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SATS

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

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Editorial

In 2023, the South African Theological Seminary singled out ethics as an academic focus for the institution. Our e-conference, "Theology, Ethics, and the Church: Perspectives from the Global South," raised the question, "How does biblically-informed, Christlike, Spirit-empowered, and God-glorifying ethics inform and transform clergy, congregants, communities, countries, and even continents?" *Conspectus* 36 further explores this question with its various offerings. From articles in Biblical Studies, to those in Systematic Theology, Practical Theology, and Biblical Counselling, this issue addresses a variety of ethical questions and how faithful analysis of the biblical text ought to transform communities on the African continent and beyond. May the articles inspire our readers to think deeply and act wisely wherever they are situated.

Conspectus 36 Articles

In the first article, "Nonconformist Transformation: An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 5:7–14," José de Carvalho dives into Ephesians 5:11's appeal to expose the unfruitful deeds of darkness, arguing that Paul had the deeds of unbelievers in mind. Through an exegetical and literary study of verses 7–14, de Carvalho demonstrates the missional value of non-verbal gospel communication through a nonconformist lifestyle that rejects secular norms.

Next, Jiofack Kana C. Jésus points out the threats and opportunities in African missions, illustrating the need to engage biblical authority, theology, and anthropology for an effective and faithful missional theology in and for Africa. In his article entitled, "Towards a Biblical Theology of Missions in Western Africa," Jésus argues that African theologians are well positioned to articulate a biblical theology of missions.

In her article, "The Effects of Boko Haram on the Church in Nigeria: The Case of Michika Local Government Area, Adamawa State," Roseline Luka Vandi discusses the devastating impact of Boko Haram on the church in the Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria. Employing a critical phenomenological method, Vandi makes recommendations about the hopeful and redemptive role of the church and its leaders in the aftermath of the insurgence.

Next, June Dickie applies literature trauma theory to demonstrate how reading and performing the biblical story of Ruth and selected lament psalms could facilitate more cost-effective healing for trauma sufferers. Reflecting on the outcomes of readings and performances of these texts with selected groups, Dickie argues that this approach gives sufferers the opportunity to express their own pain and relate to characters in the Bible.

In his article, "Emotive or Ethical? A Theological Reflection on Kenya's Comprehensive Sexuality Education," Kevin Muriithi Ndereba critiques an emotive response to sexuality education in Kenya. Through a customized practical theological methodology, Ndereba offers a theological and ethical approach to the issue by analyzing the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) policy in Kenyan society, evaluating its sexual ethics in light of key NT passages, and offering practical recommendations for ministerial and theological engagement in matters of sexual ethics in Kenya.

In her article, "Drawing on the Collective Wisdom of the Past to Develop a Transformative, Scripture-Infused Eco-Theology for Land Use in Africa," Katherine Norton addresses the widespread environmental degradation in Africa by proffering a Scripture-infused eco-theology that honors indigenous wisdom and takes seriously the engagement with Scripture

within a community's local language. She concludes with eight practical recommendations, inspired by experiences of the Faith and Farming program in Nigeria and beyond.

Finally, Samson Tadelle Demo engages the topic of transhumanism in his article, "Deconstructing Transhumanism: A *Metanoia* from *Homo Deus* to *Homo Kenosus*." Demo critiques the transhumanistic ideals of *homo deus* and calls for a *metanoiac* turn, a kenotic embrace of Christ's incarnate life and service, as key to deconstruct the ethos of transhumanism.

The publication concludes with three book reviews. Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh reviews David deSilva's (2022) *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture, Max Swart reviews Spiritual Formation for the Global Church: A Multi-Denominational, Multi-Ethnic Approach,* edited by Ryan A. Brandt and John Frederick (2021), and Megan Braithwaite reviews Catherine L. McDowell and Philip H. Towner's (2021) *The Rewards of Learning Greek and Hebrew: Discovering the Richness of the Bible in its Original Languages.*

Editorial Board

On behalf of the Editorial Board chairperson, Dr. Desmond Henry, I am honored to welcome two new members to the board: Drs. Basilius Kasera and Bitrus Sarma are joining the Conspectus Editorial Board from November 2023.

Dr. Basilius Kasera is a Lecturer in Philosophy, Applied Ethics, Religious and Moral Education, and Religious Studies at the University of Namibia. His research interests include moral philosophy, African philosophy, education, justice studies, religion, culture, political theology, contextual studies, and theology. He has contributed to the quality of *Conspectus* in various ways over the past years, including serving as a reviewer and publishing in the journal.

Dr. Bitrus Sarma is a Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Greek. He is the current Provost of ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro (ETSK) in Nigeria. His publications include *Hermeneutics of Mission in Matthew: Israel and the Nations in the Interpretive Framework of Matthew's Gospel* (Langham Monographs, 2015); *Blessed New Humanity in Christ: A Theology of Hope for African Christianity from the Book of Ephesians* (HippoBooks, 2021), and *Drums of Redemption: A New Testament Theology for Africa* (HippoBooks 2023).

We are grateful for the addition of these colleagues and pray that their contributions will benefit both the journal and church. We have also come to the end of our first three-year Editorial Board cycle. On behalf of the SATS Management Team and Editorial Team, I wish to thank each Board member for serving the journal with much wisdom and zeal. It has been a joy to co-labor with such passionate and skilled scholars and practitioners. To the new Board, to be introduced in our next volume, we look forward to the coming three years. May each work of recalibration and innovation bring glory and honor to our Lord's Name.

My gratitude to our contributors, the Editorial Board, the Review Board, the Editorial Team, and the Seminary for the successful publication of this issue. As we grapple with the ethical challenges and opportunities in Africa and beyond, may we pursue theology that is firmly Bible-based, Christ-centered, Spirit-led, and contextually informed.

In Christ,
Dr. Cornelia van Deventer
Editor

Nonconformist Transformation: An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 5:7–14[1]

José de Carvalho

South African Theological Seminary

Abstract

Ephesians 5:7–14 is an enigmatic pericope fraught with interpretive challenges that have generated much scholarly debate. The appeal in verse 11, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them," is contested in terms of what is to be exposed, and how it is to be exposed. The text is usually interpreted in one of two ways. Some scholars interpret the text as Paul instructing Christians to expose sinful behavior of other Christians. Others hold that the behavior of non-Christians are to be exposed. While the interpretation requires some nuance, this study argues in favor of the second interpretation. The significance of the article is to demonstrate the missional value of non-verbal gospel communication—Paul urges Christians to live missional lives, though not through proclamation, but rather through a nonconformist lifestyle that rejects secular norms. The research demonstrates this by employing an exegetical, literary study of verses 7–14. This methodology includes 1) a lexical study of ἐλέγχω (expose), 2) a discourse analysis of verses 3–14, 3) an investigation of the concepts, *sons of disobedience* (v. 6), and *children of the light* (v. 7), and also the imagery of *light* and *darkness* (v. 8), and (4) an exposition of the pericope (vv. 11–14).

About the Author
Mr. José de Carvalho was born in Lisbon, Portugal, and grew up in Mozambique and South Africa. He currently lives in Johannesburg. José has a diploma in management from Wits Technikon (1992) and has considerable corporate experience, including working as a General Manager at Sulzer SA, a Swiss engineering company. In addition, he acquired a diploma in international executive management at IMD in Geneva, Switzerland (1999–2000) and he also holds an M.Th. in Theology from SATS, where he now serves as an academic. José is an active member of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa (NTSSA) with a specific research interest in Pauline Studies.

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[1] These insights were first presented as a paper at the Annual Meeting of the NTSSA on 29 October 2021 in Pretoria, South Africa. They have also appeared in kernel form in a blog (De Carvalho 2022).

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1. Introduction

The appeal in Ephesians 5:11, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them"[2] is fraught with interpretive challenges and the object of much scholarly debate. Part of what sparked this debate is that the term ἐλέγχω (expose) has a wide semantic range. Engberg-Pedersen (1989, 89), citing Gnilka, remarks that Ephesians 5:12–14 are among the most enigmatic verses in the letter and that commentators disagree strongly about the interpretation of the three verses. The pronoun *they* (v. 12) points back to the sons of disobedience in verse 6. There are two questions. First, who were the sons of disobedience? Second, how was Paul's audience to expose those who committed deeds of darkness (v. 11a) without mentioning specifics that were too shameful to mention (v. 12)? The allusion to the children of the light (v. 7) as well as the imagery of light and darkness (v. 8) are of interpretive interest.

Some scholars (Hoehner 2002, Merkle 2016, Barth 2014, Osborne 2017) interpret the text to mean that Paul instructs Christians to expose other Christians' sinful behaviors, thus bringing them to repentance. Others (Thielman 2010, Cohick 2013, Talbert 2007, Engberg-Pedersen 1989) favor the interpretation that the sinful behavior of non-Christians is to be exposed. This study will demonstrate that although the interpretation is nuanced, the passage calls for the sinful behavior of non-Christians to be exposed. It will further argue that Paul stresses that Christians' godly character—their *light*—exposes the *darkness* (i.e., evil deeds), thereby drawing people to the light of Christ and new life.

This article's position demonstrates that the interpretation that calls Christians to reprimand unbelievers will violate the discourse flow (Eph 5:7–14) and Pauline theology (1 Cor 5:12–13). The development of the argument advances the significance of the study. Paul urges Christians to represent their new identity in Christ through a nonconformist lifestyle that rejects secular norms. The significance of this article is that it demonstrates the missional importance of non-verbal gospel communication, which is often underestimated and neglected.

Considering what sparked the debate, at least in part, is the meaning of ἐλέγχω the first step in the literary analysis is, therefore, an in-depth lexical study of this Greek verb. The lexical study reveals that the word contains a wide semantic range. Therefore, a careful study of Ephesians 5:7–14 will help us determine the meaning of ἐλέγχω in its literary context. Next, the study performs a discourse analysis to trace the inner coherence of Paul's flow of thought (vv. 3–14). Embedded in this section is a discussion of the concepts *sons of disobedience* (v. 2), *children of the light* (v. 7), and the imagery of *light* and *darkness* (v. 8). These expressions, in their theological and situational context, provide a critical guide to the literal meaning of the passage. This analysis reveals that Paul's rhetorical style presents an antithesis between the sons of disobedience and the children of the light and that the allusion to the sons of disobedience and the imagery of darkness refer to those outside the Christian community. The last step in the exegetical analysis is to conduct a verse-by-verse exposition of the immediate context of this enigmatic passage (vv. 11–14) to ascertain Paul's communicative intent. After verse 11 the nature and the reason for exposing the sons of disobedience is disclosed. The full force of the exposure only becomes apparent by the concluding quotation in verse 14, emphasizing the agency of Christ's light in the redemptive process.

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[2] Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations emanate from the NET Bible.

2. Lexical Study of ἐλέγχω

The present imperative ἐλέγχετε (Eph 5:11b) is derived from ἐλέγχω. It simply means to expose, rebuke or convict, referring to rebuking or correcting an error or exposing something (Robertson 2014, s.v. ἐλέγχω).

The term ἐλέγχω can mean to uncover something, such as the source of the Jordan River (Josephus, *J. W.* 3.512). It was most commonly used to refer to the exposure of something evil (Josephus, *Life* 339), deceptive (Aristotle, *Eccl.* 485), ugly (Philo, *Names* 198), or illegal (Josephus, *Ant.* 4.219.281), that the offender wanted to keep hidden, but which through a mistake (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.4, 253, 303), or evidence provided by another (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.4), was revealed (Thielman 2010, 343).

In the LXX the term appears sixty-five times, of which forty-nine occurrences are in the canonical books. It translates five Hebrew words. Forty-one times it is used for יָכַח, meaning "to decide, adjudge, prove." It is used with such meanings as to decide, or judge (Gen 31:37), to convict (Gen 31:42; Job 32:12; Psalm 50:21 [LXX 49:8]), to rebuke (Ps 50:8 [LXX 49:8]), and to expose, or reprove (Job 22:4; Ps 105:14 [LXX 104:14]; Hosea 4:4; Habakkuk 1:12; Hoehner 2002, 678).

The term ἐλέγχω can also take on a positive context by emphasizing the error that requires correction. The LXX uses the word this way to refer to God's fatherly discipline (2 Sam 7:14; Prov 3:11–12; Wis 12:2; Sir 18:13; Philo, *Prelim. Studies* 177; Thielman 2010, 343).

Four meanings are stressed: 1) to scrutinize or examine carefully; bring to light, expose, set forth, 2) to bring a person to the point of recognizing wrongdoing; convict, convince, 3) to express strong disapproval of someone's action; reprove and correct, 4) to penalize for wrongdoing; punish or discipline (Danker 2000, 315).

In the SBL Greek New Testament (Holmes 2013) ἐλέγχω is used eighteen times with four basic meanings: 1) expose (John 3:20; Eph 5:11, 13), 2) reprove, (Luke 3:19; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15; Rev 3:19), 3) convict (John 8:9, 46; 16:8; 1 Cor 14:24; Jas 2:9; Jude 15), and 4) correct (Matt 18:15; Heb 12:5). It is used in confronting either, 1) the Christian community (Matt 18:15; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15; Jas 2:9), or 2) those outside it (John 3:20; 1 Cor 14:24; Luke 3:19). It is used in an eschatological context (John 16:8; Jude 15), and in a single case it does not fit well into any of the above-mentioned categories (John 8:46).

The use of ἐλέγχω in the NT is limited, making it challenging to settle its meaning.

> In the NT the use is restricted. With the accusative of person it means 'to show people their sins and summon them to repentance,' either privately (Mt. 18:15) or congregationally (1 Tim. 5:20). The Holy Spirit does this (Jn. 16:8), as Christ also does both now (Rev. 3:19) and at the parousia (Jude 15). (Buschel 1985, 222)

The term is used in the following four senses: 1) to be sternly admonished, 2) to sternly admonish, 3) to be convicted, 4) to convict. Concerning sinful persons or acts, passive forms (e.g., ἐλέγχεται) describe the experience of the sinner when faced with the demand for repentance (Luke 3:19; 1 Cor 14:24), by their conscience (John 8:9) or by the self-revelation of light (John 3:20; Eph 5:13). In connection with the Ephesians passage (5:11b), the darkness-light theme suggests exposure, with an implied censure (Danker 2000, 315), and if darkness serves as a cloak for the deception, then light can expose it (John 3:30; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.2.6; Thielman 2010, 343).

Engberg-Pedersen (1989, 97), in his comprehensive study, compares BDAG's list of meanings with the one given in LSJ—1) cross-examine,

question, 2) test, bring to the proof, 3) prove, 4) refute, confute, 5) get the better of, 6) expose, 7) decide a dispute (Liddell et al. 1940, 532)—which is based on a vastly greater amount of material and points out that the two lists are quite different. He criticizes BDAG's first meaning (bring to light) because it lacks classical and LXX support, as well as the juridical and disciplinary overtones of "convict," "punish," and "discipline," which is not found in LSJ. Engberg-Pedersen (1989, 97) concludes that the binding together of the various meanings is "confronting somebody or something with the aim of showing him or it to be, in some determinate respect, at fault."

Barth (1960, 570–571) discusses three different ways of exerting censure that may be expressed: 1) by a word spoken in privacy, 2) by public scolding, or 3) by conduct. Accordingly, the confrontation may be verbal or non-verbal (1 Pet 2:12; Matt 5:16)—the reprobation may concern a set of beliefs or a way of life (Engberg-Pedersen 1989, 97).

3. Discourse Analysis

The letter combines Christian doctrine and duty—Christian belief and practice. Ephesians 4:17–6:6 is one of the most extensive practical exhortations in the Bible on the correct behavior of Christians in the world. The pericope in inquiry belongs to the paraenetic section of the letter that began in Ephesians 4:1–3, which serves as the link between the doctrinal section delineating the Christian's position in Christ (chs. 1–3) and the paraenetic section. It is also as a summative introduction to the instructions to follow because the phrase "[I] urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called" (4:1) is an excellent summary of Paul's exhortations to follow.[3]

The major divisions in Ephesians 4–6 revolve around the verb $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ (to walk, meaning to live) combined with the conjunction $o\mathring{\upsilon}\nu$ (therefore), which appears in 4:1, 17; 5:1–2, 7–8 and 15. Paul's structural flow of thought is based on the Christian's position in Christ (chs. 1–3). Believers are called to walk in unity (4:1–16) and holiness (4:17–32). Chapter 5:1–14[4] is an extension of 4:17–32 and continues to draw out the ethical consequences of belonging to the Christian community.

In Ephesians 4:17–32, Paul contrasts the audience's former way of life in conformance with their natural identity as gentiles with their new identity as Christians recreated in the likeness of Christ. He states it both negatively (no longer live as the gentiles live) and positively (live as new

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[3] I am aware that due to the non-personal tone, distinctive literary features, and the letter's advanced theological themes, many scholars have recently argued against the long-held view of Pauline authorship. I am also aware of the textual issues surrounding 1:1 that led to the circular theory. Although the arguments and evidence on both sides of the debate have persuasive elements, on balance, the arguments in favor of reading "in Ephesus" seem to outweigh those against it (Thielman 2010, 15).
[4] Keener (2014, 549), Lincoln (1990, 292) and Thielman (2010, 30) begin the section in 5:3, whereas Cohick (2010, 114) and Hoehner (2002, 667) begin it in verse 1. It is not difficult to see why commentators would include 5:1–2 with the previous section. After all, the last verse in chapter 4 encourages the audience to be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave them, followed in 5:1–2 by the resumptive phrase, "Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children and live in love, just as Christ also loved us."

creations in Christ), according to the truth that is in Jesus.[5] Paul presents this transformation using a three-step process: 1) "lay aside the old man" (v. 22), 2) "be renewed" (v. 23), and 3) "put on the new man" (v. 24).

In Ephesians 5:1–2, Paul continues the theme of living in the likeness of Christ. The immediate context refers to living a life characterized by sacrificial love (4:32–5:2).

In Ephesians 5:3–6, the ethical landscape is dominated by contrasting shameful and proper behavior. In verses 3 and 4, Paul shifts sharply from talking about the self-giving love of Christ to self-indulgence, warning against various sins. He uses two vice lists containing three sins each that the audience must avoid. He also provides two motivations for shunning such behavior: it is not fitting (v. 3b) and out of character for Christians (v. 4). Verse 5b warns that those characterized by such behavior do not have an "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." In verse 6a, Paul concludes this section by cautioning not to believe deceptive teachings because those that accept these false teachings will suffer the consequences. The expression "because of these things God's wrath comes on the sons of disobedience" (v. 6b) powerfully highlights the result of such behavior.[6]

In Ephesians 5:7–14, the ethical landscape is presented by a more general appeal dominated by contrasting darkness and light. The light metaphor is first used passively, defining its presence in the Christian community (vv. 8–11a), then actively, for exposing, illuminating, and transforming (vv. 11b–14). In verse 7, the inferential conjunction οὖν (therefore) forms the bridge to the new section and introduces a prohibition based on the warning in verse 6.[7] Given God's impending wrath, Paul urges Christians to abstain from evil practices by the prohibitive imperative "Therefore do not be partakers with them." This is a reference to the sons of disobedience. Consequently, by a contrasting schema, Paul emphasizes why his audience should not participate; such participation would be inconsistent with their new identity in Christ (v. 8a). In verse 8b, using conversion and ethical instruction language, Paul contrasts the radical difference between the old life in *darkness*, dominated by evil deeds, with the new life dominated by the light of the world, Christ Jesus. As a result,

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5 This is not necessarily an insult on culture, but a literary device used by most Greek writers; it was common for Greek writers to develop moral exhortations by contrasting opposites (Keener 2014, 549). The notion that the people of God are to walk differently from the surrounding nations was central to Judaism (Lincoln 1990, 274).
The subject is the gentile way of life in comparison to the Jewish lifestyle and now Christian ethics. "The word 'Gentiles' (Gk. ethnē, 'the nations') represents a Jewish way of grouping all non-Jews together ethnically as 'not us.' But the chief characteristic of the nations, apart from ethnicity, was religious: polytheism. From a Jewish perspective, this was idolatry, which in turn led inevitably, so Jews generally thought, to immorality and injustice. Thus, the term 'pagan,' meaning 'polytheist,' but also connoting 'immoral polytheist,' is an important reminder of what the word 'Gentiles' would have meant to Paul. Nonetheless, for the pagans themselves, polytheism was not a problem; it was acknowledging the way things really are" (Gorman 2017, 36).

6 Caution needs to be exercised in the application of this severe statement. For those who fall into the sins in view through weakness, but afterward repent in shame and humility, there is forgiveness. The immoral person envisaged here is one who knows God's law and willfully disobeys it with impunity, giving themselves up without shame or penitence to this way of life (Stott 1979, 201).
7 Most scholars divide this section into two parts. Hoehner (2002, 667) and Lincoln (1990, 317) believe the first part ends in v. 6, whereas Barth (1960, 585) and Thielman (2010, 327) hold that it ends at v. 7. Because the ταῦτα (these things) in verse 6 refers back to the sins mentioned in the previous verses it is better to include v. 6 with the first section. And because γάρ (for) in v. 8 provides the rationale for the previous verse, it is better to include v. 7 with what follows. Therefore, it is best to divide the section between v. 6 and v. 7 (Merkle 2016).

in verse 8b Paul commands his audience to "Walk as children of the light," a designation which contrasts the sons of disobedience (v. 6). The phrase "for you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light" (v. 8) shifts the emphasis from the indicative (you are light) to the imperative (walk as children of light), stipulating that the Christian lifestyle must conform to the reality of being a new person in Christ. In verse 9, Paul illustrates the characteristics of conduct that provide evidence of walking in the light by a triad of behaviors—goodness (active benevolence), righteousness (right standing with God and morally correct behavior), and truth (integrity and sincerity). Verse 10 provides another element of what it means to walk in the light, namely, Christians should be discerning what is pleasing to the Lord. In verse 11 Paul commands Christians "not [to] participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."

