The Banner of Truth* magazine, May 2015, Issue 620, 28–32.

throne, upon his conversion to Catholicism in 1589. This event heralded the end of the bloody wars of religion in France and the promulgation of an edict of tolerance for the French Huguenots (1598), an edict that was repealed by Louis XIV almost a century later in 1685. During that time, Protestants enjoyed restricted but diminishing liberties, followed by growing civil oppression.

This collection is, by the selection of subjects, very obviously oriented in the direction of the interests of historical theologians in the First world. This is a pity, because one of the main interests of the period in the present global situation, where oppression is the experience of many Christians, is how the French Reformed reacted to the tightening straightjacket of royal Roman Catholic authoritarianism, persecution, imprisonment, banishment, and martyrdom. What did they think about it, write about it, and do about it? An article on this subject would surely have been welcome. What was the political theory of the French Reformed, and did they not push their royalism and submission to civil authority to unacceptable limits? Were they obsessed by Pontifical authority in such a way that the French king avoided active opposition on their part, which occasioned the Catholic dictum of the time: “soumis comme un Huguenot” (submissive like a Huguenot)?

The warnings of the great Agrippa d’Aubigné addressed earlier to the French churches went by the board, and so during the Fronde at the time of Mazarin and the minority of Louis XIV, they were the most faithful supporters of the Bourbon monarchy. Later, Jean Claude in his *Les plaintes des protestants, Cruellement opprimez dans le Royaume de France* (1686) was the great defender of the persecuted Huguenots, but was his biblical defense not blunted because he was drawn into the waters of moderation and tolerance by his collaboration with Richard Simon and Pierre Bayle (*De la Tolérance*, 1686), who were among the first luminaries of free thinking?

That said, the value of this work is that it allows those who do not read Latin and/or French to become acquainted with the history and writings of theologians who are generally little known by comparison with their Puritan contemporaries. For those with special theological interest, at several points it provides a useful analysis of one of the major controversies in continental Reformed theology, focusing on the prolific writings of Moïse Amyraut, which occupy almost three pages in the select bibliography.

The book is divided into two parts, the first historical, with six articles, and the second with fifteen studies of theologians and issues in the French churches. As might be expected, there is some overlap between the two sections and a little repetition of some historical details (for example, in the article on Pierre Jurieu), which could have been edited out.

This period was a time of crisis for the French Reformed, one from which they never really recovered. In spite of the limited toleration permitted by the Edict of Nantes, from that point on, it was a case of the progressive strangulation of Reformed church life in France. It is estimated that by the time of the Revocation not only tens of thousands of Huguenots had left France by emigration, but also some 600 pastors. Others recanted publicly, either really or superficially. In the following century, the free-thinking of the Enlightenment did its work on the remnant, the result being that just before the Revolution there were only 472 churches left (by comparison with over 1,200 churches estimated to have been planted by 1570) with diminished congregations in restricted Protestant enclaves and a mere 180 pastors, a good number of whom had by then followed the philosophers and espoused deism. Calvinism had been lost to France; it has never been restored in an ecclesiastical sense and even today is restricted to the witness of isolated individuals.

The historical articles deal with the growth of the Reformed churches in the latter part of the 16th century, the influence of Beza, the Reformed synods during the time of limited tolerance, the reception of the Synod of Dort, and the increasing hardship of church life under the rigor implemented by Louis XIV. It needs underlining that between the assassination of Henri IV at the hands of a Catholic extremist in 1610 and the Revolution in 1789, a mere four Bourbon kings reigned, and their power became ever greater, until it began slipping away prior to 1789. There was a durable continuity of sapping and repressive policies that undermined the Huguenots. This fact is often not sufficiently appreciated, both with regard to the politics of exclusion the Protestants suffered and the ways in which they reacted to them. What was happening at the time in England and Holland did not help either, and Louis XIV must have trembled at the thought of the fate of Charles I or the federalism developing in Holland. A focused chapter on this subject would have been useful, together with a discussion of how the Huguenots interpreted their persecution theologically.

The theological studies, written by specialists of the period, are both detailed and well documented. The reader will find in-depth presentations of the main figures of the period—the Scot John Cameron, Moïse Amyraut, Pierre du Moulin, Jean Daillé, André Rivet, Charles Drelincourt, Claude Pajon, Jean Claude, and Pierre Jurieu. There is a nice balance maintained between theological questions and homiletic and pastoral considerations. Rather surprising is the absence of any in-depth discussion concerning the influence of the Genevan school with the Turretini, the uncle Bénédicte (1588–1631) and nephew François (1623–1687) and Jean Diodati

(1576–1649), who translated the Bible into Italian. Another absent Genevan influence is that of Benedict Pictet, who wrote a three volume theology (1696) and an influential two volume work on Christian ethics (1692).

The main theological issue at the time was obviously the condemnation of Arminianism and the fear on the part of du Moulin, Rivet and their ilk that Amyraldianism, developed from the “universalism” of Cameron, who had enormous influence on his students, was a half-way house to synergism. Du Moulin wrote pointedly about the Arminians (“apes of the Pelagians”), and chapter 9 on his *Anatomy of Arminianism* (1619) reveals his qualities as a theologian and polemicist.

The opponents of Amyraut feared that his two stage view of the divine decree of salvation, with Christ dying hypothetically for all and subsequently being received through faith by those who believed the gospel, would inevitably collapse into Arminian prescience and the limitation of divine sovereignty in salvation. They considered that this was plowing a different furrow from that of Dort, particularly its third canon, which had been accepted by the Synod of Alais, with du Moulin as moderator, in 1620. However, the theology taught at Saumur by Amyraut, La Place, and Capel, in the line of Cameron, retained its attraction throughout this period, and was never formally condemned by a synod of the church as heresy. Richard A. Muller, in his article on Amyraut, points out that his thought “although hardly a reprise of Calvin, arguably fell within the confessional boundaries set by the Canons of Dort” (p. 198). Unfortunately, Amyraut, no mean theologian, is generally only remembered in this context.

Another controversy, later than that surrounding the Saumur theology but not unrelated to it, concerned the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and centered round the ideas of Claude Pajon (pp. 299–306). Pajon published little, but his ideas circulated widely and were much discussed, generating two rounds of controversy from 1665–1667 and 1676–1685. He went further than Amyraut, who proposed that if the Spirit works immediately on the intellect in conversion, he operates only mediately on the will, since his work passes through the intellect. Pajon seems to have denied an immediate operation of the Spirit on both the intellect and the will. His opponents, who included such influential figures as Jean Claude and Pierre Jurieu, deemed that Pajon’s teaching implied difficulties not only with relation to man’s natural sinfulness but also with regard to providential *concursum* in conversion. Pajon was never condemned of heresy and avoided charges by directing his energies latterly toward replying to the able Jansenist Pierre Nicole’s work *Legitimate Arguments against the Calvinists* (1671).

One of the most engaging chapters (ch. 14) for those who are interested in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Puritan theology is by Michael Haykin on the seal of the Spirit, describing Jean Claude's sermon on Ephesians 4:30 and Huguenot pneumatology. Claude, the influential pastor at Charenton near Paris (the largest Reformed church in France with up to 15,000 members and 4 pastors at one point), who also clashed with Nicole and Bossuet, had already written on the sin against the Holy Spirit. His sermon on "The Glorious Seal of God" reveals the richness of Huguenot preaching. Claude presented the seal of the Spirit as the sign of *royal* (surely not insignificant in the light of our remarks above!) belonging and distinguished between grieving, quenching, resisting, and outraging the Spirit (p. 332). He concluded: "Let us live in this age soberly, righteously, and piously by waiting for the most blessed day and the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us remember that we have been sealed for this great day of our redemption. Enjoy the honour of this seal until finally God enables us to enjoy the promise that he confirms to us. ... [Then] the flesh will follow the Spirit into the eternal paradise ..." (p. 333). No wonder Claude was one of the influential preachers of his day, an equal of Bossuet.

The question that does not find an answer in this collection concerns to what extent the various internal polemics, that rumbled on throughout the period, weakened the Protestant churches' witness and took them away from the concrete political problems facing them in France, which were double—the continued opposition from renascent Romanism and its eloquent defenders on the one hand, and the authoritarianism of the king on the other. Why did the French churches develop no form of resistance other than a passive respect for the monarchy before the disastrous Camisard uprisings in the Cévennes in the early 18th century? Why was no oppositional theory developed in France as was the case of Samuel Rutherford in Scotland or Louis Althusius of Holland in his *Politica*, advocating that a tyrant can be dethroned and even put to death? This was not new, and there were also French precedents. The "Monarchomaques" (p. 140) had contested the absolute power of monarchy, referring to the final section of Calvin's *Institutes* and Beza's *Right of Magistrates* for their ideas about a just and active opposition to tyranny. Was the French Reformed church too much in the slipstream of the Protestant nobility, and were its theologians too tied to what seemed acceptable and desirable to their noble leaders and protectors?