Merkle (2016) and Hoehner's (2002, 679–680) arguments for the interpretation that the sinful behavior of Christians is to be exposed can be summarized as follows:

- The overall focus of this passage consists of ethical injunctions to believers (Merkle 2016).
- Paul encourages Christians (not non-Christians) not to participate in the works of darkness but instead to do the works of the light (Hoehner 2002, 679).
- Merkle (2016), citing Hoehner (2002, 679–680), point out that this passage focuses on instructing Christians to grow in maturity.
- In all his writings, Paul only exposes, rebukes, and disciplines those in the church, not outsiders—God alone judges them (Hoehner 2002, 680).

- The verb ἐλέγχω (expose) is used by Paul to rebuke errant members of the community (1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; see also Matt 18:15; Gal 6:1; Rev 3:19; Did. 15:3; Merkle 2016; Hoehner 2002, 680).
- The verb ἐλέγχω (expose) includes both exposure and reproof and thus the verbal component of the admonishment must be included (Hoehner 2002, 680).

As mentioned at the outset, I contend that it is rather the sinful behavior of unbelievers that is to be exposed. The research will concisely address Merkle (2016) and Hoehner's (2002) positional contentions to support this interpretation in sections four and five.

4. The Sons of Disobedience (2:2, 5:6), Children of the Light (5:7), and the Imagery of Light and Darkness (5:8)

Paul's contrastive argumentation style has permeated the paraenetic section since Ephesians 4:17–32. In 4:22–24, the contrast was between the *old* man and the *new* man.[8] In 5:3–14, an equivalent contrast is now presented by the imagery of darkness and light. The objective of the contrast, which is central to Paul's argument, is to draw an antithesis between the sons of disobedience (v. 6) and the children of the light (v. 8). The phrase "for you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the

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8 The term *new man* is a metaphor for the new life in Christ. Peter called it "partaking of the divine nature" in 2 Pet 1:4. This is in contrast to the old fallen Adamic nature (Utley 2008, 4:22). The expression "to put on the new man" is reminiscent of taking off old clothing and putting on new clothing and is a typical religious Greek philosophical metaphor for personal transformation (Keener 1993, 549). Accordingly, Paul portrays the removing and adopting of certain kinds of behaviors with unclothing (put off) and clothing (put on) imagery.

Lord. Walk as children of the light" (v. 8) sets up the contrast between their pre-conversion and post-conversion existence, which was common in early Christian literature (Rom 11:30; 1 Pet 2:10; Gal 1:23) and is characteristic of Ephesians (2:2–6, 11–13; Thielman 2010, 398; see also Lincoln 1990, 326–327).

Keener (2014, 551) provides further context to the contrast by stating that Jewish texts, most prominently the Qumranic manuscripts, often used light and darkness to contrast good and evil.[9] The term light is used metaphorically five times in the passage (5:8a, 8b, 9, 13, 14), referring to the character and revelation of God, the antithesis of the realm of darkness (Hoehner 2002, 671). The imagery of *darkness* is loaded with theological connotations, indicating where the God of light is not. It is used metaphorically to communicate a state of moral or spiritual darkness (4:17–18). Paul does not state that his audience was once in the darkness and is now in the light, but instead that they were darkness and now *are* light (Hoehner 2002, 669). Consequently, Paul is not saying that once they lived in darkness and now live in the light. He is speaking ontologically—about their very being. They were darkness, and now they are light because of their union with Christ (Osborn 2017).

The expression *sons of disobedience* is a Semitic idiom that means people characterized by disobedience. In the immediate context, it is evidenced by a lifestyle of immorality, covetousness, and shameful language (Eph 5:3–6).[10] In contrast, the children of the light are characterized by "the fruit of the light" (v. 9). In the immediate context, it is evidenced by a lifestyle imitating God (v. 1), characterized by goodness, righteousness, and truth, a life pleasing to the Lord (vv. 9–10).[11]

Biblically the designation *sons* is loaded with theological distinction. Humanity belongs to one of two families: either God is the Father (1 John 3:1, 10), or the Devil is the father (1 John 3:10; John 8:44). Alternatively, they are either in Adam or in Christ (1 Cor 15:22; Rom 5:15–19). Accordingly, they are either children of light (Eph 5:1; 5:8) and God's possession (1:14) or sons of disobedience (2:2; 5:6) and children of wrath (2:3). The terms *sons of disobedience* and *children of wrath* were used by Paul in 2:2, referring to their pre-Christian life. It also contains a subtle allusion to 2:4–3:10, indicating that some of those sons of disobedience have become "members of God's household" (2:19). The implication is that a person is either one or the other. The context of the present section (Eph 5:1–14) further supports this dichotomy because verse 8 is introduced by the conjunction γάρ (for) explaining that the audience was previously darkness but is now light.

Consequently, Paul reiterates that his audience is not to "participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness" (Eph 5:11a). The term συμμέτοχοι

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9 Light and darkness are presented as being opposite to each other, both in Scripture (Isa 5:20; 9:2; 50:10; Amos 5:18; Mic 7:8; Matt 6:23; John 3:19; 8:12) and in the Qumran literature (1QS 3:18–20, 24–25; 1QM 1:1, 11–16; 3:6, 9; 13:16) (Merkle 2016; see also Hoehner 2002, 670–671). More than any other community, "Qumran stressed that the opposite extremes of 'darkness' and 'light' characterize the unregenerate and regenerate" (López 2012, 212).

10 The passage is a ban on sexual immorality and speech laced with inappropriate sexual content. The excluded practices are sexual immorality, impurity, and lust. Even to discuss such things is to behave like non-Christians. The text emphasizes that the past is past, that to live like pagans is to live anachronistically, to live outside Christ. The inappropriateness of this kind of life is highlighted by the apocalyptic language of darkness and light (5:8–14; Gorman 2017, 601).
11 The notion of imitating God was common in Hellenistic ethics including Hellenistic Jewish ethics. This tradition may have exercised some influence on Paul at this point. However, the primary sources of the idea are probably Paul's own concept of the church created in God's image and the frequent OT notion that Israel should pattern its behavior after God's character (Thielman 2010, 320, 323; Hoehner 2002, 644).

(partakers; v. 7), used for not partaking with the sons of disobedience, indicates the fullest possible participation in something. "Its only other use in the New Testament is in Ephesians 3:6, where it describes the full participation of Gentile Christians with Jewish Christians as the people of God" (Thielman 2010, 335). Paul's injunction to expose the deeds of darkness in verse 11b relates to activities that originate in and are cloaked by darkness and therefore are characteristic of the pagan gentiles referred to in 4:17–19, who are "darkened in their understanding" (Thielman 2010, 344). In 4:17–19, Paul paints an evocative portrait of the pagan gentiles in the futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts. Because they are callous, they have given themselves over to indecency to practice every kind of impurity with greediness (4:17–20). Therefore, sons of disobedience (v. 6) refers to gentile pagans who are characteristically and habitually sinful and thus fit the definition of sons of disobedience and children of wrath (2:3), who have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (v. 5).[12]

The objective of this short discourse analysis is to argue for two points: 1) Paul's contrastive argumentation style and the discourse flow present an antithesis between the sons of disobedience and the children of the light and emphasize that they are two distinct groups of people, each with specific characteristics and ethics. The ethical dualism presented in Ephesians demands that the church recognizes that it is essentially different from the surrounding society. Also, under the power of the Holy Spirit, it often must live by values opposite to those of society because light

is opposite and incompatible with darkness (Culpepper 1979, 533). 2) The text presents ethical teaching to explain that walking in the light (v. 8b) is one of the specific ways the audience is called to imitate God (v. 1). This walk is evidenced by the fruit of the light (v. 9a). Paul provides three facets of walking in the light. First, discern what is pleasing to the Lord (v. 10). Second, have nothing to do with the unfruitful deeds of darkness (v. 11a). Third, expose them (v. 11b). By naming the deeds to be exposed (unfruitful deeds of darkness; v. 11), Paul sets these deeds in direct contrast to the fruit of the light (v. 9).

At this junction, it would be understandable if this nonconformity seemed to require separatism (Eph 5:7, 11). However, it will become clear later that what Paul has in mind is something quite different (vv. 13–14).

5. Contextual Exposition of Ephesians 5:11b–14

The phrase "but rather expose them" (v. 11b) is probably best rendered as "but rather even expose them" (LEB) because, according to Hoehner (2002, 678), the conjunction καὶ functions ascensively (i.e., even). The contrast is provided by the adversative conjunction δὲ (but) and the comparative μᾶλλον (rather). In context, then, it was not enough to "not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness" (v. 11a); steps must be taken to expose them. English translations generally supply *them* for comprehensibility, though a direct object is absent from the Greek text. Although the objects to be exposed are undefined, it seems best that it refers to the deeds of darkness (v. 11a), rather than to the persons themselves (v. 12) because of the reference to "all things being exposed" in verse 13 (Merkle 2016).

The conjunction γάρ (for) in verse 12 provides the reason the fruitless deeds of darkness must be avoided and explains why they should even be exposed. The personal pronoun *they* refers to the sons of disobedience (v. 6; Thielman 2010, 245). This verse can be translated either as "for the

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12 The phrase *kingdom of God* appears in sixty-five verses in the NT and kingdom is associated with Christ at least ten times, but only in Ephesians 5:5 are the two persons of the Godhead mentioned together in relation to the kingdom (Hoehner 2002, 661).

things they do in secret are shameful even to mention" (NET) or "for it is shameful even to speak about the things being done by them in secret" (LEB). It could be taken concessively (rebuke even though it is shameful to speak about) or parenthetically (for it is shameful even to speak about the things being done by them in secret). On the whole, it is probably best to understand it in the latter way (Best 2003, 258). Again, καί functions ascensively (are shameful even to mention). Does Paul mean that such sin cannot be verbally addressed? Some commentators think so (e.g., Lincoln 1990, 330). Thielman (2010, 344) believes that Paul is exaggerating for the sake of emphasizing the seriousness of the sins in view.[13]

The conjunction δέ in verse 13 is adversative, expressing the antithesis of secrecy in verse 12. *All things* refers to the things done in secret. There are two issues in this verse. First, it is challenging to decide whether the prepositional phrase ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς (by the light) depends on the preceding participle ἐλεγχόμενα (exposed) or on the following finite verb φανεροῦται (is made visible). Second, determining whether the finite verb is middle or passive also presents a challenge. Thielman (2010, 346) remarks that "A number of commentators [e.g., Lincoln (1990, 331)] attach the prepositional phrase 'ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς' (*hypo tou photos*, by the light) to 'φανεροῦται' (*phaneroutai*, becomes visible), which would then yield a slightly more intelligible statement that everything exposed is made visible by the light." Hoehner (2002, 683–684) believes that joining the prepositional phrase to the participle and taking the finite verb as passive seems to be the best option because it provides the best progression: "All the things which are exposed by the light are made manifest."

Accordingly, believers are told to expose the unfruitful works of darkness, and when these works are exposed by the light, they become visible (v. 13). Consequently, verse 13 provides another reason for the appeal in verse 11b. Paul urges believers to expose (v. 11b) the secret deeds of darkness (v. 12) because when these deeds are exposed by the light (fruit of the light in believers, v. 9), by contrast, they become demonstrably visible for what they are (v. 13). Accordingly, the pericope combines the concepts of being exposed and being revealed via the notion of light.[14]

In Ephesians 5:14, Paul expands on the concept of verse 13. The conjunction διὸ (therefore) is explanatory, introducing what the phrase "For everything made evident is light" means. Some translations put the διὸ clause with verse 14, while others put it with verse 13. The break is not interpretive, but it seems to make better sense to include this clause with verse 13 because it completes Paul's thought and allows the quotation in verse 14 to serve as a concluding remark (Hoehner 2002, 684).[15]

Cumulatively 5:12–13 "take up a proverbial saying, along the lines of Luke 8:17," "for nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing concealed that will not be made known and brought to light" (Bruce 1984, 376).

Paul's economy of words makes it challenging to ascertain what he means by the statement in verse 14a. Some interpreters have a problem with the literal translation "For everything made evident is light" (v. 14)

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13 Some commentators wonder why, if Paul is referring to non-Christians, he mentions that the deeds are done in secret, since the conduct of unbelievers is without restraint and blatant. For a discussion on this, see Thielman (2010, 345).

14 Engberg-Pedersen (1989, 102) confirms this, stating, "It is because the deeds that the addressees are enjoined to confront are deeds of darkness (v. 11, with the whole Hellenistic Jewish meaning of this), hidden things (v. 12), that confronting them by relying on the 'light' will equal 'revealing' them—in fact φανεροῦν. In other words, v. 13 in our passage spells out in what particular context ἐλέγχειν obtains the meaning of φανεροῦν (while also of course retaining its root meaning of confrontation, which is not part of φανεροῦν)."

15 The NET and LEB keep the phrase as v. 14. The NKJV keeps the phrase as v. 13. The NIV (2011) keeps the phrase as v. 13 but separated by an em dash.

finding it "disturbing" (Thielman 2010, 347) and "baffling" (Barth 1960, 572).

> These interpreters are then compelled to take 'φανερούμενον' as a middle-voice participle and translate, 'whatever makes manifest is light' (Abbot 1897, 156; cf. Eadie 1883, 387). Now we have the simple idea that light, by definition, is that which exposes darkness. As many others have observed, however, in the forty-eight other uses of 'φανερόω' (Phaneroō) in the NT (and one other in the LXX), the term never appears in the middle voice, and Paul has just used the term in the preceding phase in the passive voice. A middle sense here is unlikely. (Thielman 2010, 347)

Considering the above and that the finite verb in the preceding clause is passive, it is likely that the participle φανερούμενον should also be passive. Paul then is simply stating that everything that becomes visible is light and no longer darkness (Hoehner 2002, 684–685). Considering that the phrase is difficult to understand, translators have not rendered it literally. Some chose to translate the clause as a truism, "for it is light that makes everything visible" (NIV 1984).

The literal translation is problematic because not everything that becomes revealed is light. If this was true it would mean that when darkness is confronted with the light of Christ Jesus in Christians and the fruit of the light is exhibited in their lives, the confronted see the nature of their deeds and respond to the light in such a way that they become light (v. 8). This would result in automatic salvation, which clearly cannot be true.[16] The problem arises because the full force of verses 11b–14 is not immediately apparent. However, the concluding quotation provides an interpretive nuance. The quote informs those who have recognized their sinful condition that if they are drawn to the light of Christ they will become light (see 1 Cor 14:24–25). Accordingly, it is a call to salvation.[17] Consequently, the exposure serves a greater purpose than revealing the deeds of darkness. The transformative effect of the light may lead to the conviction of sin and repentant faith in Christ Jesus; "Awake, O sleeper! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!" (Eph 5:14).[18] The first

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16 I accept that the light—namely believers and their deeds (Eph 5:8–9)—does not always exercise a transformative influence on darkness, even if they have been spiritually illuminated. It is also accepted that darkness generally rejects and avoids the light—Christ—whose presence convicts them (John 3:20). However, this does not mean that the consciousness of the people in darkness is without inner moral sense, thus open to some extent to the influence of the light of Christ. "The New Testament speaks of people being convicted by the law (Jas 2:9), by conscience (John 8:9), and by the working of the Spirit (John 16:8)" (Foulkes 1989, 151).

17 Engberg-Pedersen (1989:104) discusses two passages that are almost always referred to in connection with the text in inquiry; 1 Cor 14:4–25, and John 3:20–21. Both passages combine the use of ἐλέγχω with the concepts of darkness and light. They are like the Ephesians passage in that they talk of ἐλέγχω in relation to non-Christians (the former certainly, the latter reasonably so), but differ from it in that their focus is not on the confronters, but instead on those being confronted.

18 Considering that we have no original copy of the quotation, it has been the source of much debate. The long-standing consensus is that Paul is quoting a Christian Easter or baptismal hymn. Verse 14a, (for this reason it says) is an introductory phrase intimating that a quotation from the OT might follow. The difficulty with the quotation is that it does not emanate from the Tanakh (Stern 1992, 591). It is widely accepted that the introduction makes clear that Paul thought it to be from an authoritative tradition (see 4:8). Among the several views for the source of the quotation, the two most popular are Isa 61:1, and maybe certain similar passages, namely, 9:2; 26:19; 52:1. For a comprehensive discussion of the issue, see Hendriksen (1967, 234–237), Best (2003, 259–262), and Thielman (2010, 348–351). For a comprehensive study contending that "Paul himself is responsible for the form of this citation, as he typologically appropriates texts [the first two lines relate to Isaiah 26:19 and the third to 60:1] from their original contexts and redacts them to fit with the fulfilments that have come through Christ," see Lunde and Dunne (2012). Those who interpret it as a call for conversion hold that the metaphor refers to people spiritually dead in their sins (Thielman 2010 350–351). Those who interpret it as an exhortation to disobedient or wayward believers (Hoehner 2002, 686–88), see sleep figuratively for those who are slumbering in moral and spiritual indolence (Merkle 2016)

two lines (Awake, O sleeper! Rise from the dead) recall the language of 2:1 and 5–6, where Paul describes his audience as formerly dead in their trespasses and sins and then made alive, raised, and seated together with Christ in heavenly places. The third line (and Christ will shine on you) recalls 5:8, where the light-dark imagery of the passage began, and which describes the audience's movement from their former existence, defined by darkness, to a new reality defined by the light of Christ (Thielman 2010, 350).

It is noteworthy that the implied object of the verb expose (5:11b) is deeds and not the people who do these deeds, and that Paul contrasts these deeds with the fruit of the light (v. 9) and deeds that please the Lord (v. 10). In verse 13, Paul speaks of all things, not everyone (Hoehner 2002, 678–680). Accordingly, "Paul probably has in mind the exposure of the deeds themselves as the evil practices they are" (Thielman 2010, 344–345), "rather than rebuking the persons themselves" (Merkle 2016). However, when deeds of darkness are exposed, the doers are indirectly reproved (Hendriksen 1967, 234).

Regarding Hoehner's (2002, 680) argument that the word *expose* (Eph 5:11b) includes both exposure *and* reproof and that this verbal force must be understood as part of the idea, it does not appear to fit the argumentation of the passage. As discussed in the lexical section, ἐλέγχω has a wide semantic range. Consequently, the precise meaning of ἐλέγχω lies in its use in any given context. I concur with Barth (1960, 570–571) that out of the three means by which this exposing which ἐλέγχω refers to is done, *conduct* is the most likely in the present context because the immediate context discusses behavior. The summary given in verse 15, "Therefore be very careful how you live" also supports this idea. This makes it unlikely that the exposure is verbal. The exposure is done by a contrastive lifestyle (Lincoln 1990, 330). Consequently, Barth's (1960, 570) paraphrased translation reads as "disprove [by your conduct]."

6. Conclusion

In debating the meaning of, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph 5:11) scholars generally fall into one of two camps. One is inadequate, and the other requires nuance. The view that that Christians are to reprimand other Christians is inadequate because the contextual allusion to the sons of disobedience and the imagery of darkness references those outside the Christian community. If the text calls for Christians to reprimand unbelievers, it will violate the discourse flow (vv. 3–14) and Pauline theology (1 Cor 5:12–13).

Although the passage in inquiry is part of the paraenetic section of the letter and focuses on ethical injunctions to Christians, Paul's contrastive argumentation style and discourse flow must be considered so that interpretation is coherent with his flow of thought in Ephesians 4:17–5:14. Paul's presents an antithesis between the sons of disobedience and the children of the light and emphasizes their ethical duality. What precedes 5:11 is ethical teaching to explain that walking in the light (v. 8b) is one of the specific ways that Paul's audience is called to imitate God (v. 1). This walk is evidenced by the fruit of the light—all goodness, righteousness, and truth (v. 9a).

Paul then provides three facets of what it means to walk in the light. First, discern what is pleasing to the Lord 5:10. Second, have nothing to do with the unfruitful deeds of darkness (v. 11a). Third, expose them (v. 11b). Following 5:11b the nature of the exposure is disclosed. The inner argument of 5:12–14 provides the reason for the appeal. Paul urges Christians to expose the hidden deeds of darkness (vv. 11–12) because everything the light exposes becomes visible (v. 13). The two phrases combine the concept of being exposed and being revealed via the notion of light. The full force of the exposure only becomes apparent by the concluding quotation in verse

14, which is a call to conversion, and emphasizes the agency of Christ's light in the process. The quote informs those who have recognized the nature of their deeds and sinful condition that if they are drawn to the light of Christ, by his grace and mercy, they will become light; accordingly, it is a call to salvation. Consequently, the exposure serves a greater purpose than revealing the deeds of darkness. The transformative effect of the light may lead to the conviction of sin and repentant faith in Christ Jesus.

Although some interpreters view expose (Eph 5:11b) both as exposure and rebuke of others in the Christian community, I argue that, contextually, it refers to gentile Christians discerning cultural norms that are unworthy of their new identities in Christ and living in a way that provides the evidence that exposes darkness, because this interpretation best fits the discourse flow of 4:17–5:15.

It should not be automatically assumed that because Paul affirms the values Christians must live by in contrast to those living outside the community, the audience was living anachronistically. Ephesians was not written to correct specific errors in a local church but to prevent problems in the church as a whole by encouraging the body of Christ to mature and be united in Christ Jesus. Consequently, Paul is not appealing to his audience to reprimand anyone. Paul wants his readers to realize that the church is to live by values different from that of society. Rather than being corrupted by the surrounding darkness, Christians are urged to exercise their transformative influence on it. If the church has some missionary role in this passage, it is not through the proclamation of the word but by its very existence as the sphere of light (3:10). Therefore, Christians have the responsibility to represent the light of the world (John 8:12) appropriately; as a people who live the message (Jas 1:22) and demonstrate the transformative power of the gospel, both spiritually and socially, so that the testimony of their walk validates the sincerity of their relationship with God.

Therefore, this text provides an often neglected and underestimated appeal for non-verbal gospel communication. Paul urges Christians to fill a missionary role, not by proclamation, but by promoting moral excellence, representing their new identity in Christ, and displaying the gospel's transforming power through their godly behavior.

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Towards a Biblical Theology of Missions in Western Africa

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Abstract

This article suggests a paradigm for a biblical theology of missions in Africa. The research was prompted by the observation that previous theological designs and models have laid emphasis on effectiveness and issues of identity. Then too, Africa is marked by a renaissance of African Traditional Religion, pandemics, and societal problems. The paper hypothesizes that African theologians are better positioned to articulate a biblical theology of missions that addresses the continent's contemporary realities. The methodology combines soteriology and symbolism. The findings indicate that an African theology of missions is anchored on indigenized theology, functional Christology, and relational Christology. These results illustrate the need to engage biblical authority, theology, and anthropology for a missional theology in Africa. The present research may be situated within the current commitment of African scholars to develop contextual theologies for the Global South.

1. Introduction

The term theology of missions ordinarily has strong affinities with missiology, which is a related discipline. David Bosch (1991, 9) says, "Missiology, as a branch of the discipline of Christian theology, is not a disinterested or neutral enterprise; rather, it seeks to look at the world from the perspective of commitment to the Christian faith." Missiology is therefore a continuous reflection on the practice of missions across history. This entails the study of propounded models (old and new) and their impact on the mission fields, and the dissemination of new theories through teaching and publications (Moreau 2000, 633). On the other hand, the task of a theology of missions is to provide a biblical framework for facing current challenges

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and doing missions in a changing world (Ott, Strauss, and Tennent 2010, xi–xii). For the sake of brevity, it can be said that while missiology pays attention to new developments in mission models and practice, there is a need for a theology of missions that can give biblical direction to this endeavor. It can suffice, however, to note that worldviews play an important role in theological reflection. Grenz (1997, 94) contends, "The church has continually sought to express its affirmation of faith in the context of the specific historical and cultural situations in which it has lived and witnessed to the revelation of God in Christ." We might not want to endorse Grenz's overall aim with his book *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* since its post-modern undertone might not lead to good biblical hermeneutics. However, Grenz's point about the influence of culture on the theological expressions of the Christian faith strikes a necessary balance between worldviews and theological discourse.

Veeneman (2017, 10) concurs that "the story of Christ tells us about God breaking into history in a particular time and place. Because we also live in a particular time and place, we must take that into consideration. Taking the time and place or location of the theologian into account will result in some theological questions being the same, while others will be different." Talking about the dynamic function of worldviews, Conn (1984, 15) remarks that they constitute "culturally oriented beliefs that take precedence over, and therefore serve as criteria for, other beliefs." Corroborating Conn, Hesselgrave (1991, 164–165) adds that worldviews provide people with the cognitive, affective, and evaluative foundations on which cultures are built. These definitions suggest that in cultural anthropology, worldviews are seen to be conceptual frameworks from which people give meaning to their worlds. An African Christian theology of missions is therefore a theology of missions that is articulated in the worldviews of the African people.

Today, the African continent is facing several issues including urbanization, the growing influence of African Traditional Religion, the threat of post-modern relativism, new theories on gender, and the threat of pandemics, just to name a few. These issues raise the question of the importance of an African Christian theology of missions that will be biblically sound, relevant, and practical. This article takes as a given that the task of developing the most appropriate theological framework to guide gospel proclamation and disciple-making on the continent in the twenty-first century is the responsibility of African theologians and missiologists.

The approach of this paper combines soteriology and symbolism—bearing the African worldview in mind. According to Peterson (2013, 272), Thomas Aquinas, the Christian theologian of the Middle Ages, defined salvation as an "intimate friendship with the triune God, which finds its ultimate expression in our beholding of God for eternity, that is, the 'beatific vision.'" The sense in which salvation is defined in Aquinas's soteriology suggests a relationship that culminates in a blissful life in God's presence. Citing a Church Father, Waldow (2019, 276) observes that "Origen provides a clear definition of 'redemption': it is a payment which is made to enemies in order to acquire the liberation of those whom they hold in captivity." This definition lays emphasis on Christ's redemptive work that made the relationship between a holy God and sinful humans possible. Hunsinger (2019, 247–248; 260–261) argues for a sense of wholeness in soteriology; meaning that salvation is past, present, and future. In other words, Christ's redemptive work took place in history, we are presently in communion with Christ as he sustains us despite a remnant of our old sinful nature, and Christ is coming back for us so that we can be delivered forever from the influence of sin. On his part, Yoakum (2021, 124) remarks that "holistic gospel ministry proclaims the truth

of end-time salvation even as it demonstrates how the kingdom of God has broken through to present-day realities through ministries of mercy." The implication of Yoakum's emphasis is that salvation goes beyond a relationship with God in view of a blissful life in the future, to incorporate God's works of restoration in the life of the believer now as well.

In Systematic Theology, the doctrine of salvation is another term for the doctrine of the application of redemption. In terms of their doctrinal orthodoxy, the definitions of salvation mentioned above emphasize the wonderful relationship between sinful human beings (graciously saved by Christ Jesus) with the Triune God. However, theologians differ among themselves concerning the other outcomes of salvation. This diversity in common orthodoxy becomes important for the present discussion. They highlight the importance of soteriology in contextual theologies of missions, by indicating that the implications of redemption may not be the same for people of all cultures.

Symbolism is another important factor in theology. Mulolwa (2018, 18) contends that "à travers les symboles s'expriment des vérités profondes: l'explication des phénomènes cosmiques, le fonctionnement du psychisme humain etc" (deep truths are expressed through symbols, including the explanation of cosmic phenomena and functioning of the human psyche). He goes on (29) to state that "le langage symbolique dans le Nouveau Testament a l'avantage de présenter une réalité rationnelle, en une image tirée de la vie ambiante" (in the New Testament, symbolic language has the advantage of presenting rational reality in the form of an image drawn from everyday life). In other words, symbols are used in the New Testament because they enable people to see what the speaker is saying. In agreement with this function of symbolic language, du Plessis (2016, 6) adds that "Symbols and metaphors evoke strong emotional, psychological and intellectual responses because they are the lenses through which people perceive reality." The power of symbolism can be explained by the fact that it crystallizes in the human psyche concepts that would have required several hours to communicate.

By way of conclusion on the method of this research, soteriology and symbolism provide a good theological and anthropological foundation for discussing the prospects for an African Christian theology of missions. This research might appear to contain generalizations from which specific missiological principles may be further investigated for in-depth analysis or applied with some degree of variability in the mission field. This point is conceded. However, the purpose of this research is to suggest a tentative framework for such enterprises. The scope of its application suggested in the present analysis is evangelism and discipleship, considered as the two-fold task of missions.

The first section of the paper discusses the biblical foundations for an African Christian theology of missions. The second examines the relevance of the African worldview for this enterprise. The third section discusses the features of what should be considered a biblical theology of missions for Africans. The last section highlights some points of application of this African Christian theology of missions.

2. Biblical Foundations

The scholastic origin of theology as an academic discipline shows that the study of God is inseparable from its target, which is specific local cultures (Conn 1984, 217). Another way of putting it is to underline that God's Word is addressed to human beings within their cultural and historical contexts, and in languages they are familiar with. Two examples can serve as analogies pointing to the importance of an African theology of missions: the gospel traditions and the early Christian missions.

2.1 Gospel traditions

The theological formulations of the authors of the four gospels suggest varied approaches to Christology. Matthew traces Christ's roots back to Abraham (Matt 1:1–17). This arrangement of the material suggests an awareness of the Jewish audience, who equally traced their roots to Abraham. Luke traces Christ's genealogy from Adam (Luke 3:23–37) and addresses this gospel to "most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3–4 ESV). Here, Jesus's genealogy comes after the account of his miraculous conception and birth. Carson and Moo (2005, 212) note that at that time, "the new and tiny Christian movement was competing with a welter of religious and philosophical alternatives in the Greco-Roman world." On the other hand, John's Gospel underlines the divine nature of Christ, while Mark emphasizes Jesus's miracles, to present Christ as "the good news of salvation" (186). Commenting on Christological pluralism, Péroukou (1995, 26) submits that this was unavoidable and, more importantly, necessary due to the variety of cultural settings and individual mentalities. Thus, differences in the presentation of Christology as it appears in the gospels have missiological intent.

2.2 Early Christian missions

Two major events in the early church can be mentioned shortly as illustrative of the importance of an African theology of missions. The first major conflict in the early church, while they were all still in Jerusalem, was linked to ethnicity. The Hellenistic Jews, that is Greek-speaking Jews, complained that their widows were neglected during the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1). To address the problem, seven other leaders were chosen to minister to the concerned, while the Apostles continued their duty of the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:2–7). This election of a new spiritual leadership shows that the Apostles were able to think in a missiological manner, in order to tackle issues in the mission field without straying from the Scriptures. From the perspective of the Apostles (Hebraic Jews) who were chosen by Jesus Christ as the leaders of the newly established church, it was necessary to put in place a new leadership (Hellenistic Jews) that would address the ethnic crisis of this assembly. On this particular matter, the Apostles were able to blend spiritual authority that is grounded in the Bible and cross-cultural leadership skills.

Secondly, when it became obvious that God had given the Holy Spirit to non-Jews, the challenge facing the church was to decide whether the latter had to follow Jewish festivals and traditions. The Jerusalem Council was then convened to address this theological issue (Acts 15:1–6). It appears that this meeting was requested by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:1–2). The aim was to be sure that missionaries were preaching the gospel accurately, and to contextualize this gospel for non-Jewish cultures. The main point in the agenda was the salvation and incorporation of non-Jews into the church (vv. 4–6). Having examined the Scriptures, the council arrived at two important resolutions: (1) salvation is God's free gift that cannot be earned through ceremonial laws (vv. 7–11), and (2) non-Jews who had believed the gospel had only to abstain from eating foods offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood (Acts 15:19–29). As a result of this meeting, there was growth in the mission work among non-Jewish people: "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (16:5 ESV). This move can be described today as a theological reflection in new missionary contexts.

3. The Importance of the African Worldview

Three components of the African culture will be used to highlight the relevance of the African worldview in the formulation of an African Christian theology of missions: African anthropology, African spirituality, and African ethics.

3.1 African anthropology

Africans conceive the human person as a whole being, including the body, soul, and mind. The concept of *orthokardia* (right love towards God and the neighbor), as expounded by Isaak (2016, 43), sheds some light on African anthropology. He underscores that to an African, the soul connotes the whole person, and not simply an invisible part of the person. He further remarks that this perception entails the rejection of any philosophical dualism between body and mind, as propounded in Western anthropology. While Western theology engages in complex and abstract scholastic speculations around dichotomy and trichotomy, the African worldview conceptualizes the human person in concrete terms—in terms of *wholeness*.

Another peculiarity of African cultures is the notion of personhood. Africans generally define personhood in terms of one's relationship with the community. Among the Yémba, a people group of West Cameroon, the term for a person is *Niŋnon*, which literally means "person in the human race." This designation suggests that every individual views themselves in relation to other individuals in society. This view of personhood is similar to what many people groups in Sub-Saharan Africa—especially in Rwanda, Burundi and South Africa—refer to as *Ubuntu*. Qangula (2019, 10) explains that "uBuntu involves caring, sharing, respect, compassion and ensures a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family, communality, oneness, cooperation." *Ubuntu* is a Zulu and Xhosa term, as it appears in the writings of many scholars of South African origin. According to Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005, 217), "Ubuntu is not only about human acts, it is about being, it is a disposition, and it concerns values that contribute to the well-being of others and of community." It can therefore be argued that in the worldview of Africans, personhood is perceived as the state of being a human among other human beings. This view of personhood also relates to African spirituality, which is discussed below.

3.2 African spirituality

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is marked by the belief in spiritual forces that allegedly affect the destiny of humans, for better or for worse. It is believed that certain substances contain a power that humans can tap into to help the community (Onunwa 2005, 143). The Cameroonian theologian and philosopher Kifon Bongmba (2001, 27) submits that among the Wimbum people of North-West Cameroon, there are two types of *tfu* (witchcraft). He uses the Limbum term *tfu yibi* (bad witchcraft) to refer to the secret powers some people in the community use to eat human flesh. The term *tfu yebu* (good witchcraft) is used by some particular people to supposedly unveil the activities of bad sorcerers (29). It is worth noting that because of this belief, Africans are often reluctant to renounce magical practices and charms. Many of them live in constant fear of negative spiritual forces. Even the COVID-19 pandemic was interpreted in some religious milieus as a spiritual attack, which should not be treated as a simple disease. In fact, religious leaders and self-proclaimed prophets give written imprecatory prayers, stickers, water, and other artifacts to their clients, supposedly to protect themselves against all spiritual contamination.

Another aspect of African spirituality is ancestral veneration. The longing of adherents of ATR is to attain the status of an ancestor. This prospect of becoming an ancestor is tantamount to salvation in the

religious system. It is believed that the departed ones can now serve as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and the living. Talking about this relationship between the living and the dead, the Cameroonian philosopher, Ela (1973, 19) affirms emphatically, "in Africa, the dead are part of the family. Offering one's dead a meal is a simple act of filial piety." This emphasis puts in place the link between personhood, community, and African spirituality as already mentioned above. Furthermore, it indicates to what extent ancestral veneration relates to soteriology in the African worldview.

The dream of practitioners of ATR is to become ancestors after their demise and continue in the spirit realm to relate with relatives through dreams and communal worship. In this sense, life as a whole is embedded in an eschatological world. McLean (2003, 66) is therefore right when he observes that, "Spiritually, it means that growth and fulfillment are earthly realities and have their epiphany in the present...." While many Christians tend to emphasize the afterlife as that blissful moment in God's presence, practitioners of ATR emphasize life as a whole. Mbiti (1986, 201) concurs that this celebration of life can be seen in "the large numbers of rituals, festivals and ceremonies which are carried out in African Religion." In a nutshell, African spirituality reflects people's desire to achieve wholeness.

3.3 African ethics

An exhaustive discussion of African ethics is beyond the scope of this paper. So, for the sake of concision, only marriage and procreation will be mentioned here as aspects of African ethics. In Africa, procreation is first of all a cultural issue. Howe et al. (2020, 187) assert that "Social concerns about death and legacy factor heavily in discussions of infertility in Zambia, where people often die young and unexpectedly." This is not typical of the Zambian cultures alone. Even among some tribes of West Cameroon,

people who die without biological children are buried with a stone in their hand, as a means of exorcising the curse of childlessness from the community. In the same vein, Kofon (1992, 52) states that in the Bafut culture of North-West Cameroon, "people marry because they want to have children.... There is no marrying simply for personal fulfillment or for mutual pleasure of the spouses." Mbiti (1986, 81) clarifies that to most Africans, marriage and childbearing have spiritual implications because they enable people to "achieve something of the original immortality; and when they die, it is believed that their spirits continue to survive even if there is no special bliss for them in the hereafter." Mbiti's explanation substantiates the fact that African ethics is grounded in African spirituality.

Unlike in the West, Africans value childbearing above the need for a life-long partner and sexual pleasure. Kunhiyop (2008, 196) draws a parallel between this attitude and the Jewish context, where infertility was also feared. He further stresses the influence of such a view on Christianity: "Rather than endure the shame of infertility, people will go great lengths to try to conceive. Even Christians will consult witch doctors and all sorts of medicine men and women in an attempt to solve the problem, regardless of the cost." These cultural beliefs about marriage and childbearing require a theological response from missiologists and ministers of the gospel.

In a nutshell, in the African worldview, there seems to be a confluence between spirituality, anthropology, and ethics. These three areas of human life are believed to be subjected to forces that people have to reckon with. Thus, some Christians trust Christ for eternal salvation but maintain their magical practices as solutions to daily existential struggles. Referring to the Kenyan situation, Sesi (2009, 30) submits that "theologizing is weak and faith is maintained as a shallow expression of people's Christian identity." These realities suggest the need for an ongoing effort to develop biblical principles for greater missionary impact in Africa.

4. Features of an African Theology of Missions

4.1 Historical roots

As a start, this paper contends that African Christian theology and African Indigenous Churches (AICs) have made some attempts that are close to the theme under consideration. African Christian theology came as a reaction to three theological designs propounded by Western missionaries: conversion theology, church implantation theology (or *plantatio ecclesia*), and the theology of the local church. The proponents of the first design considered conversion and Christianization of "pagans" as the primary goal of the church. Those who advocated for the second design focused more on establishing Western churches in Africa; with no regard for the culture of the people. One of the first proponents of the third design is the Roman Catholic Church. Through Vatican II, it presents Christian witnessing and preaching in local churches, as the main purpose of the church (Mushete, 1979, 24–26).

Two major trends in African theology have challenged these three claims: the first trend, which is the liberal approach, was pioneered by African theologians like Idowu Bolaji (1962) and John Mbiti (1970). The conservative trend is represented by Byang Kato (1975; 1985). The former use ATR and cultures as standards and defining elements of theology (Mbiti 1971). The latter suspects his counterparts of syncretism and argues that the starting point for theology in Africa should the Bible, with culture being a vehicle for communicating biblical truths. He goes further to contend that African Christians and theologians are running the risk of drifting away from the supra-cultural truths of Scripture. The point of agreement between these two strands of African Christian theology is their commitment to addressing the gaps left by a sort of Eurocentric theology that seemed to have little regard for the realities of the African peoples. Their lack of unanimity was at the level of methodology.

From the preceding, it seems obvious that African Christian theology aims to enable Africans to understand divine revelation in the context of their worldview. Although some of its discussions touch on certain concerns of an African Christian theology of missions propounded here, the two are different. The latter focuses primarily on mission practice, and in that light, has more commonalities with the orientation of African Indigenous Churches (AICs), which this analysis now turns to.

Founders of AICs were mostly leaders who did not conceptualize missionary models or theological designs but focused more on the actual practice of missions. Some of their concerns are remarkably similar to the preoccupations of this research. Although Tippet (1987, 200) described these churches as sects or syncretistic groups, noting their departure from biblical and historic Christianity, he did acknowledge that their founders were motivated by the desire to fill the cultural void left by Western missionaries who preached the gospel in modern Africa. On the other hand, African scholars argued that Europeans' disregard for African cultures and religion, and their ignorance of African psychology made this development inevitable (Nmah 2010, 485). AICs incorporate elements of African cultures such as emphasis on prophecy, healing, and sometimes the adoption of polygyny.

In Cameroon, many of their practices such as laying hands on people to declare blessings, or raising up hands and praying aloud during church gatherings are familiar to many Africans. In addition to this symbolism borrowed from the indigenous religions of Cameroon, the spontaneity that members of AICs exhibit in prayers is a feature of African prayer. African advocates of AICs consider these practices as a positive development in African Christianity (Ositelu 2002, 16–26). Although this optimism

can hardly be endorsed in an absolute sense, AICs exemplify useful missionary principles. They corroborate the fact that "we cannot avoid a serious engagement with the religious and spiritual issues which African traditional religions raise for us; since they form the cultural background of the Christian faith of most African Christians" (Bediako 1996, 31).

At this point, it can be said that while African Christian theology advocates for a Jesus who resembles Africans, AICs want an African church. More missiological in focus, the current research directs attention to the importance of an African Christian theology of missions in the fulfillment of the Great Commission for the transformation and eternal salvation of Africans. As has already been pointed out, the research is concerned with the theological trends discussed above, especially regarding the cultural distance between Western theology and African realities. However, it has different presuppositions, and it employs a different methodology. The result of this theological investigation is a framework for a contextual theology of missions for twenty-first-century Africans that will be both biblical and culturally relevant.

4.2   A contextual biblical theology of missions

The Bible, the worldview of Africans, and historical precedents suggest the need for an African Christian theology of missions that will be Christ-centered, and sensitive to the particular questions that twenty-first-century Africans ask in their own contexts. The main prospect of this contextual theology of missions is that it will be mindful of the global communion of believers in Christ that has been called, in the Reformed tradition, the universal Church while maintaining the fragrance of African cultures. The highlights of this theology of missions are outlined below. It is characterized by an indigenized theology, a functional Christology, and a relational Christology.

4.2.1   Indigenized theology

The genesis of the concept of indigenization in theology is often associated with the indigenous theology of Mar Thomas, former Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989, 73). He reportedly argued for an Indian Christian theology that "must recognize God's past and present workings in the Hindu renaissance and in the incursion of secularism in India and work for the realization of his future purpose" (74). The orientation of Thomas's theology seems to be anchored on religious pluralism, which defeats the very purpose of missions. In the sense of this research, however, an indigenized theology incorporates biblical teachings that address Africans' preoccupations with salvation. It expresses theological concepts using popular language including symbolism, which is a familiar way of communicating spiritual realities in ATR. An indigenized theology presented as a feature of African Christian theology of missions also seeks to respond to questions specific to the African worldview like preoccupation with the spirit world, divine healing, welfare, marriage, childbearing, and pandemics as genuine concerns.