Perhaps the fact that France in the 17th century was hardly unified linguistically, since the majority of the population was illiterate and conversed in patois dialects, often incomprehensible outside their immediate locality,

also held back the growth of the Reformed church and limited it to the more educated, the nobility, or the growing middle commercial and professional classes. Whether it was the theological disputes, the growing oppression of the king, or broadly speaking the class limitation of the Reformed faith, the question remains, and it is a fascinating one, as to why the numbers of the Reformed diminished rather than increased during this century, in the context of limited tolerance. It seems to be the case that in France during this period the “commoners and peasants neither knew much about its [Catholic Church’s] doctrines nor participated in official religious events” (p. 142) and that religious identity was weak. The Catholic Church engaged in activities to rectify this, and the likes of Pierre de Bérulle and François de Sales worked to educate the population. Were there any comparable efforts on the part of the Reformed churches to “enlarge their tent”?

Beyond the tragedy recounted in these pages, is it not also indicative of the plight of the Reformed faith in France that the only contribution to this volume written by a French scholar is the historical piece by Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard, who teaches at an institution that is hardly a friend of confessional Calvinism? French theologians and historians today show scant attention to Calvin’s theology or to that of his successors and are rarely interested in questions that go beyond the historical plight of the Huguenots and their struggle for freedom of conscience. It would be a great thing if this volume were to inspire some younger scholars in France to dig into their largely unexplored theological patrimony.

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Adrian Chastain Weimer. *Martyrs’ Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. x + 218.

This monograph is a careful study of the impact of martyrdom on New England Protestants in the seventeenth century. The idea of martyrdom from the early Christian saints through the sixteenth-century persecution of Queen Mary helped to form a historical and more specifically apocalyptic framework that influenced the perception of early New Englanders, as they understood their context and purpose. Weimer argues that the idea of martyrdom, along with other apocalyptic features, shaped many of the significant interactions between New England Congregationalists and other Protestant groups in the colonies.

The first chapter examines the impact of the sixteenth-century martyrologists John Bale and John Foxe. Particular attention is given to the well-known *Actes and Monuments* compiled by John Foxe. Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and other books formed a body of literature that provided a foundational reference for New Englanders to understand their own plight and persecution. Weimer highlights the value and extensive circulation of these volumes in New England.

Chapter two focuses on the Separatist movement and its emphasis on holiness. Suffering and persecution were understood as necessary for seeking greater purity. The history of Christian martyrdom followed the same pattern, however an inconsistency did emerge in the Separatists' appeal to earlier English Protestants who sought a pure church and were willing to suffer and die for that cause. Weimer points out that several of the martyrs under the reign of Queen Mary were bishops in the Church of England. This fact created an ecclesiastical problem given that the Separatists argued that they should be identified as the true church because of their pursuit of true holiness. Yet if bishops of the Church of the England were martyred for pursuing the same holiness, they should likewise represent the true church. This forced Separatists to divide the issue by honoring these bishops' individual pursuit of holiness, while denying the Church of England to be a true church.

Chapters three, four, and five address issues in which New England Congregationalists confronted what they understood to be doctrinal and ecclesiastical heterodoxy. Weimer looks at the Antinomian controversy, the rise of English Baptists, and finally the arrival of the Quakers in New England. With each of these topics martyrdom is examined as an explanatory idea for those being persecuted as well as for those inflicting persecution. Particularly interesting is the discussion of how the Congregationalists (formerly persecuted) now began to persecute others, while still maintaining their identity as the "heirs of the martyrs." They set doctrinal differences in the context of a cosmic battle with Satan, and thus their so-called persecution of other religious minorities was really an attempt to protect their congregations from the ultimate persecution of the devil.