In this way of theologizing, abstract theological concepts are translated into symbols that project into the mind of African Christians and religious seekers the mysteries of God's relationship with humans through Christ. A few examples in the New Testament corroborate this thought. Jesus uses the language of the kingdom to depict the relationship between God and believers. He taught and preached that the Kingdom of God (Mark 4) or Kingdom of Heavens (Matt 7) is God's dwelling among his people. Entering that kingdom was another term for salvation, which he also described as "eternal life" (John 3:16). In Matthew 13, Jesus uses a series of images in parables to refer to this kingdom including the

mustard seed, the yeast, and the hidden treasure. Parables were images taken from everyday life to point to spiritual realities. Jesus Christ offered an eloquent illustration of the type of indigenized theology that is propounded in this analysis.

4.2.2 Functional Christology

Functional Christology is a description of Christ that emphasizes his works rather than his nature and person in the Godhead. Folarin (2003, 302–303) distinguishes three types of Christology: the *kenosis* Christology that stresses the emptying of Christ of divine attributes prior to incarnation, which is considered a heresy; the *skenosis* Christology that emphasizes the correlation between God in-dwelling humanity in Christ Jesus and Jesus's obedience to the Father in his humanity without losing his divinity; and functional Christology that stresses the works of Christ. The author argues for complementarity rather than exclusiveness between an ontological and a functional Christology. He suggests that Christ should be known both as God who became man and as the mighty liberator and healer (304). However, it can suffice to note that African Christians hardly refute Christ's divinity. The spiritual crisis that African Christians often face relates to a faulty understanding of what Christ can do in the lives of people who have put their trust in him.

This author has met only a few Africans in Cameroon (his native country) and in Nigeria (the neighboring country) who believed that the miracles of Jesus ended with the last Apostles. These few had in common the fact that they were seminary graduates who were trained by European missionaries. A typical African has little difficulty believing that Christ is God. Consequently, he or she expects Christ to act as God in the life of his followers. It is useful to note that functional Christology provides a biblical backing for African Christians to engage in spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons, and against witches and wizards who use evil spirits to torment people and entire communities. The favorite lyrics of many African Christians in the midst of these existential crises would be "Because He [Christ] lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives, all fear is gone" (Gaither and Gaither 1971). Emphasizing the works of Christ in the life of believers strengthens hope in the midst of uncertainty and produces steadfastness amidst the difficult journey of the Christian faith.

The imagery in the lyrics of the aforementioned song expresses people's conviction about Christ's ability to *do*; rather than just being there as Lord, Savior, and God in the life of Christians. Such conceptualizations as ontological Christology and functional Christology are useful in theological language for the sake of clarity and precision. In practice, however, they are not a true reflection of the African worldview which, as already argued, is more holistic. In real life, people hardly isolate *being* from *doing*. For example, the Christian theologian is perceived by the public as first of all a man of God or a woman of God. As a matter of fact, any immoral behavior jeopardizes one's identity as a theologian. The functional Christology argued for in this research is embedded in Christ's nature as God-Man.

4.2.3 Relational Christology

The concept of relational Christology draws from Péroukou (1995), although he does not use this particular term. He reports his uncle's answer concerning Christology as follows:

> In Uncle's statement, the initial Christological datum bears less on the being of Jesus Christ as such (sometimes called his 'nature' or his 'person') than on the kind of relationship that his coming establishes with the human being for the 'destiny' of that human being. In this

perspective, we are dealing not with titles, but rather with a type of relation, function, or activity of Jesus Christ. (Péroukou 1995, 24–25)

Based on this answer, the author posits that many professing Christians revert to magic and sorcery because they have difficulty understanding the person of Christ. He suggests a Christology that has relationship as the foundation, as a way of overcoming the pitfalls of faulty Christologies, or a form of Christology that emphasizes only the nature or the deeds of Christ (25–26).

The relational Christology propounded in this paper stresses Christ's lordship as the main relationship between Christ and believers. This lordship emphasizes Christ's sovereignty. The term for Lord among the Yémba of West-Cameroon is *Ndi* meaning "Owner." This research argues that the Lordship of Christ is the basis for our union with Christ. Our union with Christ is understood to mean an ongoing relationship with God through Christ. Paul makes the following injunction to Christians: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11 ESV). This privileged relationship is the evidence of salvation and the ground for Christ's works in the life of believers. Gaffin (2016, 283) is therefore correct when he affirms that, "Without union, the benefits that flow from it (i.e., salvation) are otherwise non-existent or irrelevant." Without this emphasis on union with Christ, salvation may look like mere religious emotionalism to many African converts from ATR.

In the Bamileke communities of Cameroon, just like in many other ethnic groups in Africa, people withdraw their allegiance from a particular deity only to submit to the lordship of another deity. It becomes biblically and contextually relevant to emphasize Christ's lordship in relation to the salvation experience in Africa. As a matter of fact, it is when Christ is acknowledged as Lord that he can then become the husband to African single women and widows. This symbolism is backed up by the gospel, where Jesus puts himself forward as the bridegroom to all his followers, designated collectively as the bride (Mark 2:19–20; John 3:29–30). The same figurative language is echoed in Ephesians 5:22–28, where marriage is presented as the picture of that eternal relationship between Christ and the Church. In John 18:21–29, the terms *bridegroom* and *bride* are used figuratively to refer to Jesus and the Church, respectively. Relational Christology reflects the African worldview in which an individual is "existentially a being-in-relation" (Nihinlola 2018, 79).

The features of African Christian theology of missions indicate that it takes biblical authority as the basis for theological reflection. It takes biblical authority as the basis for theological reflection and engages the Bible and the worldview of Africans to suggest contextual principles for doing missions in contemporary Africa. As such, it goes beyond the quest for identity or originality, to propose biblical models for evangelism and discipleship in context. In this theology of missions, the human person is seen both as a spiritual being and a person of feelings in search of genuine fulfillment and happiness in this life and in the afterlife.

5. Areas of Application

The discussions in the previous sections have outlined a theological framework for an approach to missions that will address the realities of Africans. However, missiology is tested in the mission field through praxis. Two areas of application for an African Christian theology of missions are suggested in this research: evangelism and discipleship. These two areas constitute the subject matter of the section below.

5.1   Application to evangelism

It was explained above that relational Christology propounded in this theological discussion emphasizes the relationship between Christ and believers. This suggests that in evangelism, the preacher or teacher will present the need for commitment to Christ as a covenantal relationship. This methodology seems more relevant and biblically grounded than the idea of *accepting* Christ into one's heart. The expression "accept Christ in your heart" that many evangelists use today is borrowed from evangelistic materials that were contextualized in the West. During our family Bible study, my ten-year-old son asked me a question about the surgeon's ability to *remove* Jesus Christ from somebody's heart and bring him back after the operation. This question echoes the struggle faced by many Africans in understanding some of these popular expressions that have no reference in their worldview.

On the other hand, relational Christology emphasizes lordship as the all-encompassing relationship that Christ has with believers. Correspondingly, contextual evangelism that is faithful to this scriptural truth will present Jesus Christ as the only one who reigns over all. Therefore, the question addressed to the respondents would not be "who wants to surrender his (or her) life to Christ?" This sounds like a mimic of the Western pattern of evangelism that matches the individualistic worldview of Europe and America. The question of the African preacher would rather be "who wants Jesus Christ to reign in his or her life?"

Then the gospel will be heralded as the good news that brings significant change in the life of individuals and communities. Putting it another way, it is necessary for the respondents to understand other implications of salvation like deliverance from witchcraft, demons, and the power of curses for a fruitful life as exemplary and godly citizens. Ijatuyi-Morphé (2011, 597–600) underlines the necessity to include in religious discourse what Africans are saved *for*, instead of merely emphasizing what they are saved *from*. This approach can help solve the problem of dual allegiance.

One strategy of gospel proclamation that resonates with the Ubuntu spirit is for the church to operate as a community of grace and mercy through genuine acts of compassion. In practice, it means that Christians bear witness to Christ's salvation by sharing the good news while sharing the rich blessings of Christ in terms of love, care, and generosity. It will seem a contradiction for onlookers that someone shares the good news of Jesus but is insensitive to the physical needs of their neighbor. Jesus made the following statement about the crowd who had just listened to his message: "I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way" (Matt 15:32 ESV). This calls for the church to become a family of refuge for the homeless and rejected. As a witnessing community, African Christians need to show love towards one another and towards their neighbors and translate this love into acts of generosity. This is even more acute in a context where people live in fear of being excluded because of their social status or because of existential crises. COVID-19 was also a big isolating factor. The paper now turns to the second area of application of this theological framework.

5.2   Application to Christian discipleship

The importance of symbols advocated for in this theological framework cannot be overstated. They are useful for the communication of religious knowledge. In discipleship, they will be used to express some major doctrines of the Christian faith by integrating appropriate analogies drawn from culture, songs, and proverbs. The missionary will break down the complex (and somehow abstract) language of scholasticism into concrete images through the use of symbols, to equip disciples who can confidently

share the hope that they have in Christ (1 Pet 3:15) and make other disciples of Christ. The term *grassroots reflections* (Oyinloye 2003, 265–268) has been used to refer to the outcome of this method of discipleship. Another term that seems appropriate is *grassroots theology*. This can be produced by the masses that have been properly discipled and are able to express their faith in an accessible manner.

In keeping with the contemporary realities of African societies, discipleship will be orientated towards transformation in all spheres of life. Accordingly, the teaching on the implications of redemption will include deliverance from negative spiritual influences and curses and the responsibility of every Christian to work for the development of the community and country. This entails the need for a curriculum that enhances both spiritual and social transformation. Tienou (1997, 96) seems to concur with this missional approach to discipleship when he submits that "Christian mission in Africa will need to be more than Christian activism if it is to contribute to make qualitative and permanent impact on African Christianity." Adeyemo (2009, 95–121) adds that for this holistic transformation to take place, the church has to overcome the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular and keep her prophetic voice and priestly role, as well as her kingly function while pursuing godliness and fruitfulness, with excellence, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The impact of functional Christology on discipleship has been mentioned above, especially concerning the equipping of Christians to affirm Christ's supremacy over demons and all the powers of darkness. Believers should trust Jesus's good hand in their pursuit of godliness and excellence. On the other hand, relational Christology becomes a biblical and contextual tool for giving hope to single or childless men and women. They will find comfort in knowing, for example, that Jesus is the *Groom* of the Church. As such, he has brought about a new humanity (children of God

born of the Spirit; John 1:12–13), and a new kind of parenthood (which is the ability to make children of God through the seed of the gospel; Col 1:6).

Relational Christology also suggests the importance of teaching about salvation as a communal experience. Mantilus (1989, 45) states that community life in the African worldview includes the living and the dead since it "comes from the consciousness of continuity with the departed who left the communal legacy which keeps everybody alive." African Christians who have lost their loved ones due to COVID-19, other diseases, aging, or other factors of the broken world, need some assurance that will help them cope with the loss. To address this felt need, discipleship should include eschatology that stresses the beauty of the large family of God's people that includes all those who have preceded their fellow brothers and sisters in God's presence. Applied to soteriology, it stresses the communal implication of individual salvation. This second emphasis is reflected in Peter's sermon at Pentecost when he stressed that as a reward of faith in Christ, salvation is God's promise "for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:39 ESV). This teaching of eschatology has the potential to provide a biblical and missiological response to ancestor veneration.

6. Conclusion

In the final analysis, it appears that an African Christian theology of missions provides a biblical orientation for presenting the gospel as the good news that brings about salvation and beneficial changes in all areas of human life. In this respect, soteriology includes not only liberation from the power of sin and hell, but also deliverance from the harmful influence of curses and the spirit world on people's lives. Symbolism and metaphors play a central role in this theology of missions, to impart biblical truths and beliefs in the hearts and minds of the people. Consequently,

African theologians play a pivotal role in this enterprise, because they best understand the realities of their contexts. This theology has the potential of causing the church to blend doctrine, spirituality, and involvement in the affairs of the community. This contextual theology of missions stresses a holistic approach to Christian missions, whereby the human person is looked upon as a unified whole within the community, where the church exists as the sign of God's *shalom*.

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The Effects of Boko Haram on the Church in Nigeria: The Case of Michika Local Government Area, Adamawa State

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Abstract

Boko Haram's insurgence wreaked havoc in some Nigerian societies. The Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State was specifically affected from September 2014 to February 2015, when the insurgents laid siege to the city. The insurgents left many people homeless, sick, or dead, and many properties were also destroyed. The Church of the Brethren, known in Hausa as *Ekklisiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria,* (EYN), was at the center of this destruction. This article discusses the effects of Boko Haram, focusing on its impact on the church in the Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State. The article looks at how the church struggles after the impact of Boko Haram. These struggles include economic, theological, and pastoral care challenges. The study adopts a critical phenomenological research method because the subject demands that the experiences of the victims be documented and interpreted. The study found that many people in the Michika Local Government Area sustained injuries, and lost property, loved ones, or even their own lives. Some women were also raped. Because of the people's predicament, the church has been drastically affected. Despite these divesting effects, the government has not yet done enough to help the victims. The church also struggles to provide theological responses to the problem. This article recommends that religious leaders have a more significant role than anyone else in providing comfort, rehabilitation, empowerment, and seeking justice for the residents.

SATS

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

Much like the time of the early church, where the followers of Jesus Christ were severely persecuted (Ukeachusim 2022, 1), the churches in the Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State in Nigeria today are passing through what feels like their worst challenges in recent times. Nigerian Christians have been subjected to systemic persecution for many years due to the pluralistic nature of the country. However, the emergence of Boko Haram has aggravated the level of persecution to more than it has ever been in the history of Nigeria. The insurgence of Boko Haram severely affected the church in Michika Local Government Area in Northeastern Nigeria. Many lost their lives, with many members becoming refugees in neighboring countries and states across Nigeria. This article focuses on the effects of terrorism on the church in Michika Local Government Area, from September 2014 to February 2015, when the insurgents laid siege to the city.

Boko Haram came into the limelight in 2009 after the death of its leader and founder, Mohammed Yusuf. On September 7, 2014, the Christian community of Michika had its share of the attack by the Boko Haram insurgents. This attack drew global attention because of the intensity of the destruction caused by the insurgents. The aftermath was devastating, and the loss irreparable (Bintube 2015, 13). Many people lost their lives, properties were looted, and church buildings and houses were destroyed. Many women were left as widows and, together with their daughters, were raped and forcefully given in marriage to insurgents as the bounties of war. Many children are now orphans. Thousands of people were displaced and now live in camps for Internally Displaced People (henceforth IDPs). They experience various forms of abuse: physical, social, economic, educational, spiritual, and psychological (Bloom and Matfess 2016, 106).

This paper is a critical phenomenological study examining the effects of the insurgency on the church in the Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria. Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019, 92) assert that "phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it. The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of this experience—both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced." Phenomenological research is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of this approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of people's experiences. Due to the limitation of time and space, this study made greater use of literary sources than of field-based data gathered from interviews.

2. A Survey of the Emergence of Boko Haram

The name Boko Haram is a Hausa expression, meaning Western Education is forbidden. *Boko* means education, while *haram* means forbidden. The meaning of this deadly Islamic group's name has also been understood to mean Western influence is sinful, unlawful, and sacrilegious to Islam (Dunn 2018, 1; Ojaide, Mohammed, and Othman 2019, xvii; Agbiboa 2013, 145). Boko Haram "officially calls itself 'Jama'atul Alhul-Sunnah Lidda, Watiwal Jihad,' which means the people committed to the Prophet's teachings and Jihad" (Agbiboa 2013, 145). Some writers traced its roots to the founder of the Maitatsine Jihadist group, Mohammed Marwan. When Marwan was killed in 1980, his followers regrouped to form what is now known as Boko Haram. Nguvugher (2010, 105) believes that a closer look at the teaching, ideology, and practice of the Maitatsine and the Boko Haram groups confirms the assertion that Boko Haram might probably be an offshoot of Maitatsine (105). But in actual fact, knowing the origin of Boko

Haram is complicated, though they could have been the remnants of the Maitatsine movement.

Mambula (2016, 55) asserts that in 1995 the group was said to be operating under the name Shabaa'a Muslim Youth Organization with Abubakar Lawal as the leader. When Lawal left to continue his education, Mohammed Yusuf took over the group's leadership. Some reports link the insurgency with previous Islamic groups that opposed the Nigerian states but lacked the international notoriety of the current organization. These accounts associate Boko Haram with small resistant groups composed of young men that began congregating in the mid-1990s, led initially by Abubakar Lawal (55).

Mohammed Yusuf, who took over, was a charismatic Nigerian cleric. This divisive figure was born in 1970 at the start of a decade when the Nigerian Government undertook a quest to rebuild national unity. Yusuf gained prominence among local youths of Maiduguri, the Borno State capital (Thurston 2018, 37).

Foard Copeland (2013, 2) argues that "By 2003, Yusuf led a movement promoting a conservative theology that mimicked Saudi-style Salafism and opposed Nigeria's secular state, which was considered corrupt and un-Islamic." His popularity allegedly opened the group to political influence. Yusuf officially founded the group in 2002 in Maiduguri, intending to establish a government based on *Sharia* Law in Borno state under the then Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. He established a religious complex that included a mosque and a school, where many low-income families from across Nigeria and neighboring countries enrolled their children (4).

Boko Haram's primary concern is establishing an Islamic caliphate patterned and administered according to the Qur'an and its jurisprudence. It is based in Maiduguri, Yobe, and Adamawa States in Northeastern Nigeria. The group has been described as the world's deadliest and most destructive terrorist organization in terms of brutality, heartlessness, and mindlessness. It has instilled fear in the mind of every Nigerian citizen (Familusi 2021, 213–214).

3. The Michika Local Government Area

The Higgi, or Kamwe, live in the Michika Local Government Area in Northeastern Nigeria. The population of the Kamwe people is estimated to be over one million people. About ninety-eight percent of Kamwe people are Christians, predominantly members of the Church of the Brethren. It is popularly known in Hausa as *Ekklisiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria* (EYN). However, the second edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia lists a population of 327,538 people in the year 2000, and the 2006 census placed them at 155,302 (Debki 2009, 3).

Accounts of the historical origin of the Kamwe are many and varied. The Kamwe, like other ethnic groups in Nigeria, claim eastern origin. They are believed to be connected to the Marghi and Kilba people, tracing their roots to the Chad basin (Bazza and Kanu 2018, 83–84). However, Marguerite G. Kraft (1978, 42), who made an ethnographic study of the Higgi tribes, found out that all Kamwe (Higgi) people trace their origin to *Mcakli*, meaning hail or an icy place, which is believed to be in Cameroon, from where they moved to the Mandara Hills area of Northeastern Nigeria. Van Beek (1987, ix) argues that "the Kapsiki and Higgi people are one ethnic group ... [and] need to be seen as one ethnic group, which is called Kapsiki in Cameroon and Higgi in Nigeria." This conclusion agrees with the oral tradition, which states that the Kamwe people migrated from Nchokyili in the present-day Republic of Cameroon. Ultimately, the Kamwe people seem to have a Nubian origin but migrated southward to their present location.

From a religious viewpoint, the Kamwe people are very religious and even fanatic about their faith. They believe in one supreme God, called *Hyalatamwe*. They revere and fear him and believe that he resides in heaven. Direct communication with him is impossible in Kamwe culture. Thus, contact with him must be through intermediaries called *Da melie* or *Tchehye shwa*. The Kamwe People also believed in witchcraft and the existence of other spiritual beings, such as evil spirits and the spirits of dead ancestors, which could attack directly or be manipulated by others. They believe that disobeying the demands of any of the spiritual beings, such as the supreme God, an ancestral spirit, or an evil spirit, meant incurring the displeasure of the gods. This could result in problems such as crop failure, epidemic diseases, accidents, or death in a tribal war (Dada, Mangoro, and Williams 2005, 8).

Michika people generally are farmers and very enterprising as they find themselves in the big cities and towns in Nigeria engaging in all forms of trades such as baking, selling of provisions, shoe making, and driving. Michika is a cosmopolitan town with branches of many banks, a college of health technology, a technical college, and many secondary schools. The inhabitants are mostly Christians though there are a few traditionalists and Muslims. There are about 26 chiefdoms and 801 villages around the mountain. Other tribes also reside in the cities and towns, such as Bura, Kilba, and Margi (Dada, Mangoro, and Williams 2005, 8).

Boko Haram terrorists first entered Michika in 2012. They attacked banks and markets, killed 15 people, and left. After some months, they attacked the neighboring Madagali Local Government Area. On September 7, 2014, the insurgents attacked Michika again while people were at church, rendering service to their God. The Boko Haram fighters entered Michika in a convoy of vehicles. A military jet circled the town causing the militants to hide in the people's houses. There was confusion as people ran helter-skelter, fleeing from gunshots. It was unclear who had attacked the people as the insurgents wore Nigerian army uniforms. About 650 persons were killed, others died because of heart attacks, and others were wounded since they ran around frantically (Olofinbiyi 2021, 2).

4. The Effects of Boko Haram Attacks on the Local Church

As stated in the introduction, the study examines the effect of the Boko Haram insurgency on the church in the Michika Local Government Area. This section looks at the socio-economic, theological, and pastoral care effects on the church and its members during the six months from September 2014 to February 2015, when Boko Haram laid siege to the city.