The sixth chapter explores the concept of martyrdom during King Philip's War. Important attention is given to how the war shaped the New England pursuit of holiness and how suffering was identified with the legacy of martyrdom. This chapter takes into account how the Native American Christians likewise were impacted by this concept of martyrdom. It would be interesting to further explore how the narrative of martyrdom influenced emerging ideas of race and ethnicity.

In this volume, Weimer offers a helpful contribution to our understanding of early New England religious history. Previous works studied the wider apocalyptic interest of that era, and this singular focus on martyrdom gives further insight into the formation of religious identity in New England. This volume is worth considering for those interested in understanding the history of early New England in the context of religious thought.

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Eric Metaxas. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich*. Nashville: Nelson, 2010.

Years ago, someone said of a Broadway musical, only a little tongue-in-cheek, “nobody liked it but the audience!” Apparently it had received considerably negative reviews from the theater critics and other professionals, but the spectators had loved it. Something like this could be said about Eric Metaxas’s book about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, not that all who praise the book are laypeople. And it has received numerous prestigious awards. But many of those most qualified to evaluate it have been quite negative. There are two possibilities. The critics could be wrong, as they sometimes are. Or, the winsome prose of the book camouflages the errors.

Because of that, this book is difficult to review. It is indeed beautifully written, smooth and engaging. The subject is of considerable importance. Dietrich Bonhoeffer made a profound mark on the twentieth century, not only because of his leadership in the resistance against the Nazis, but because of his theological views and writings. Books such as *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* are still being read at seminaries and in churches. The difficulty is to know how much of the Metaxas book is hagiography, and how much it is trying to make Bonhoeffer into someone he was not. My answer is that it is a bit of both.

There is no rule against hagiography, as long as it does not conceal serious inaccuracies. The fact is, several people have tried to label Bonhoeffer and garner him for their cause. Rather as they do with C. S. Lewis, many want to claim him as their hero. The charge against Eric Metaxas is that he has made Bonhoeffer into more of an evangelical (in the American sense) than he was. For example, Clifford Green asserts that Eric Metaxas has “hijacked” Bonhoeffer for the evangelicals (whereas Metaxas says or implies that it is liberals who have in fact hijacked him). Green has credibility as he is the

executive director of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. It is worth reading Green's review, as well as the long thread of comments that follow.¹ The question is legitimate: Is Bonhoeffer a close ally of modern evangelicals, or, if they really knew him, would he be too radical for their comfort? *Christianity Today*, in many ways the conservative opposite number to *The Christian Century*, wants to settle the debate by calling him, "a liberal with some evangelical sympathies or leanings."²

No doubt this kind of debate has its place. Bonhoeffer was not an aggressive liberal, at least in the sense of the disputes between "modernists" and "fundamentalists" in the early twentieth century in the United States. He did share certain views with European liberal theologians. He not only studied with but became friends with Adolf von Harnack in Berlin (1924–1927). Harnack, a noted liberal, who, with many colleagues, taught biblical higher criticism, questioned the authorship of John, and urged people to think of the New Testament less as a *norm* and more as a *source* for the Christian faith. He nevertheless urged students to achieve a piety that was authentically theirs and not dependent on creeds and traditions. Something of this dichotomy can be seen in Bonhoeffer's so-called "religionless Christianity." No doubt his greatest mentor was not a liberal at all, but Karl Barth, the leader of "neo-orthodoxy," known in Europe as "crisis theology" or "dialectical theology." Though a fierce critic of liberalism, Barth nevertheless was comfortable with biblical criticism. Bonhoeffer's admiration for Barth stemmed from his appeals to faith without tying it to rational or historical verification. They both detested what they believed to be Christian apologetics. Bonhoeffer clearly cannot be claimed by American evangelicals who hold to the doctrine of "inerrancy." In his 1933 treatise of the creation and the fall, he states that the traditional view of verbal inspiration is flawed, and that the author(s) of Genesis were limited by their times. Yet at the same time, his writings are full of biblical allusions. He followed the typical strategy of neo-orthodoxy by relegating historical and textual issues to the "lower storey" or *Historie*, reserving the use and authority of Scripture to the "upper storey" or *Heilsgeschichte*. In my view this split is ultimately fatal, and yet did not at first prevent its adherents from a certain deep, authentic piety.