4.1 Socio-economic effects

Boko Haram destroyed farm crops, animals, and farmland, and also burnt down houses. People were left with nothing to feed their families. Food security became less and less stable due to the disruption in agricultural activities. As a result, most of the communities in the Northeast were becoming poor—the poorest beginning life from scratch. As Victoria Ojeme (2011, 1) reported, the North has the highest rate of poverty. The index highlights states in the northeast, consisting of Borno, Bauchi, Taraba, and Adamawa, as the states with the highest poverty incidence, ranging from 54.9% to 7.2%.

Today Nigeria has millions of people displaced from their homes to IDP camps. Such an event drastically affected economic productivity. Most displaced persons live in abject poverty and do not have access to any form of social welfare. Many are malnourished, and the farmers cannot return to their farms because they fear being attacked. Since the church depends on

the generous donations of its members, it also faces financial difficulties. The Church of the Brethren in Nigeria was attacked, and the terrorists captured its headquarters during the six-month siege. Many church workers faced financial crisis as the church was at the height of this trial (Familusi 2021, 213–214).

The massive destruction of homes and social amenities means that the communities of the Michika Local Government Area will be faced with rebuilding infrastructure while individual households grapple with rebuilding their communities, their shelter, and their broken relationships. These also will have obvious consequences for people's health. The mass emigration of Michika citizens from their homeland has posed a formidable economic threat. The rush to escape Boko Haram has affected the profitability of business establishments in the Michika Local Government Area.

Kidnapping has also contributed to insecurity, fear, mistrust, suspicion, and psychological stress and trauma in Michika. The monetary impact of abduction is devastating for the victims, their families, relatives, and society as they are forced to sell all they may have to pay the ransom for the kidnapped victims. One known event was the kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls in 2014. About 90% of these girls are members of EYN and members of the Kamwe tribe (Mambula 2016, 7).

4.2 Theological effects

Although Christians from all the denominations in Michika were affected when Boko Haram attacked the community, the case of EYN is different. The terrorists took over the headquarters of the church, and the church was forced to relocate to Jos temporarily. The Church of the Brethren has a pacificist stance and does not believe in using the sword in religious encounters. However, the activities of Boko Haram have led to many theological challenges. A few pastors preach that Christians should not take up arms against their persecutors, while others advocate that Christians should pick up arms in self-defense. Many Christian scholars, however, are neutral and would not want to discuss the issue. It seems theological responses to terrorism are also politicized. Since the Body of Christ in Nigeria, including its theologians, has no unified theological response to terrorism due to its diversity, individual pastors provide different answers to their members based on their contexts since the southern part of Nigeria does not have the same experience of terrorism as the church in the north.

The Church of the Brethren, because of its experience, is compelled to think theologically about the insurgency. For instance, Ephraim Kadala (2013, 91), a pastor in the EYN, noted that in his interview with church members, some responded, saying: "Jesus did not ask the disciples to buy swords for decoration, but Christ knew they will need it in the future. And at Gethsemane, Jesus did not tell Peter to throw away the sword, but to put it back for future use." Therefore, it was not yet time to use it. Others noted,

> If Christ intended for us not to defend ourselves in all situations and at all times, should we not expect him to say, 'Peter, throw away your sword, for all who take the sword died by the sword?' But that is not true. He did not disarm Peter. He told him to put his weapon back in its scabbard after Peter drew it in anger, arrogance, and ignorance because he knew Peter would want it at the right time. (Kadala 2013, 91)

Since Jesus did not disarm Peter, the church should not disarm its members at this crucial stage in the life of the church. Others add that,

We have turned both cheeks and they have cut off our heads, and we have gone more than five miles, and they have led us out of our towns, we have given our cloaks as well, and they have stripped us naked. These Muslims have always taken us for a ride and for fools for much too long; we need to stand our ground. (Kadala 2013, 91)

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that the theologian is faced with numerous theological questions to answer.

The jihadists saw themselves as agents of God in this war. Members of Boko Haram see themselves as a chosen instrument of Allah to implement his fury against infidels, or unbelievers. Such violence committed in the name of Allah absolves the perpetrators of agency and responsibility. Thus, when killing people without mercy, they shout *Allahu akbar*, meaning God is great. This implies that God is happy with the destruction and the death of men, women, and children.

Their activities present a terrible image of God and portray God as wicked, partial, discriminatory, and unjust. This has challenged the faith of the Christians, who constitute about 95% to 98% of the population in the Michika Local Government Area. Many wonder if God really loves and cares about what is happening to human beings. Some saw the Boko Haram attacks as a failure of the God they believed in, so they resorted to seeking help from traditional religion by attempting to use charms. However, most Michika Christian communities interpreted the crisis as the fulfillment of Jesus's prediction in the Scripture; that the Boko Haram crisis was a sign of the end of the world and the nearness of the second coming of Jesus Christ. With such an apocalyptic interpretation, many took comfort, accepted, and endured their suffering throughout the crisis. This apocalyptic interpretation helped some Christians resist the temptation to apostatize in light of the Boko Haram crisis. Many stood their ground in the face of the threat of death and refused to recant their faith in Jesus Christ.

4.3   Pastoral care effects

During the Boko Haram crisis, the EYN church lost over 8,000 of its members while 700,000 were displaced, and 43 out of 50 district church councils were destroyed or closed. One thousand six hundred seventy-four buildings, or worshipping centers, were completely burned down or closed. As a result, 1,390 EYN pastors, assistant pastors, and evangelists were left without work and income to care for their families. The pastors and their families were among the EYN members who lost their lives due to the Boko Haram attack. These created massive and unimaginable pastoral challenges in Michika, where almost all the congregations were displaced, and the church buildings burnt down (Billi 2015, 5).

During the Boko Haram crisis, both pastors and their church members needed pastoral care as they were all scattered in different directions like sheep without a shepherd. Both competed for relief materials that were distributed in IDP camps. Both focused on caring for themselves and their families. Some members were shocked to see their pastors in the queue, competing to be ahead of their members to receive relief materials instead of providing care to them. Some pastors left their pastoral responsibilities, moving from church to church to seek sympathy and assistance from other churches that were unaffected (Samuel Dali, interview by author, March 2, 2015).

However, a few tried to take advantage of the displacement to open new churches in areas that the church had never reached. Others frequently went to the displaced people in camps to provide pastoral care, comfort, and encourage the displaced members. A few were given relief material to distribute to their members, but instead, they shared it among

themselves and their families, leaving the members with nothing (Samuel Dali, interview by author, March 2, 2015).

5. The Effects of the Boko Haram Attacks on Women and Girls

Northern Nigeria is patriarchal, which is a major feature of this traditional society, where men dominate and control everything in the society, sometimes to the detriment of women. Before the emergence of Boko Haram women were subjected to domestic responsibilities. They were not allowed to be heard in public, kept at a low level of education, often neglected, and continually kept at home. They could only be mothers and wives and were regarded as the property of men. Especially in Kamwe culture, women are regarded as cheap laborers and seen as the property of their husbands (Makama 2013, 116).

In 2020, one of the girls who escaped after being taken captive by Boko Haram and had an unwanted pregnancy spoke of the appalling abuse experienced by those held captive by Boko Haram. This girl explained that when the Boko Haram terrorists kidnapped them, some of them were forced to convert to Islam, married to the Boko Haram fighters, or mercilessly raped. Some women and girls were forced to participate in military operations, including suicide bombing missions. In her case, four to five terrorists would have sex with her daily. She escaped only by God's grace; she cannot even explain how it happened (Mercy Kwata, interview by author, August 16, 2020).[1]

Oladeji et al. (2018, 4759) assert that among the women liberated from the insurgents and relocated to one of the large IDP camps in Borno State, the camp's clinic has recorded forty-seven women with sexual violence-related pregnancies (SVRP). Nineteen of these women delivered the babies from these unwanted pregnancies in the camp's clinic (Oladeji et al. 2018, 4764). Many women, specifically girls in the Michika Local Government Area, have children whose fathers are not known due to ungodly encounters with the insurgents. The possibility that some of these children may end up being lured to continue with the atrocities of their fathers cannot be completely ruled out since the insurgents are still recruiting poor and innocent youths in broad daylight while the government says nothing (Oladeji et al. 2018, 4765).

5.1 Widowhood and orphans

The issue of widowhood and orphans is a big challenge to women because many women have lost their husbands. As a result, the children are deprived of what belongs to them. One lady informed me that when her husband was killed by the Boko Haram insurgents in 2019, the relatives of her late husband took everything and left her and the children with nothing, which was a big challenge to her. This incident put her in a fragile situation to the extent that her neighbor took advantage of her and raped her, and nobody defended her. She also told me that when they were moved to the IDP camp, one of her daughters was raped by someone, and afterwards, she engaged in commercial sex for their survival (Rose Musa, interview by author, August 1, 2020).[2] These and many other challenges are a present reality to many women in Michika due to the Boko Haram terrorists. Only the grace of God in the process of holistic trauma counseling could bring succor and healing to the victims.

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1 This name is a pseudonym.

2 This name is a pseudonym.

5.2 Education of girls

Before the emergence of Boko Haram and its attack on Michika, female education was not at an ideal level due to the limited opportunities afforded to women. One of the major consequences of Boko Haram is that girls from this region will forever lag behind their contemporaries from other parts of the country. Many girls have been uprooted from their homes and are now living with their parents, who cannot send them to school as displaced persons. All the academic activities in Northeastern Nigeria, especially in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States, have been disrupted since 2014, and many students stay home. Some have become street children. This makes some parents hesitant to send their children to school. Some girls are paralyzed at the thought of going back to school, thinking they may be killed or kidnapped on their way or in their hostels. Some of these girls have witnessed killing, kidnapping, abduction, and illegal detention and were forced to watch while the terrorist slaughtered their teachers and fellow students, and damaged educational buildings and other facilities (Isokpan and Durojaye 2019, 2–3).

6. Thinking Theologically About the Insurgency

Harper and Pargament (2015, 350) state that "For better or worse, people often draw upon religion and spirituality in the wake of traumatic events." Persecution causes trauma in many Christians, which profoundly impacts their lives on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. Mutai (2015, 133) argues that since the first century, Christianity has faced different kinds of challenges, ranging from doctrinal differences to martyrdom. The violence and opposition witnessed in our context today come from political and social rivalry as well as cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices. During the persecution, Christians were devastated in many respects, ranging from being displaced to being economically disadvantaged, causing trauma at different levels of their beings (133).

Christians face what Langberg (2015, 47) calls the dilemma of suffering. She draws on Matthew 10:29–31, which says "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (ESV). Using this she explains that suffering, based on this Scripture, usually comes to Christians with the approval of God. At the same time, God is portrayed as a loving Father. Langberg (2015, 47–48) argues that "The dilemma of suffering is inherent in the Scriptures. Suffering cannot occur apart from the Father. Suffering occurs with the knowledge and oversight of the Father, who obviously cares and considers us valuable." How Christians should react to hardship is one of the questions that she considers to be relevant. Christians need to understand that these atrocities are indescribable because they are so horrifying in nature that words cannot appropriately express what occurred both inwardly and externally. As a result, the trauma is stashed away and forgotten, and life continues as usual (Langberg 2015, 47–48). In line with this, Mutai (2019, 131) notes that Christians, especially those living in IDP camps, ask where the loving God is amidst all the violence and trauma.

Mutai (2019, 134) lists a few biblical principles for responding to traumatic events, which this study finds useful. First, we need to acknowledge and expose the sinful actions of evil men. Second, we need to comprehend that our adversaries are not human beings but rather remember that our war is "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of

evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12 ESV). Third, we must remain confident about God's power to overcome the enemy. Fourth, we should understand that God is not angry with us when we are facing terrible things. Fifth, survivors should know that lament is biblical. Sixth, Christians should learn to observe the Sabbath in the sense of resting emotionally, physically, and psychologically.

7. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction to this article, we set out to examine the impact of the insurgence of Boko Haram on the church in the Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria. The study has presented a brief survey of the origin of Boko Haram and its ideology which serves as a basis for their activities, including the devastating effects it has on the church in Michika. Of course, not only the church is affected, but liberal Muslims are also affected. However, we limited our study to the impact of Boko Haram on the church in Michika. The church was affected because many church members lost their livelihoods, so the church was also in financial a crisis. Amidst the predicaments of members, the church also faced theological and pastoral care challenges. In the end, women and girls bear the brunt of the attack. The women lost their husbands and children while many of their daughters were abducted, raped, and given out to Boko Haram generals as the bounties of war. The church, its clergies, non-governmental agencies, and the government are crucial stakeholders and partners in protecting its citizens. The government needs to equip their security forces to face the terrorists to ensure the safety of its citizens.

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Becoming Ruth or the Lamenting Psalmist: Finding Hope in Pain

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Abstract

The need for trauma healing has significantly increased in recent years, and new innovative and cost-effective ways must be found to help sufferers, particularly those in economically challenged areas. In this study, literature trauma theory is applied, using the biblical story of Ruth and some lament psalms, to help sufferers find a measure of healing. It was found that engaging with the emotions experienced by the characters in the biblical text enabled sufferers to express their own pain and to identify with the way God interacted with the biblical characters. The approach also provided a creative interaction with the text which participants enjoyed. In these days of increasing emotional challenge, it is a means worth exploring in various contexts while using relevant biblical texts.

1. Introduction

Positive intervention for trauma healing has become increasingly urgent and widespread since the COVID-19 pandemic. But even before then, many people in South African townships and informal settlements have found themselves living in situations of great trauma with poverty, aggression, crime, and seemingly hopeless vulnerability. In response to this, empirical research was done to see if exposing interested persons to some biblical stories and poems could help them. Rather than simply listening, the idea was to allow the participants to engage with the stories at an emotional level, through performing the text. Performance has many advantages, particularly for young people with a low literacy level, as a powerful means of expressing

Conspectus

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

the emotions underlying actions. Further, it also permits cultural nuances to enter the story, making it more acceptable and appropriate.

First, two groups (one consisting of grade seven learners and the other of adults) from two townships in Cape Town were invited to learn and tell the story of Naomi and Ruth through drama. Second, various groups of burden-bearers in two provinces of South Africa were given the opportunity to use the form of biblical lament to compose their own lament poems. Both exercises produced significant benefits for the participants.

In this article, attention is first given to the basic theories underlying this approach. Five aspects are addressed: first, the value of using biblical literature to contribute to trauma healing, and the benefits (both psychological and physical) of performing the biblical text in meeting the basic principles of healing (as outlined next); second, the foundational steps to (psychological) trauma healing, as proposed by the psychiatrist, Judith Herman (1992); third, the steps outlined by pastoral theologians for spiritual healing of soul abuse; fourth, the theory underlying biblical lament; and fifth, the value of experiential storytelling. Then the empirical studies are briefly outlined, one at a time, with the outcomes resulting in the lives of the participants. Finally, a conclusion compares this approach with some other current approaches to trauma healing using biblical literature and suggests that this methodology has advantages in certain contexts.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Literary trauma theory

Literary studies are opening new ways for exploring the role and function of texts (Frechette and Boase 2016, 4). Literary trauma theory is concerned with the ways that texts encode trauma and bear witness to trauma. As Rahim (2016, 90) observes, literature facilitates an empathetic context for remembering and mourning, two processes that are important to the healing process. For recovery and resilience, it is vital that the traumatic experience be expressed, and yet neurological disturbance following trauma often makes it difficult for the trauma survivor to find the words to convey the problem and the associated emotion (Soelle 1975, 71–72). In such cases, literature can significantly help, as linguistic symbols allow traumatic memories to be confronted "at a distance [allowing for] a 'safe' confrontation with the traumatic experience" (Granofsky 1995, 6–7). Thereby literature can facilitate recovery and resilience for both individuals and communities (Frechette and Boase 2016, 10–11). The narrative of Ruth can be useful in this regard (Frechette and Boase 2016, 14). For example, victims of sugar daddies could imagine the thoughts and fears of Ruth as she went down to the threshing floor for an encounter with Boaz in chapter three.

It is necessary to relive the traumatic experience (in an environment of safety) to activate the emotional and cognitive processes associated with the trauma, in order to gain dominance over them (Allen 2005, 262; González-Prendes and Resko 2012, 22). The emotion provided in such texts can help sufferers express their own pain and find a fellow sufferer in the biblical character. Further, such texts often show how survivors preserve their agency and demonstrate a "capacity for resistance, survival, and recovery" (Claassens 2016, 20), all of which can encourage victims in their own situations. Consequently, such texts can have a "restorative capacity" (Strawn 2016, 143–160).

Apart from these narrative texts, the biblical psalms have also proven of great value in providing burden-bearers with the words and prayers that resonate with their experience. For example, Psalm 13 expresses deep pain that persists over a long time. Indeed, this psalm begins with four rhetorical questions of the form "How long?" Many burden-bearers resonate with these emotions arising from prayers that seem not to be answered. The

ultimate lament is that of Christ on the cross when he said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Miller (2005, 22) believes that all cries of lament are included in Christ's lament, and thereby authenticated and validated. Indeed, the many different laments in the biblical text contribute to healing by either expressing the words that the sufferer battles to find, or by serving as models for one's personal expression.

2.2 Herman's (1992) three steps toward emotional healing

Judith Herman (1992, 155, 175–177) notes that, in the case of individual traumatization, there are three fundamental stages of recovery: establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connections between survivors and their community (i.e., reconnecting with ordinary life and being able to move forward).

Clearly, a person who has been abused or violated needs to know they are safe (emotionally and physically) before they will open up and allow the healing process to begin. Then, second, they need to "remember and mourn" (Herman 1992, 175). The goal is to reclaim the memory, with all its associated emotions and bodily sensations. Although the person must be exposed again to the trauma trigger in order to relive the experience, it must be done in an environment of safety. Towards this end, exposure must be balanced with containment (Allen 2005, 250). As Herman (1992, 176) asserts: "There is a need to constantly maintain a balance between preserving safety and facing the past." Literature can be useful in this regard in two ways: first, a carefully selected story can facilitate the sufferer identifying with the pain of another and also with the way God intervened in their situation, but at the same time the pain is kept at some distance. Indeed, finding resonance with characters in biblical texts enables a safe exposure to the emotions provoked by the situations the characters find themselves in. The second way in which literature can help a trauma sufferer to revisit the trauma in order to experience healing is through either providing the very words that she battles to find (as in using a lament psalm to express one's pain) or by offering a form for them to use to write their own lament. Both of these methods are explored in the empirical work.

The third step in trauma healing responds to the need to connect with others socially and be able to move forward in one's life. Trauma freezes one's capacity to make decisions and plan a future and leaves a person feeling isolated. Herman (1992, 214) notes that "Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between the individual and community." As Sweeney (2011, 227) notes, "One of the greatest human pains is the loneliness of being alone." Thus, when a group of people who have experienced a common trauma can share together, participants report the solace they feel simply being present with others who have endured similar ordeals. Through connecting with others, their sense of self, of worth, and of humanity is restored (Herman 1992, 215). Being able to talk about their traumatic experience provides the opportunity for them to be heard, thereby reducing the sense of social isolation (Allen 2005, 252, 266). As West (2016, 220) observes, "Validation is a vital component [of the healing process]." Indeed, the safe and supportive presence of others as witnesses and dialogue partners can be crucial for advancing the process of reinterpreting the traumatic experience (Frechette and Boase 2016, 7).

Herman (1992, 195) warns that this approach to healing takes time and is never complete: "Interventions based on storytelling … have no claim to an immediate healing power. Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete." However, significant improvement can result when the survivor has shifted the traumatic memory to the past and can give attention to the present and future, with hope and zest.

2.3   Pastoral theology's response to soul abuse

Emily Lyon, a clinical psychologist and church worker, with over twenty-five years of experience helping abuse survivors, maintains that there is a gaping ignorance of psychological research on the part of many spiritual-care workers. Further, clinical treatment programs utilizing methods of psychotherapy give little, if any, attention to the *soul damage* that abused people suffer. This damage to the soul arises from the interpersonal evil at the root of abuse, "a theological problem which only the church is equipped to address" (Lyon 2010, 239). Grand (2000, 4–5) asserts that the act of abuse causes "the collapse of the survivor's self," a kind of "extinction," an "internal space of catastrophic loneliness imbued with hate and fear and shame and despair." The person's sense of identity and of having a personal history is fragmented or confused (Lyon 2010, 236). A sense of trust and safety has been shattered, resulting in a mangling of the soul (Becker 2014, 22).

Lyon (2010, 240–241) suggests that in order to address the needs of those whose souls have been wounded, new liturgies including sacramental actions are needed which would "involve reparative relationships." Towards this end, the social environment must be supportive, facilitating a positive relationship between the survivor and others. Lyon (2010, 240–241) also advocates attention being given to the person's sense of shame and injustice, and opportunity being provided for "transcendent and transformative spiritual experience."

Beyond the ideas suggested by Lyon, soul therapy may also incorporate poetry, rhythm, song, movement (as in dance), and creative expression through drama. All of these can contribute to the social, emotional, and spiritual healing of an individual in pain (Dickie and Zogbo 2022). Further, to encourage soul healing, attention should be given to promoting neural development (to negate the effect of toxic memories) by including a moderate level of stimulation, as is inherent in creative tasks (Dickie 2018a, 154; 2019, 888–891).

2.4   Lament theory

The distinguishing features of biblical lament are that the person addressed is God, and the prayer includes complaint (i.e., deep emotional pain). The lamenter may accuse God or enemies of being the cause of her pain. When traumatized people accuse God, God seems to accept that their pain and anger make them likely to rage not only against the perpetrators but also against God as the powerful one who did not prevent their suffering.[1]

Modern psychotherapy recognizes that expressing lament is part of healing (Westermann 1994, 91). Lament psalms both reflect crises and provide a way to pass through a crisis (Mandolfo 2002, 3–5). However, to have therapeutic value, psalms need to be read as performance literature with attention to the different voices (5). This enables the sufferer to identify with the pain of the lamenting psalmist and provides her with another voice which may help her see her situation from a different perspective.

It is also necessary that the space and time for lament be sacred, set apart from the ordinary, and that there is a sense of safety for all participants. In particular confidentiality is a key element. Frechette and Boase (2016, 16) argue that people can best appropriate biblical texts through the use of ritual, which is performance enacted in spaces and times set apart from the ordinary. They also advocate the need to "create a sense of solidarity," and thus the use of communal lament payers in a public setting (as part of worship) can be very helpful.[2]

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1 See also Herman 1992, 94–95.
2 See also Mandolfo 2002, 6–7.

Indeed, this has been found to bring about a change in the persons praying and the audience (Dickie 2020b, 58–60; Corvin 1972, 145). Presenting a lament as a sacramental action (in the company of others who care) can lead to stronger relationships within the church community and a place of safety within the liturgy for all those battling various issues. This suggests the value of lament becoming a regular ritual within the weekly worship service, thereby providing a liturgical opportunity (in the company of the believing community) for burden-bearers to unload their burden as part of their worship of and trust in God.

The need for public lament in the church is important not only for the sufferers to be able to express their pain and be heard (Grand 2000, 5), but also for the other members of the community to hear the pain, and if necessary, be convicted when they hear about the pain. As many researchers have noted (e.g., Seto 2008), many abusers were themselves abused. The one who was sinned against becomes the one sinning against another. Thus, in the church, those who need to lament may at other times need to hear the lament of others and accept their own sin. Furthermore, in order to cultivate a caring community in the church, all need to hear and pay attention to the pain of others in their midst.

Lament may be expressed not only in words but also through ritual acts. For example, an oppressed group in Korea developed a communal dance of lament which was performed annually. This ritual dance provided an opportunity for the women to comfort one another, and to encourage one another to resist injustice and not give in to resignation (Choi 2007, 8). Lyon suggests that such rituals could also be very helpful for oppressed and abused men and women today. In addition to the emotional release, the new and energetic patterns of movement and the crying out of anger and grief would provide the stimulation that the neural systems of abused people need to break old habits and form new avenues for free expression.

Another example of *body lament* was part of a communal response in a Cape Town church to the spate of domestic violence in August 2019. Congregation members were invited to go to the front and add a pinch of salt to a bucket of salt water, representing the tears of God and those of the people. As they added their tears to the communal pain, they could express the particular burden on their heart, aloud or silently, as a prayer accompanying their symbolic action (Dickie 2021, §3.2.2).

2.4.1 Applying advances in neuro-research to lament theory

The right hemisphere of the brain dominates for organizing the human stress response (Wittling 1995, 55–59), and for integrating unconscious affects into a more complex implicit sense of self (Schore 2009, 144). Thus, when the function of the right brain disintegrates (which happens when trauma is experienced), the *implicit*-self collapses, resulting in an instant loss of a sense of safety and trust (126). Moreover, during traumatic experiences, there is an over-production of bio-chemicals, resulting in hyperactivity in the amygdala and the normal action of the hippocampus being blocked (McNally 2003, 137). As a result, new events are not processed by the hippocampus (Hug 2007, 232), but the (trauma) memories are stored by the amygdala as unprocessed, noxious emotions and other sensory fragments. This results in invasive, disturbing flashbacks when triggers cause the traumatic events to be reactivated.

However, several researchers (e.g., Doidge 2007; Schore 2009, 142) are showing that the brain has an enormous capacity for *plasticity*, enabling itself to heal. Under certain circumstances, hormones are released which stimulate the development of neurons to replace those destroyed during

trauma. The release of such hormones is stimulated by "moderate levels of stress such as that involved in new learning" in a positive interpersonal environment (Cozolino 2002, 24). Other researchers (e.g., van der Kolk 2006, 225; Hug 2007, 232) also claim that there is an optimum level of stimulation that facilitates a shift to right-brain processing, and maximum integration of memories into the hippocampus (Schore 2009, 140).

I would suggest that composing and/or performing a biblical lament can also provide the necessary creative stimulation to bring about healing, particularly as it also takes place within a positive interpersonal environment. Moreover, the right brain seems to be associated with religious experiences (Hug 2007, 234), and thus the exercise of studying biblical psalms and composing one's own lament can be expected to promote the healing of the soul (Lyon 2010, 238).

2.5   Experiential storytelling

The empirical work that follows in the next section is an application of Experiential Storytelling, a body of theory that has been explored by researchers in many fields of study. With reference to experiencing Bible stories, Brophy (2007, 149) notes the following:

> The Bible is full of story piled on story … and all are stories with a point. Stories, quite simply, are one way of depicting reality and of revealing what lies beneath the surface of events. They are interested in meaning rather than the recitation of "facts." They help us to explore what is significant. They take full account of the human dimension.

Brophy (2007, 150) continues: "The fascination of stories lies in their connectedness to our own lives. They appeal to experience." Frankfurter (2017, 95–96) agrees, claiming that "the performance of narrative is

traditionally imagined as bringing a power into the world" and "[the power is] an efficacy in the *experience* of people" (emphasis mine). Thus, the choice of the biblical story is important if the hearers are to be able to enter into the experience of the characters described.

The story of Ruth was considered to be particularly relevant to the experience of participants in the empirical work for many reasons. These include the following:

• The text includes much ambiguity in terms of motivation and emotional response, which allows readers/hearers to explore their own personal responses in such situations.
• The traumas experienced by the two women (Naomi and Ruth) are those many women in Africa face today—vulnerability (without a male protector), bereavement, being a foreigner, being hungry, and a complex relationship with her in-laws. Moreover, the appearance of an older male with means (like Boaz), willing to help a young, helpless woman (like Ruth) presents many temptations and risks that young African women face.
• The book of Ruth is one of the few biblical texts that expresses the agency of women. Further, its position in the canon, after the book of Judges, when "everyone did what they thought was right" (21:25 CEV), highlights the role of women in a world where men dominate and yet are not assuming their leadership roles in the home, thereby pushing (or enabling) women to assert themselves. As this is the context in which many girls and women live today in Africa, it was felt that the message of the book would speak to young and old, of both genders.
• The biblical text is largely dialogue and so makes for an easy transition to drama on the stage.

Brophy (2007, 155) highlights that "We learn from one another by telling the stories of our experiences and listening to the experiences of others." The focus of this article is on the latter. As Hannabuss (2000, 222) comments, "[listening to stories] allows for … reflexivity. It encourages reflection on the *outcomes* of decisions" (emphasis mine). Thus, in the empirical work, we encouraged participants to reflect on the *consequences* of decisions made by characters in the story.

2.6   Application of this theory in the empirical work

Psychology, pastoral studies, and biblical laments have indicated the need for burden-bearers to 1) become an agent and tell their story in a safe environment, 2) build relationships with others, 3) have a sense of justice restored, and 4) experience God in their situation. The two approaches described in this article meet these needs by either helping participants to compose (and perform, in some cases) their own laments or by expressing themselves through drama and song/dance as they engage with biblical stories and enter the characters' emotions.

The first criterion of establishing safety is achieved in the empirical work by allowing participants to engage *at a distance* with the traumas of characters in the biblical story of Ruth or the lamenter in Psalms. Pain is contained in that it (initially) is the pain of another person in focus, either Naomi/Ruth or the lamenting psalmist. Nevertheless, indirectly, the texts facilitate resonances, situations with which the participants can identify emotionally.

Herman (1992, 155) also refers to the importance of agency or finding one's voice. This is addressed in the empirical work by providing space for the sufferer to give her version of the traumatic event, either in words as in a lament or through the choice of language as well as non-verbal and paralingual cues when performing a story. Further, by doing so in the company of others who are fellow sufferers or sensitive persons who listen well, the burden-bearer is released from the agony of isolation and can build relationships with others again.

Finally, when burden-bearers learn to write a lament poem to God, they can hand over the question of recompense to God when they appeal for justice. Since a lament is a prayer, it is two-directional and thus facilitates a transformative spiritual experience, providing an opportunity not only to bring one's pain to God in prayer (and be released from a sense of helplessness) but also to hear God respond (Dickie 2020a, 14).

3.   Empirical Studies

3.1   Becoming Ruth

Two workshops were held in Cape Town using the performance of the biblical book of Ruth to help participants identify, and resonate, with the traumas and struggles of Naomi and Ruth. One of the advantages of using performance is that a character on stage must show some response to the actions or words of others, and this requires actors to *dig deep* and consider their emotions in such a situation. For example, when the biblical text does not clarify Naomi's response to Ruth's whole-hearted commitment to her, how does that make Ruth feel? For young African women, often trapped in a dominating mother-in-law relationship, such a situation could provoke familiar fears within them. Having the opportunity within a group to discuss their concerns, and imagine how Ruth might have dealt with them, can provide new resources for young women today.

The first group were grade seven learners from Westlake Primary School, and the other group were adult members of a Bible-study group,

mainly from Capricorn Township.[3] Over several months (approximately one hour once a week), the participants slowly went through the story, internalizing the events. It was hoped that they would then be able to tell the story from memory, but this was not possible given the time constraint. Thus, in the end, they performed a *dramatic* reading, with short sections (such as Ruth's commitment to Naomi) memorized well.

Within the drama, an inquirer[4] interrupted the story at key moments, to ask the audience how they felt the various characters were feeling at that point. For example, after Ruth had been instructed to go down to meet Boaz at the threshing floor at night, the inquirer asked, "How do you think Ruth felt at that time?" The boys in the school audience, and the men in the Bible-study group, responded, "Excited!" However, when the girls were asked, their response was, "Frightened!" Not only could the girls identify with the possible fears of Ruth, but they could also see how God cared for her in that situation. And the boys could have their eyes opened to other perspectives, and the possible traumas experienced by others.

As the story progressed, the audience (and actors) were faced with situations of bereavement, hunger, vulnerability (having no man to care for the two women who returned to Bethlehem), and the dangers and stress of being a foreigner (first Naomi in Moab, then Ruth in Bethlehem). In response to the inquirer's careful questions, the audience was given the opportunity to express how such a character (one like them!) would feel in such a situation. Thus, they were able to express their fears (giving them agency) and to receive a sympathetic hearing, recognizing they were not alone because the audience, as well as the characters in the story (having had experiences similar to theirs), were also present. The opportunity to discuss issues raised in the drama meant there could be ongoing reflection and sharing.

A workshop based on Ruth was also recently held with women in Ivory Coast, all of whom had been through two periods of war and suffered bereavement, hunger, vulnerability, and the lack of a man to help them. Over a period of six days, we went carefully through the biblical text in their own language. After about an hour of study and discussion, the women were divided into two groups. One group worked on a dramatic performance of the story and the other group worked out a song to capture the essence of what had happened and what can be learned from it. Each day the two groups performed their creative efforts for one another, and recordings were made on video for them to watch in the evenings for their own enjoyment. This repeated exposure to the story and its deeper resonance for them in their situation meant that the women really entered the emotion of the story, both the difficulties and seeing how God intervened to bless the women and care for them. When reporting back at the end of the workshop, a number of the women said, "I am Naomi!" By saying this, they were expressing: I have been there; I have suffered in those ways; I am learning to see how God cared for her, and for me.

3.2 Becoming the/a lamenting psalmist

Many lament workshops have been conducted over the past five years, in KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Town. In each case, one or two lament psalms were first studied. Psalms 3 and 13 were usually used since both are short and include the speech-acts typical of biblical laments. As noted, Psalm 13 begins with four highly emotive rhetorical questions, clearly complaining because God was slow in responding to the psalmist's felt need. Many

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3 Westlake and Capricorn are two townships in Cape Town.
4 A person who stands upfront, but who does not form part of the drama.

participants found these rhetorical questions raised their own personal questions, usually also of the "How long, O LORD?" type. For example, one refugee, having studied Psalm 13, wrote:

> For how long, God, will you allow the enemy to do whatever he wants towards my life? For how long, God, will you allow the enemy to attack my family spiritually? (Dickie 2018b, 14)

Further, Psalm 3 includes an element of justice. Psalm 3:7 calls for the enemies to have their teeth broken, thus no longer being able to mock, as in verse 2. This is also an extremely helpful insight—that a lamenter can hand over justice to God and thereby be set free to forgive and be enabled to move forward in their lives.

Moreover, it was noted from these psalms that the lamenting psalmist used language that may seem "shocking" for the Bible. Indeed, the Psalmist did not hold back in complaining to God and sometimes in accusing God, and brought his emotions, raw and uncensored, to God in prayer. Participants came to understand that God welcomes people who bring their pain, frustration, fear, and anger to God, and that as they do so, they experience relief. Not only do they find that God speaks to them in their situation, but they also experience a greater wholeness as they become more spiritually authentic (Dickie 2020c, 528–533). Participants also noted the metaphors used for the LORD in Psalm 3:3, that he is a shield and the one who lifts the head of those who have been shamed. They were encouraged to try and find images that spoke to their situations. Some were extremely poetic, as in the following excerpt from example 1 further down:

> For how long will people play me? They make me like a car that won't start.

In particular, we noted that biblical laments typically include four elements. The two distinguishing ones are that they have an address to God, and a complaint, usually against God or against an enemy. They often also contain a request for God to act in some way which may include executing justice against the enemy. The fourth element that is almost always present in a biblical lament is an affirmation of faith or confidence in God's character. For example, in Psalm 3, the psalmist begins by crying out "O LORD" (ESV) and then complains "How many are my foes!" (v.1 ESV). They continue complaining in verse 2, even quoting the words of the enemy against them. However, in verse 3 we notice a remarkable change of mood, to one of confident trust in the LORD: "But you, LORD, are a shield about me" (ESV). Clearly, something has happened between verses 2 and 3. It would seem that the lamenting psalmist has heard God's voice reminding them of God's character, promises, or former acts on behalf of the psalmist or the people of God. However, for this exercise, what is important is that participants recognize that the psalmist is able to affirm something they know about God, which gives them confidence that God might respond to their complaint (and request).

With these four aspects of a biblical lament in mind, participants then use the following questions to help them relate to these elements and compose their own prayer to God.

1) What worry, frustration, or difficulty are you dealing with that seems unjust to you? That is, if God comes and sits next to you and says, "How is it going?" What would you say?
2) What one big thing would you like God to do for you?
3) What would you like God to do in regard to those who caused you pain?
4) What do you know about God that gives you confidence that God might act in your situation?

Example 1 below gives the lament of a Zulu woman in the HIV+ support-group and indicates her response to these questions incorporated into her lament prayer. An English translation follows:

Nkosi, kanti ngiyohlupheka kuze kube nini?

Ngiyodlala abantu kuze kube nini bengenza imoto engadumi emile engen msebenzi, kuyoze kube nini?

Ngisabathe ngizama ukuhlanganisa impilo kodwa ayhlangane.

Wena ukhona uyabukela njekanti kwalangoshiwo yini kuthi wena uwumaphendula asabele kodwa uyaphuza ukuphendula, kanti kuyoze kube nini.

Kanti kuyoza kube nini Nkosi mina ngiphila impilo yokuhluphela abanye bayasizakala kodwa mina.

Ngiyazi Nkosi kumanele ngilinde kodwa akuvami ngizohlalela ethembeni ngoba wena uwukhukhanya wami.

1. Lord, till when will I suffer? For how long will people play me?
2. They make me like a car that won't start, a useless one. Till when?
3. Every time I try to put things together, life is not coming together. And you are there, just looking.
4. Didn't they say that you listen when you are called?
5. But you are taking long to answer, But … till when? Till when, my Lord—me leaving my poverty?
6. Others do get help, but me—I'm not.
7. I know my Lord, I have to wait, but it's hard.
8. I will stay in the hope, and you are my light.

In the English translation, we can note her address to God (line 1) and her heartfelt complaints (lines 1–6) which include rhetorical questions as she accuses God and an enemy of causing her pain. There is no clear request, but her rhetorical questions (lines 1–2, 4–5) imply a request for God to intervene and relieve her of her situation of poverty. The last two lines suggest an affirmation of faith (although line 7 contains a veiled complaint), with the last clause reminding God of God's place in her situation.

The poet's use of rhetorical questions in lines 1 and 2b perhaps shows the influence of Psalm 13:1–2, giving her a means to express her deep frustration. And the strong metaphors she introduces in lines 1b and 2a reveal her sense of being abused. Moreover, composing her own personal lament not only enables her to call upon divine aid as a means of dealing with her pain, but it is also a means of physical healing (as noted in section 2.4.1, Cozolino 2002, 24). Indeed, after sharing their poems with others, many commented on how released they felt, and supported by those listening with empathy.

Another example shows how important it is for the speaker to include an appeal for justice. One poet, a Zimbabwean woman who lost her job as a result of falling pregnant, includes the following line in her lament: "Lord, let Mr. X feel the same pain as I experienced when I lost my job." By trusting that God would take care of her need for justice, she was able to release the burden of ensuring that justice is served. Her thinking was impacted by Psalm 3, particularly the lively enactment of the enemies mocking the psalmist (v. 1) and then having their teeth shattered (v. 7). She felt that she had permission to ask God to likewise deal with her enemy. Such is the power of performance, entering the deepest emotions and bringing release.

4. Benefits of this Approach

Becoming a biblical character, as in the two methodologies discussed, is an indirect approach to trauma healing and has several advantages over other methods, including those that also use stories, whether biblical or other.

The main strength is that participants can identify at a deep (emotional) level with the problems or pain that the biblical person experienced. Some approaches to trauma healing are more *content-based,* dealing with ideas that only address the mind but not the soul or the body, as in performance. Moreover, the sufferer can also see God's response to the biblical character (e.g., directing events to help Ruth), and thus be able to appropriate such for themselves (thereby having a transformational experience with God).

Such an approach also avoids a *didactic* approach which can appear condescending and fails to consider the rich insights that people can make when they are free to respond openly, rather than coming up with pre-determined (content-based) answers. Moreover, this approach avoids the confrontation and exhausting introspection that often accompanies traditional trauma healing. By reflecting on characters in a story, the sufferer has some distance and objectivity to evaluate the situation without feeling personally exposed or vulnerable. Indeed, the story serves as a container but also as a bridge. It *contains* the powerful negative emotions by keeping them at a slight distance and yet serves as a bridge to allow the person to explore these emotions when she feels ready to do so.

Moreover, most Africans enjoy drama, song, and dance, and it has proven helpful to give them the opportunity to express themselves creatively, following biblical patterns, which have the advantage of seeing the positive change that happens when God intervenes. Also, for younger people, being on stage results in improved self-confidence and may lead to the discovery of strengths they were not previously aware of.

5. Conclusion

A key element of the empirical work described in this article is the use of performance—to enter fully into the emotions behind the biblical text. In the first case, this occurred through performing the biblical story of Ruth, and in the second, by using lament psalms to serve as a framework for expressing one's own feelings. Both methodologies proved to be ways for people in bleak situations to find hope as they handed over their concerns and pain to God and received some encouragement for the way forward.

The methodology of using performance, as a way of experiential learning, has application beyond trauma healing. As a translation consultant, I have been exploring the use of performance in every stage of the translation process, to clarify the exegesis, and particularly for participants in Psalms workshops to enter the emotions of the poet.

But as a trauma healing approach, the agency afforded to burden-bearers when they use the psalms or biblical text to express their own pain is significant. It was interesting that almost without exception, the laments written by hurting young women included those forms of speech that are apparent in biblical lament, thereby showing that the need to express pain/complaint is a critical part of healing, along with the fact that the pain is expressed to God, one who has the capacity to do something about the problem. Also, for many of the participants, there was a need for justice (e.g., example 2 above). Participants' prayers usually included a request for deliverance, whether the provision of a job or relief from poverty. However, often just being able to release the emotional load was sufficient to bring relief.

What is exciting is that these positive shifts took place in simple, low-cost workshops, with minimal counseling expertise. Trauma healing or counseling for abuse is often beyond the financial means of sufferers in South Africa, but this methodology allows participants to experience healing through their identification with characters in a story.

Many communities in South Africa and further afield could benefit from this approach. Thus, this article seeks to encourage youth workers, teachers, and other concerned adults to provide opportunities for those

battling various difficult situations to engage, through performance, with a relevant biblical text. The need is great, and innovative, low-cost methods can be found. The poetry of the psalms, and biblical stories, have much to offer. All that is needed is people with a heart and a vision to experiment!

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Emotive or Ethical? A Theological Reflection on Kenya's Comprehensive Sexuality Education

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Abstract

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) has been lauded as a more inclusive, rights-based, and progressive approach to sexuality, particularly in its assumed impact on youth sexuality in Kenya. An emotive approach is proposed by both protagonists and antagonists of CSE. This article, however, seeks to ground the discussion on a theological and ethical approach, by way of utilizing a customized practical theological methodology. First, it utilizes inter-disciplinary methods to analyze the CSE policy in Kenyan society. Second, its normative aspect is grounded in a theological reflection on the sexual ethics espoused in key New Testament passages. Third, its practical recommendations explore the ramifications of this research for sexual ethics in youth and

family ministries and public theological engagement with Kenya's society.