I have worked through several of Bonhoeffer's works a number of times, and am always enriched by his use of Scripture. But they do raise important questions. Was he a pacifist? Not in the Anabaptist fashion, though he did

¹ In *The Christian Century*, Oct. 5, 2010: <http://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/hijacking-bonhoeffer>.

² See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/februaryweb-only/redeemingbonhoeffer.html>.

plead for peace and peace-making, based on his understanding of the Sermon of the Mount. His *Ethics* (1940–1943) advocates doing everything possible to achieve peace, yet admits of exceptions, such as wars of necessity. Many questions remain about his involvement with the plot to assassinate Hitler. But it is clear that he was not opposed to such an extreme measure. Metaxas rather poignantly describes Bonhoeffer's resolve in the midst of an extreme situation.

What were his views on Scripture and inspiration? In the end, Metaxas does not spend much time elucidating Bonhoeffer's views on Scripture. If that is the reader's major interest this is not the book to satisfy it. It does not intend to be. Rather, it is far more concerned with Bonhoeffer's piety, and his bravery when facing the increasingly hostile Nazi régime. Although Karl Barth was the primary author of the *Barmen Declaration* (1934), the document that would call for a return to traditional Lutheranism and to resist the growing darkness of a tyrannical government, Bonhoeffer was deeply involved. Here Metaxas has a thorough treatment of the declaration, of the creation of the Confessing Church and Bonhoeffer's role in the growing resistance to Hitler.

Another charge against Metaxas is his unfamiliarity with the history of Bonhoeffer's times. This ignorance is said to deprive him of the ability to understand Bonhoeffer's theology more fully, since so much of it was shaped by his interaction with people and events of his day. Such a criticism is leveled, for example, by Victoria J. Barnett. She too has considerable credibility since she is the General Editor of the English Edition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Works*, as well as the Director of Church Relations at the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Her assessment is that Metaxas is guilty of "oversimplification of the battle lines and the complexities of the church struggle." She takes issue with what she believes to be Metaxas's view, and answers, "The failure of the German Evangelical Church under Nazism was not that it was filled with formalistic, legalistic Lutherans who just needed to form a personal relationship to Jesus, but that it was filled with Christians whose understanding of their faith had so converged with German national culture that it tainted both their politics and their theology."³ I am not convinced this is fair to Metaxas. There is much more in his recommendation of Bonhoeffer than an appeal to a personal relationship to Jesus, though without doubt that is present. And to say that the problem in the church was not formalism simply denies one of the facts about the German

³ <https://contemporarychurchhistory.org/2010/09/review-of-eric-metaxas-bonhoeffer-pastor-martyr-prophet-spy-a-righteous-gentile-vs-the-third-reich/>.

church in the period between the wars. *Barmen* can be read, among other things, as an admonition against formalism. It is indeed full of appeals to putting Jesus Christ first, in order to combat any spirit of compromise.

To be sure, Metaxas does not approach his subject as a social historian. Another book may be needed to compare people and events with Bonhoeffer's theological evolution. Yet this one does not abstract him from his times. Quite the contrary, it is full of quotes from correspondence, full of biographical details, and the recounting of historical events. Even his critics admit that the book is a great read, although some of them rather resent it, because they feel the reader will be unwittingly drawn-in. I share some of their reservations about his theological assessment of Bonhoeffer, but I find the criticism over the top. One of the greatest virtues of the book is to make you *feel* as though you were right there, rejoicing or suffering along with Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church. We feel we actually know his fiancée, brother and sister, and his friends. We live with him through his visits to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem with Adam Clayton Powell at the pulpit. We sense the agony of several major choices in his life. We are oppressed at the Flossenbürg and Buchenwald prisons. That is what good historians do.

Metaxas's Bonhoeffer is a hero, and someone who, in his own words, "is ready to sacrifice all ... when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and exclusive allegiance to God ..." (p. 446). While fully acknowledging the legitimacy of the questions raised by his critics (Is he an evangelical, and were his views shaped by the history of his times?), the take-away for me is his example of Christian heroism. Bonhoeffer advocated constantly for a full devotion to Jesus Christ, whatever the cost. He gave his life for his Lord. We must be ready to do the same, whether literally, or in our daily decisions to follow Christ.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Since writing this review Bill Edgar suffered a cardiac attack on August 18. The editors join with me in wishing our friend and colleague a complete return to health and activity and assuring him and his family of our prayers at this time.
—Paul Wells

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