1. Sexuality and Sex Education: An Introduction

Sexuality is central to what it means to be human persons created in the image of God. Sexuality, which involves physical, biological, psychological, emotional, and even spiritual aspects, is a topic that finds resonance in the biblical text from Genesis to Revelation. We see this in the one-flesh union between Adam and Eve, the sexual abuses and excesses in the narratives of Lot (Sodom and Gomorrah), Dinah, and Tamar in the Pentateuch, the romantic and sexual imagery of the Song of Songs, the counsel on sexual ethics in the Wisdom

SATS

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

Literature, Jesus's ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul's engagement with Greco-Roman sexual practices, as well as the warnings in the book of Revelation. The Bible is not as *squeamish* as we are concerning the subject of sex and contains sufficient material when it comes to discussing sex in a very frank and open manner (Smith 2014, xii). The biblical text contains various approaches to sexuality education. Throughout their different genres, biblical passages have ample information on the general topic of sexuality, as well as assuming and prescribing various ethical duties in the area of sexuality.

Within the Kenyan context, sexuality education has been approached from several angles. Traditional sexuality education is the education on sexuality that has been handed down through the various African traditional religions and cultures in Kenya. These types of sexuality education are centered around taboos, rituals, community harmony, and appropriate sexual relations. The second approach, usually lumped together with the traditional approach, can be understood as sexuality education emanating from the various religions of Kenya, the two most common being Christianity and Islam. These approaches to sexuality education, which derive their sources of knowledge from religious texts, can be termed conservative sexual ethics. *Conservative* is used to delineate their focus on ethical norms and appeals to special revelation. In some cases, the word conservative is used in a derogatory manner to mean *backward* or *retrogressive*.

The third approach is Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). CSE is seen as a more progressive approach to sexuality education. This approach moves beyond the taboos of traditional sexuality education and conservative sexuality education by tackling contemporary sexuality issues that are a central part of Kenyan society. These include aspects such as early teenage pregnancies, sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+),

Gender-based violence, contraception, and safe sexual expression. Much of the literature assumes that CSE is more progressive, and many make emotive appeals, stating that it is a better approach to sexuality education in a country that is marked by high teenage pregnancy rates, early exposure to sexual activities, as well as an increasing focus on gender minority and gender rights discourses (KNBS and ICF 2023, 16). This study surveys the history of CSE in the country and the key issues raised through this approach to sexuality education. The rest of the article investigates the policy formulations supporting CSE within the Kenyan context and highlights the ethical issues raised and why a biblical theological approach is needed in the conversation.

2. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the Kenyan Context

CSE in Kenya, as in other countries such as Ghana, Peru, and Guatemala, has wide support at the national and international policy levels. Kenya, for example, has signed various international agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the Cairo Programme of Action (1994), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), and the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2001) (Panchaud et al. 2019, 285). Some national policies in the area of Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health include the Adolescent Reproductive Health Development Policy (2003), National Guideline for the Provision of Youth-Friendly Services (2005), Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS, Second Edition (2013), and National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (2015) (Sidze et al. 2017, 17). Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is defined by UNESCO as:

A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. (UNESCO et al. 2018, 16)

CSE is therefore viewed as a positive tool for better outcomes on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights among adolescents. According to UNESCO (2018, 16), CSE aspects include formal and informal education settings, empirical data, an incremental approach, age- and developmental-appropriate perspectives, and methods that are curriculum-based, comprehensive, gender-equity-based, culturally relevant, and human-rights-centric. It is laudable that CSE seeks to address some of the worrying statistics around sexual and reproductive health. These include early teenage pregnancies, sexual and gender-based violence as well as cultural practices that hinder the sexual well-being of adolescents in many African countries. CSE is anchored in UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (UNESCO 2009), which was updated in 2018 to address more recent issues in the contemporary context. These issues include "an increased recognition of gender perspectives and social context in health promotion; the protective role of education in reducing vulnerability to our sexual health outcomes, including those related to HIV, STIs, early and unintended pregnancy and gender-based violence" as well as increased access to social and digital media (UNESCO 2018, 13).

The African Union's Maputo Protocol (2003) provided political support for implementing CSE in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wangamati 2020, 56). CSE is seen as another phase in sexuality education beyond the initial stages of focusing on biological, population, social aspects, and gender rights approaches. CSE is seen as a more engaged phase of sexuality education in the history of Kenya, having moved from the first stage (1960–1980) of biological and anatomical education to the second phase (1980–1994) of population and developmental issues to the third phase (1994–2000) of social aspects of sexuality, to the fourth phase (2000–2015) of human rights, as a key agenda in sexuality education (Panchaud et al. 2019, 281).

Wangamati (2020, 57) argues that CSE is based on a public health approach, which differs from faith-based, culture-based approaches that are moralistic and focused on preventing premarital sex. CSE took momentum following the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 and in Nairobi in 2019 (Wekesah et al. 2019, 2). The implementation of CSE in schools in Kenya has encountered some resistance, primarily on the basis of sociocultural norms among guardians as well as other pragmatic concerns in curricular implementation (Wekesah et al. 2019, 3). Various media platforms have also been used as avenues for CSE in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as *The World Starts with Me*, which was developed in Uganda and implemented in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Malawi (Wekesah et al. 2019, 5). In the Kenyan context, the primary avenue of CSE implementation is life skills education, which is a primary school platform for informal education.

Sexuality education seeks to offer knowledge and skills to cope with the various ways in which sexuality has been narrowly conceived as sex and usually with connotations of filth and dirt (Bruess and Greenberg 2004, 3; Lehmiller 2017, 2). Human sexuality is therefore a broader concept than sexual acts and includes biological, ethical, cultural, psychological, and spiritual aspects that are core to human personhood (Bruess and

Greenberg 2004, 5; Lehmiller 2017, 2–5). Cultural dimensions of sexuality have to do with the norms we have inherited from the context of our societies. Psychological dimensions have to do with attitudes and feelings about sexuality. Ethical dimensions include moral aspects of sexuality. Biological dimensions include anatomical aspects such as the development of sexual characteristics, responses to sexual stimuli, and reproductive organs, among others (Bruess and Greenberg 2004, 6; Lehmiller 2017, 2). More recently, some scholars draw attention to the political tone discussions around the topic of sexuality have taken on, with some contexts celebrating diversity (Weeks 2022, 2). Weeks (2022, 2) portends that this political tone has led to differing views on sexuality among liberal sexual ethics and religious sexual ethics. To him, as to many others, religion is seen as a poison to the pleasure of sexual ethics.

The politicization of sexuality has also led to it featuring much more on new media and attention is often drawn to sexuality and gender rights. Because of the increasing violations of sexual minorities, scholars and policy analysts have pushed for the incorporation of LGBTQIA+ rights within the Kenyan constitution as well as calling for Africa's "homophobia" to be addressed. Van Klinken (2019, 3), for example, observes how homophobia is pervasive in African societies. Those who are against homosexuality premise their arguments on terms such as un-African, unnatural, and un-Christian. What is interesting in van Klinken's analysis is the absence of the Islamic view on sexuality, which is a significant religion in the African context. More recently, for instance, the World Cup officials in Qatar remained adamant concerning homosexual expression during the October-December World Cup 2022 (MacInnes 2022). For van Klinken, religious and especially Christian sexual ethics are directly correlated with homophobia and consequentially, societal discrimination and marginalization of those who identify as

homosexual. A question that remains is how to wrestle with human rights issues where all human life is safeguarded while still wisely and pastorally emphasizing the ethical dimension of sexuality. The politicization of sexuality is therefore not just limited to religious and ecclesial actors, but to a host of individuals and various groups that are pushing for their own view on the sexual ethics that is most appropriate for the Kenyan context.

2.1 Emotive or ethical? Situating CSE in ethical perspective

This study seeks to explore whether champions of CSE have premised sexual education on a comprehensive ethical approach or whether it is an emotive approach that pushes its political agenda on the continent. In this section, I analyze various facets of CSE that have a direct bearing on the ethical dimensions of this approach to sexuality education.

2.1.1 Discrimination against sexual minorities

The literature has noted discrimination committed against sexual and gender minorities, meaning those who do not espouse to the sexuality and gender norms of the majority population. Sexual and gender minorities have higher chances of being victims of sexual abuse, verbal insults, reduced access to government and health services, and unequal opportunities at work (Harper et al. 2021, 3). The same abuse is extended, disproportionately, towards women. For instance, global estimates acknowledge that 35% of women have faced or are at risk of physical or sexual abuse from their partners (UNESCO 2018, 23). In the literature, these issues are correlated with high levels of mental health issues, and researchers are mobilizing various social and political actors to offer

health and other services to sexual and gender minorities (Harper et al. 2021, 2; UNESCO 2018, 25).

The role of CSE is to educate Kenyan society on these minorities so as to foster their human dignity and well-being. From a theological position, this corresponds with the principle of human dignity, which is vested in all human beings because they bear the image of God. Stanley Grenz (2001, 280) applies the *imago Dei* to human sexuality, by noting that sexuality is more than the physical dimension and is central to humanity seeking wholeness. Christians have the proper foundations to ensure that the lives of all people, including sexual minorities, are safeguarded as an outworking of the commandments to love your neighbor and extend grace and patience to those who are different, especially to the minorities in our societies. Jesus's engagement with the woman at the well (John 4) is illustrative of this point.

2.1.2   CSE, and sexual and gender rights

Because CSE is focused on improving the knowledge and skills of young people in the areas of gender and sexual and reproductive health, the positive outcome in Kenya is that more young people are able to discern various sexual practices that are harmful to them (Panchau et al 2018). Kenya's adolescents (15–19-year-olds) have high rates of sexual exposure (KNBS and ICF 2023, 16). Whereas some of this is due to sexual expression between peers, part of it also results due to rape or sexual abuse by adults in society. Thus, CSE helps to protect especially the vulnerable members of society. The rights-based approach also promotes the individual's right to choose when, where, and with whom they "will have any form of intimate or sexual relationship" (UNESCO 2018, 18). This choice expands on abstinence by being "learner-centric" and offering young people the decision to delay or engage in sexual activity. CSE also champions safer sex

so as to foster "healthy interpersonal relationships, based on respect and communication, which may or may not involve sexual intimacy" (UNESCO 2018, 18).

2.1.3   Abortion rights

Premised on the high rates of sexual activity among Kenyan adolescents (aged 15–19), especially from sexual-based violence, CSE is viewed as a tool that gives young people agency when it comes to how they deal with early teenage pregnancies (Sidze et al. 2017, 7). Because of these early pregnancies, research shows that 17% of women who seek post-abortion care in public health institutions are between 10–19 years old, with 74% of moderate and severe complications arising from this age group (APHRC 2013, 18). The teaching of abortion within CSE is viewed as a key agenda in the championing of human rights. Thus, CSE proponents within the media space teach abortion as part of young people's "reproductive health, rights and choices" (Sidze et al. 2017, 39). Other analysts argue that CSE can help young people to deal with sexuality issues and thus lead to reduced unsafe abortions (Ogolla and Ondia 2019, 113).

While it is important to respect the dignity of young people, ethical responses that focus on individual human rights tend to follow Western ethical approaches that distort broader conceptualizations of ethics. For instance, Bujo (2001, 25) argues that ethics should consider more than just the individual, by also considering how the wider community is affected. For young girls who are pregnant, decisions on whether to abort or not, have direct consequences for the life they carry, their own psychological and emotional well-being, and also the young person's accountability to the community and God. If indeed God is the giver of life, then he is the one who has ultimate authority on whether or not to take life—barring special health emergency cases. In other words, an approach to the issue of abortion that narrows down its focus to the individual may lead to greater losses than gains.

3. Theological Approaches to Christian Sexual Ethics

From the discussion above, CSE's approach is primarily targeted toward young people, seeking to deal with the disturbing statistics regarding the violation of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights among adolescents. Further, CSE's approach to sexuality seeks to move beyond traditional approaches that are viewed as moralistic so as to foster more comprehensive approaches, that are primarily centered on human rights. The uniqueness of this article is in situating the CSE discussion at the policy level in Kenya and analyzing its ethical foundations through theological reflection on key New Testament passages.

Sexual ethics can be approached from various perspectives. The first is the natural law ethics which focuses the conversation on sexuality on natural order (Salzman and Lawler 2012, 2). This approach is popular in the Roman Catholic tradition and draws on the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas in its application to sexuality. Natural law sexual ethics are also based on Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. This approach does not rely explicitly on revelation but values the place of human reasoning to determine what is "natural, good and conducive to human flourishing" (Piderit 2011, xxiv). Written in the heyday of the sexual revolution, *Humanae Vitae* has stood as a theological testament to the beauty, truth, and goodness of sexuality within the bounds of God's natural revelation in light of contemporary issues in sexual ethics such as abortion, contraceptive pills, and other issues (Pope Paul VI and Eberstadt 2014, iv).

A second approach can be called evangelical sexual ethics. Now the term *evangelical*[1] has received several critiques due to its undue alliance with republican politics in the Trump era, and its silence in the face of racial injustice in, for example, America and South Africa. That said, *evangelical*, as championed by Christian ethicists, seeks to explore the biblical ramifications of sexuality, especially in its direct connection to moral living (Grenz 1997, 2). This approach views sexuality as part of God's good creation, following the arguments of the New Testament against Gnostics and upheld by the Church Fathers (Grenz 1997, 3). While reason, tradition, and the sciences are important in ethical reflection, evangelical sexual ethics views the Scripture as the normative standard for sexual ethics (Davis 2015, 3). Another way to conceive of this approach is to speak of ethics that begins with "the Lordship of the God of the Bible," which Frame (2008, 41) argues is what differentiates Christian ethics and non-Christian ethics. This study appreciates the place of natural law, particularly in its deconstruction of the shaky ground on which postmodern and relativistic ethics is founded. However, it also seeks to reflect briefly on some key passages in the biblical text and their relevance for sexual ethics in light of the CSE dialogue.[2]

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1 The term *evangelical* can be used as a system of interpretation of Christian life and doctrine, or as a social and religious grouping. As a system, Bebbington quadrilaterally observes that an evangelical emphasis is one that is bibliocentric, christocentric, conversionist, and transformationist. For more on this, see Bebbington (2015, 87–96). As a social and religious grouping, evangelical refers to a fundamentalistic approach to religion as well as racial and political alignments, particularly within the Northern American context.

2 For a thorough exegetical treatment of the Bible and homosexual practices, see Gagnon (2002).

3.1 New Testament sexual ethics in light of CSE

3.1.1 Gender complementarity (Matthew 19:4–6)

The New Testament corpus assumes gender complementarity. Jesus's teaching on divorce is predicated in his view of human gender as either male or female. In this passage, Jesus Christ is quoting directly from Genesis (1:27; 2:18, 21–23). These passages argue that gender is given by God, which is a contrast to the sexual ethics of CSE whereby gender is diverse, and it is up to an individual to choose which gender they identify as. While Jesus Christ is teaching about divorce, he assumes that sexual intimacy is more than mere physical expression, and that it has lasting significance within the marital context.

This concept of gender complementarity is extended by Paul in his exposition of sexual ethics in 1 Corinthians 5–7. Mutuality in marital sex is premised on sexual expression between a husband and a wife (1 Cor 7:1–4). This passage expands on what we find in some of the patriarchal cultures that tended to view women as the property of the husband; a view still found in some African cultural contexts. In New Testament sexual ethics, male and female in the context of the marital union is a reflection of God's image in humans. Paul also uses the images of mother and father to explore pastoral approaches to discipleship as both caring and firm.

In Ephesians 5:22–33, marital union is again premised on gender complementarity and Paul even cites Jesus's teaching in Matthew 19:4–6 as well as its prior injunction at the start of Genesis. What this means is that young people need biblical and pastoral guidance on the gender discussion. While acknowledging gender minorities do exist, the teaching on gender complementarity should guide our engagement with them so that we point them to God's intended design for them that would lead to human flourishing. Pro-homosexual ethicists, rather than basing their arguments on Scripture, usually lean towards more emotive appeals. This therapeutic view of sexuality is something that has been addressed by various theologians who trace its roots back to the romantic era with its obsession with feelings, as it was influenced by figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Trueman 2022, 2). In his fine analysis, Trueman (2022, 11) argues that the view that moral codes are oppressive can be traced back to Marx and Nietzsche. While feelings are part and parcel of human life, they must be interpreted and informed by God's wisdom.

3.1.2 Freedom or Scripture: Sexuality by which norms? (John 8:31–32)

The Church's response to LGBTQIA+ rights is often muddled by the political, social-cultural, psychological, and spiritual aspects of LGBTQIA+ realities. Acknowledging that sexual and gender minorities are created in the image of God offers us bridges to engage with them, and to seek their well-being. However, such a grace-centered approach should not ignore the truth. The truth is central to the concept of human rights and freedoms. Liberal sexual ethicists usually argue that conservative sexual ethics are backward. Liberal sexual ethicists challenge conservatives to widen their affirmation of sexual activity and gender identities to a level that is at odds with the Scriptures. However, by critiquing conservative sexual ethics as backward, they hold their own prescriptions on the discourse as the normative standard. Further, by making appeals to human rights and freedoms, they forget that such appeals are philosophically based on some objective standard on the sources of rights and freedoms. If sexual ethics is socially constructed, as the deontological ethicists argue, how can societies ever come to a settled agreement on what is constitutive of human rights?

By appealing to human rights, ethicists are implicitly assuming an objective moral standard. If so, the question remains, where does this standard come from? If reason, tradition, culture, and feelings are the sources, then what is clear is that they are not normative sources as they change over time due to the diversity of the human experience. The argument from moral law portends that our moral duties assume a moral law, and a moral law, assumes a moral-law Giver. This is the basis for normativity in ethical discussions such as this. In this discussion, the question is not whether ethical norms for sexuality are there, the question is, What are their sources?

The view of this article is that the characteristics of Scripture qualify it to be an ultimate norm for ethics: for it is unchanging, supra-cultural, timeless, corresponding to reality, and leading to ultimate transformation, from the inside out. In John 8:31–32, as in the entire Johannine corpus, the gospel writer assumes that objective truth exists, that truth is embodied in the person of Jesus, and that truth brings transformation. According to Jesus, freedom is not living as people wish, but it is living in light of God's good design for humanity. For the context of this study, it is living in light of God's design for gender and sexuality. In fact, people's continued practice of sexual sin reveals that they have not experienced the freedom that is found in Jesus and remain in slavery (John 8:34).

3.1.3 Sexual sin and true sexual healing (Romans 1:18–32, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11)

CSE seeks to delink sexuality from ethical norms, an exercise that is self-defeating because CSE seeks to proscribe different sexual ethics. This article argues that sexuality education cannot avoid ethical discussion because it is inherently ethical in nature. The secularization of sexual ethics does not take the existence of sin into consideration. In the Bible, sin is understood as missing the mark or falling short of God's glory. Sin is not only found in sinful acts but also pervades humanity because of our sinful nature which we inherited from Adam through original sin.

The outworking of sin is seen in practices that are antithetical to God's Law, which is normative for human life and behavior, as has been argued. Whereas emotive appeals are made concerning how we should understand homosexuality, the biblical witness categorizes homosexuality as a sin. Romans 1:18–32 argues that homosexual desires and acts are not natural but rather describes them as "dishonorable passions" (v. 26 ESV) and "shameful acts" (v. 27 ESV). The presupposition of this passage is that if people move away from God's truth they end up in ethical confusion regarding sexuality. In this passage, homosexual acts are said to attract "the due penalty for their error" (v. 27 ESV).

Pro-homosexual ethicists would read texts such as Romans 1:18–32 and 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 as speaking of homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman context of pederasty or rape. Such critiques argue that consensual sexual relationships between two people of the same gender should be viewed as a normal romantic relationship. In fact, Gnuse (2015, 85), argues that refuting homosexual practice using the Bible is similar to how the Bible was used to justify slavery. Two quick responses could be offered. First, these biblical texts prohibit not only consensual homosexual expression but also sexual expression outside the bounds of the marital covenant. Secondly, conflating slavery with homosexuality is a false equivalence because homosexuality is a moral issue while racism is an ethnic issue.

The apostle Peter also interprets homosexual acts in the time of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah as abhorrent. It attracted God's judgment because "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the

unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2 Pet 2:9–10a ESV). Paul lumps homosexuality together with the sins of fornication (heterosexual sin before marriage) and adultery (sexual activity with someone other than one's spouse) (1 Cor 6:9–11). Those who continue in these lifestyles "will [not] inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:10 ESV). The issue therefore is not that the Bible is committing violence against homosexuals, but rather that the Bible proscribes ethical norms for both homosexuals and heterosexuals. The books of the New Testament have a unanimous voice on this issue.

However, while the teaching of sin is one that humbles or even reveals the nakedness of humanity, the message of the gospel provides clothing that dignifies all who are in the trenches of sexual sin. Paul continues to say "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11 ESV). For Paul, there is hope for homosexual and heterosexual sin. The New Testament scholar Leon Morris (1990, 94) offers the following exegetical insight on this verse.

> The prefix *apo* points to the complete washing 'away' of sins. The tense is past, the aorist referring to one decisive action. You were sanctified is in the same tense and will here indicate God's act in setting them apart to be his. You were justified is another aorist; it looks back to the time when they were accepted as just before God. It is a legal term used of acquittal, 'reckon as righteous', 'declare righteous', 'acquit'. Paul uses it here as an act of God, whereby on the basis of Christ's atoning death, he declares believers to be just, and accepts them as his own.

Herein lies the hope of the gospel as the power for transformation. Contrary to the claim of CSE, genuine transformation will not come from neutral ethical foundations but rather from ethical foundations that align with God's design and an accompanying spiritual power to live in line with those foundations.

4. Practical Theological Reflections

4.1 The role of public theology in sexuality education

Public Theology is a discipline that engages with various public spheres including the church, society, and the academy. It is therefore necessary for Public Theology to engage in sexual ethics as it seeks to explore the common good of society (Smit 2007, 25). This research reveals the significance of Public Theology as a mediating conversation partner between diverse disciplines, in this case, public policy and Biblical Theology. Theology that is grounded in the authority of the Scriptures must also be grounded in its application in every sphere of life. In an age where sexuality takes center stage in public life, Christians often feel inadequate and sometimes scared of engaging with public issues. The nature of sexuality, this study reveals, is not only a public issue but also a sensitive issue. This is so because of its cultural, political, and spiritual nature. Yet, Christians must not be mute on it, but must thoughtfully, graciously, compassionately, and boldly speak to such an issue, because the Scriptures have a lot to say, as this study has shown, when it comes to sexuality. They comment on its nature as a created reality, its significance for human and married life, its place in the family, and its role as a means of safeguarding future generations who belong to God's covenant people.

Such an approach that seeks to impress ethical values from God's wisdom must do so intergenerationally but also through discipleship relationships (Chiroma 2020, 360).

4.2 Pastoral care approaches in youth and family ministries

The writing of this article coincided with two relevant occurrences: The first is the Church of England voting for the blessing of same-sex couples and the second is the Supreme Court ruling in Kenya allowing for the legal incorporation of an LGBTQIA+ organization. These two issues have generated significant debate within my Kenyan context. I teach in an ecumenical institution, that has a significant Anglican demographic. The Anglican Church of Kenya gave a statement in the week of February 13, 2023, denouncing the verdict from the "mother" church (Muia 2023). Shortly afterward, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa followed closely with a similarly worded statement against the blessing of homosexual couples (KIRK TV 2023). It is a sign of the lines that are drawn when it comes to the contentious issues of sexuality, even while these two churches remain pastorally open to walk alongside those who identify differently.

On the second issue, it draws attention to the often-thin line between church and state. While the state has the authority to pass laws that touch on its citizens, the church has a role in keeping the state accountable. Many have also argued whether or not Kenya is a Christian or a secular state. If we define it as the former, then the church's response to the matter is understandable. In fact, many church denominations have offered press statements, calling for the state to repeal its ruling. If we define Kenya as a secular state, then how do Christians navigate the gender and sexuality discussion within a space in which all views must be acknowledged? In this section, I hope to move beyond the ethical standing, which I have argued for, to the practical implications this has on pastoral care within our youth and family ministry contexts.

This study notes the integrative nature of sexuality as Balswick and Balswick (2008, 29) have observed that it is informed by divine mandate and shaped by sociocultural, genetic, and biological factors. However, it now explores the role of pastoral caregivers, both ordained ministers and lay ministers, in sexual ethical teaching within the ecclesial and family context. The topic of sexuality is a sensitive issue. While churches in the Global South may hold conservative views—which is good—the way they approach the discussion and practice in dealing with sexual diversities is often harsh. A pastoral care approach is therefore significant because it moves beyond our knowledge of facts to how we apply wisdom in real-life situations (Patton 2005, 7).

Rather than relegating the duty of sexuality education to the state, the church must recover its role in sexual education. This is especially the case because the church has the wisdom of God as its guide. This is not to say that there is no wisdom outside the church. If, as we hold, sex is given as a gift from God for the well-being of society, we must move beyond viewing sex as a taboo topic and address it with pastoral sensitivity, wisdom, beauty, and truth. While sex and sexuality education has been viewed negatively within the church, we must recover the sexual ethics in the Bible and teach them to the next generations. The negativity of sex and sexual education in the church is correlated with the influence of stoicism in the Greco-Roman context of the early church. In stoicism, human beings muffle their emotional life so as to control their bodies. Dominian (2001, 1–6) looks at how the Early Church Fathers exhibited a negative attitude towards sex. For instance, Tertullian proclaimed that "continence brings down the gift of

the spirit," Origen viewed sex as a temporal activity and went to the extent of castrating himself, and Chrysostom viewed marriage as a mere necessity of the fall (Dominian 2001, 5). These views have cast a long shadow on the way we approach pastoral care and sexual education among young people.

5. Conclusion

This research proposes the need to ground sexual ethics within a biblical framework. Capitulating to the popular view on sexuality, even to please the next generation, is wooing them to the world. While Canales (2022, 82) proposes pastoral care approaches to LGBTQIA+ persons based on the *imago Dei*, his argument that conservative sexual ethics is retrogressive as an "older paradigm for myopic interpretations" and "needs to catch up with the science" may be an example of the former argument of surrendering to popular culture. Perhaps a more grounded pastoral care approach would be to respect the human dignity of all persons, even those whose biological desires do not align with God's intended design, while honoring the sacredness of human sexuality, and how it should be expressed, as Bongmba (2007, 50) argues in his study on the Church and HIV/AIDS. This supports the larger argument of this study, that sexuality education and approaches to pastoral care in a complex world must be grounded within biblical ethics. Such biblical ethics takes the whole Scripture as God's word and carefully pays attention to the systematic exploration of sexuality rather than reading culture into Scripture.

Secondly, pastoral care for those who struggle with sexual sin needs to be sensitive. Sexual sin encompasses not only same-sex attraction and intercourse, but also adultery, pornography, and masturbation. Pastoral care portends a gracious approach that seeks to heal and redeem human persons who are in sin or who are facing struggles with their sexuality. Sensitivity is needed because, while we offer grace to people facing other types of struggles in the Christian life, we are not as gracious to those struggling with sexual sin. In some cases, sexual sin is erroneously treated as the unpardonable sin. The sexual ethics in Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a helpful basis for those pastoring young people in a sexual age. He proclaimed that the gospel is powerful enough to transform all people caught up in sexual sin and struggle (1 Cor 6:9–11).

Lastly, sexual education should form part of youth and family ministries. Church leaders working with families and young people within an African context must note the liberal tendencies that seek to unhinge sexuality from its ethical perspective. They should also be conversant with the emerging sexualities and unpack a holistic biblical theology of sexuality, noting its nature as a gift, its idolization, its purpose, as well as its significance as a pointer to the ultimate communion we have with God. This can be applied within pastoral ministry settings such as pre-marital counseling, teaching and preaching ministries, as well as in one-on-one counseling sessions.

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Drawing on the Collective Wisdom of the Past to Develop a Transformative, Scripture-Infused Eco-Theology for Land Use in Africa[1]

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Abstract

How can eco-theology impact people, communities, countries, and continents? Two things are necessary. First, a thorough engagement with the beliefs, attitudes, and actions, both past and present, that make up a community's interactions with each other and with their environment. Secondly, an examination of these beliefs, attitudes, and actions in the light of Scripture. All aspects of land use should be considered as related and interconnected, whether farming, herding, fishing, hunting, tree cutting, tree planting, or mining. Engaging with traditional and current beliefs and practices in the local language in the light of Scripture helps churches and communities to consider local environmental degradation, celebrate local wisdom, and release community members to move forward with hope as they seek to make positive changes in every aspect of land use in their communities and beyond. This article laments the widespread environmental degradation in Africa but celebrates indigenous wisdom about the environment. It draws hope that the spiritual connections to nature and Scripture in the local language can inform a Scripture-infused eco-theology which will enable communities to flourish. Inspired by experiences of the Faith and Farming program in Nigeria and beyond, it concludes with eight practical steps that communities can take to help them move forward with hope.

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SATS

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

Many African adults lament the rapid degradation of the environment in their communities. Hauwa Madi (2022, 733) describes her shock at experiencing sandstorms for the first time in her village when she visited in 2021. Previously unheard of in her area of Adamawa, Northern Nigeria, these sandstorms are now a common experience, attributed by older people in the area to the indiscriminate felling of trees. Madi says "It was distressing to see the flat, treeless view across the village where once there had been a forest of trees." Their loss has also contributed to excessive heat, lack of shade, and air pollution which she describes as leaving one feeling suffocated (73).

Another example comes from Senegal. The Bible translator François Bagne Ndione has lived all his life in the village of Fandène, just outside Thiès. Now in his sixties, Bagne remembers playing as a child in the river at the edge of his village. However, when crossing the bridge into the village, it is clear that the river has now gone and only a dried riverbed remains (François Bagne Ndione, personal communication, December 10, 2022).

This is the reality across Africa. According to Attfield (2020, 283) Ethiopian farmers struggling with changing weather patterns, Nigerian coastal fishermen's work is affected by water pollution caused by oil extraction, and droughts are aggravating bushfires, soil quality is declining, and biodiversity is being lost.

As Christians, we serve a Creator God who delights in his creation. In Genesis, we read that "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31).[2] However, in many places today the environment in Africa is struggling, and so are the people. The environment is not experienced as very *good* but rather very *difficult*.

In his Faith and Farming presentations, Yunana Malgwi (2023a, 2023b) looks at the loss of connection with indigenous wisdom in regard to the local environment and how Scripture in the local language can inform how we engage with the environment. This article suggests practical ways to restore that connection and develop a Scripture-infused eco-theology. *Infusion* suggests a slow and complete permeating of one thing into another, hence this phrase suggests that all of Scripture is allowed to permeate the whole of a local eco-theology. This would transform it from, for example, an African Traditional Religion-based eco-theology to a Scripture-based eco-theology while maintaining the traditional local environmental wisdom. The paper will draw on academic research and personal correspondence from conversations and practical engagement with farmers and other land users in Africa.

2. Spiritual Connections to Nature

Traditional African cultures hold vast amounts of wisdom regarding the environment. "Centuries of co-existence with ecosystems has resulted in some of the richest collective memories on patterns and behavior of biological resources and environmental changes" (Bardy, Rubens, and Azupogo 2018, 8). In former times, one generation passed on to the next the skills and awareness needed to care for the land around them that had sustained them for generations. People used to know each tree and plant, where and when to get them, and how to use them for medicine, thatching, cooking, or other purposes. They knew each animal, bird, and insect in their environment, their names, and their habits. They knew when the season for hunting or fishing was and to leave the animals and fish to breed to ensure plenty of food every year (Malgwi 2022).

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2 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations come from the NIV.

This wisdom was not just at the visible level, but also connected with the spiritual level. Each African community had traditional spiritual leaders who engaged with nature at a spiritual level, performing rituals to ensure, for example, good rainfalls, hunting success, and fertile soil. In his M.Th. thesis, Godwin Yahaya (2018, 54) mentions ten such traditional officers among his Bwatiye people in North-East Nigeria. These range from the *Nzofame*, the minister for rain, who took care of the *mosuto* (the sacred rain pot) and its shrine, to the *Nzokakei Bemti* who was in charge of the hunting grounds and associated rituals.

As Lyn White (1967, 1205) puts it, "In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men … before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation and to keep it placated." Much of the environmental degradation that we see across Africa today is spreading rapidly due to increased pressure on the land from growing populations, the widespread use of chemicals for farming, and international commercial enterprises such as logging (Mansourian and Berrahmouni 2021,14). The disconnection between spirituality and nature also contributes to this situation. There are many challenges to contextualizing Christianity in local contexts. Traditional ways of engaging with the environment are often condemned as anti-Christian for various reasons. For example, festivals involving the environment may include elements not condoned in the Bible such as drunkenness, libations to gods, or sacrifices to ancestors (Hill and Hill 2008, 79).

Inadequate Bible teaching has often encouraged people to use their "freedom in Christ" to exploit the environment. For example, people may feel that now that they are Christians, they can cut down ancient sacred forests that were formerly protected by taboos or rules of the local religion.

Moreover, they may feel they no longer need to obey traditional hunting restrictions but can hunt at any time of the year since "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). This is just one of many such misapplications of Scripture. These kinds of activities can lead to severe environmental destruction at a rapid pace if the indigenous environmental wisdom is not respected after someone's spiritual allegiance changes (Hopkins 2018, 4).

Hopkins (2018, 2) describes the destruction of the Bwatiye land in North-East Nigeria as people moved away from the traditional cultural practices towards a form of Christianity that did not connect well with nature:

> Discerning such spiritual significance in nature, traditional culture built sustainability into its approach to the land, the water and the resources sustained by them. There were rules against destructive practices, such as bush burning and harvesting fish before they were mature, and officers in place to police these rules. A combination of mulching and leaving land fallow maintained the fertility of farmland naturally…. Christianity sacrificed rather than reinterpreting [*sic*] the spirituality of nature; it also fatally weakened the communal structures of society which had held the key to sustainable living…. The results have been dire. Natural vegetation—large trees, bush, grassland, fringing vegetation of lakes—has been destroyed along with the animals these habitats harboured: with this biodiversity has been hit hard, including species that had once been useful. Soil is impoverished, ponds overfished, grassland overgrazed: yields are not what they used to be. (Hopkins 2018, 2)

There are some well-known and inspiring examples of churches integrating care for the environment as carefully as local traditional religions, such as the Church Forests of Ethiopia. Here, the Orthodox churches are surrounded by remnants of the once prolific Afromontane Forest that is for the most part completely destroyed beyond the church compounds. The priests consider the caring for and preservation of the forest as part of their daily worship, so the forest is protected, leaving green oases that starkly contrast the over-farmed and over-grazed deforested surrounding landscape, captured from the air by author-photographer Kieran Dodds (2021; See also Bongers et al. 2006).

Western Christianity is also going through an eco-theological reawakening as the church of today considers its responsibility to care for God's earth. There has been rapidly growing interest in the A Rocha UK project, Eco Church. It has around 3,000 registered churches in the UK and is spreading to France and New Zealand as well (A Rocha, n.d.). Denmark has its own *Grøn Kirke* (Green Church) award scheme (*Grøn Kirke*, n.d.). Both of these examples are multi-denominational projects, but individual denominations are speaking out and taking action on environmental issues as well. The Church of England's website states that:

> As of the end of 2022, there are 1,155 Bronze, 401 Silver, and 23 Gold Church of England Eco Churches, and our first two gold cathedrals; Salisbury and Chelmsford. The [Eco Church] scheme is a fantastic resource for encouraging churches, cathedrals, and dioceses to embody the fifth mark of mission. (The Church of England, n.d.)

The fifth mark of mission is "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth" (Anglican Communion, n.d.). In 2021, Pope Francis launched a seven-year *Laudato Si'* action plan to encourage environmental sustainability across the areas of influence of the church (Mares, 2021).

African Christianity is also ripe for a similar eco-theological reawakening. Fortunately, since there is such a deep and recent connection between nature and spirituality in Africa, there is great hope for a re-connection. This can be affected by using Scripture in the local language as our source for the spiritual foundation, and local wisdom that has sustained generations on the land as our source on sustainable land use.

3. Putting All Things to the Test, Keeping What is Good, and Avoiding What is Evil

The reality is that many, if not all, African communities already have an eco-theology, albeit in the context of traditional religion. In order to develop a Scripture-infused eco-theology, churches and communities must make a full examination of the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that make up a community's interactions with one another and with the environment. Both those patterns that existed in the past and those that continue up to the present day should be considered. Then a biblical process of discernment should be followed. Such a process can help believers to "Put all things to the test: keep what is good and avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thess 5:21–22 GNB).

An exercise often employed in Faith and Farming[3] workshops or Bible college classes to aid in this process of discernment is to consider a list of

[3] Faith and Farming is a Scripture use program founded in 2017 by SIL Nigeria that enables farmers, herders, and other land users to appreciate the dignity of their work as they act as stewards and caretakers of God's creation. They learn from Scripture how to grow in the knowledge of their Creator as they discuss, remember, and value their local, traditional, ecologically sound agricultural and environmental practices. For more information, see https://sites.google.com/sil.org/faith-and-farming.

the elements of a particular traditional event. For example, on a large piece of paper or board with Fishing Festival written at the top, participants note various activities pertaining to this traditional celebration. They will usually offer suggestions such as the calling of the festival at a specific time of year (e.g., after the rains); fishing; swimming races; boat races; drinking of local alcoholic brew, often leading to drunkenness; demonstration of local crafts such as nets and fishing baskets; traditional dress; libations to river gods; eating fish and other food together; singing and dancing.[4] This discussion is best done in the local language that people use for these events so that the ideas and terminology can flow easily. Once the list is finished, it can be examined in the light of Scripture in the local language, and the activities which are permitted in the Bible separated from those that are not, so that a biblically sound yet genuinely local fishing festival can be developed.

Activities condemned by Scripture	Biblical parallels
Libations to river gods.	King David declares the wrongness of pouring out libations to false gods (Ps 16:4).
Drunkenness.	The debauchery and carousing associated with drunkenness is prohibited (Rom 13:13, Eph 5:18).

The lyrics of some songs may not be in line with Scripture (e.g., those in praise of local gods).	Scripture forbids having and worshipping other gods apart from God (Exod 20:3, Ps 81:9).

Activities not condemned by Scripture	Biblical parallels
Calling of the festival at a specific time of year (e.g., after the rains).	The birds of the air are praised for doing things in the right season (Jer 8:7).
Fishing.	Jesus affirmed fishing and fishermen many times in Scripture. For example, in Mark 1:16–17, he used fishing as an illustration of evangelism (fishers of men).
Swimming and boat races.	The concept of racing is affirmed several times in Scripture when Paul uses a good race as an analogy for keeping the faith (e.g., Gal 5:7, 2 Tim 4:7).

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4 Activities expanded from Hill and Hill (2008, 83).

Demonstration of local crafts and dress.	Traditional skills are affirmed in Scripture as craftsmen are often called upon in the Bible to do special work for the Lord, like making priestly garments (e.g., Exod 28:3) or constructing the Tabernacle (Exod 36:1).
Drinking of local alcoholic brew.[5]	Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1–11) and Paul encourages taking a little wine to help the stomach (1 Tim 5:23).
Eating fish and other food together.	There are many examples in Scripture of Jesus eating meals with people, like in John 21:10–12, when they eat bread with fish that the disciples had just caught.
Singing and Dancing.	The Psalms often encourage us to sing and dance to the Lord (e.g., Ps 149:3).

This exercise highlights the fact that although a local festival may be grounded in traditional religion, many of its elements are in fact not forbidden by the Bible, and more than that, can be found in the Bible. The local ecological wisdom is also highlighted in calling the festival at the time of year when the fish are plentiful and have finished the breeding season. This way fish stocks can multiply so there are fish available to eat for the next year and beyond. Furthermore, the use of traditional fishing nets and baskets is an age-old method of fishing for larger fish while letting smaller fish swim free to grow and multiply. This is in stark contrast to modern methods of fishing which are prevalent in Africa today. Inoussa Maiga (2018) reports how "the use of Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), carbide, dynamite and light for fishing have become attractive to fishermen as a means to meet market demands." This kills all the fish, regardless of size, vastly reducing the breeding stock for subsequent years and generations.

Using a discussion method such as the one described above can contribute to the contextualization of Christianity in an area. Over time, as each aspect of the culture is considered in the light of local language Scripture, a Scripture-infused eco-theology will gradually develop that is relevant to the language, culture, and environment of that particular location. This process of "discerning what is best" (Phil 1:10) reveals that traditional cultures often contain much that is biblically and ecologically sound that we can embrace and celebrate.

However, Christians need to identify and consider what to do with non-Scriptural practices and find Scripture-based solutions (known as *functional substitutes*) to replace them. This will help to avoid the practice of syncretism, where people blend Christianity with non-biblical practices. Bauer (2007, 1) defines these functional substitutes as "Biblically appropriate replacements for cultural ceremonies, customs, celebrations, and procedures that replace the pre-Christian practices in order to avoid creating a cultural void or cultural vacuum." For example, at the beginning of the farming season, many farmers go to the local shrine to bring offerings

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5 This point can be contentious as some church denominations ban the drinking of alcohol while others point out that it is drunkenness that is forbidden in Scripture, rather than the use of alcohol itself.

of tools, seeds, animal sacrifices, and so forth as petitions for a blessing on their land, the work, and the harvest. Tabona Shoko (2007, 37) describes the rain rituals among the Karanga people of Zimbabwe involving the sacred priest cutting his hair and wearing special clothes. Local people are also involved in the brewing of local beer for the ceremony (Shoko 2022, 29).

Rather than just condemning these practices, Christian leaders can have confidence that Scripture can speak into every situation in life (2 Tim 3:16–17). They need to understand why people are doing these traditional rituals and they need to provide biblically appropriate alternatives. They will likely find out that farmers feel at the mercy of nature as they work and would like spiritual help to overcome the challenges that they see as being outside of their control (e.g., drought, pests, insecurity, injury). It may also become apparent that, in contrast to the church where services and prayers are often conducted in a language of wider communication, the prayers and libations offered at the shrine are in the farmer's language.

In response, churches can organize prayers of blessings on tools and seeds in the farmer's language at the beginning of the rainy season as a biblical substitute for visits to the shrine. Similar research and responses can be designed for every element of land use, whether fishing, mining, tree cutting, or another activity, to form a holistic Scripture-infused eco-theology that addresses each interaction between the members of the community and the environment.[6]

4. The Importance of Local Language

This aspect of using the local language for cultural engagement is of vital importance. In their study on the interconnectedness between language diversity and species diversity, Gorenflo et al. (2012, 8037) conclude:

> Adopting a shared framework for integrating biological and linguistic conservation goals will facilitate monitoring the status of species and languages at the same time as it may lead to better understanding of how humans interact with ecosystems. Indeed, it may be impossible to achieve large-scale conservation of species and the ecosystems that contain them without incorporating resident languages and the cultures they represent into biodiversity conservation strategies.

Traditional information concerning the environment was and is communicated in the local language. Elsadig Omda is a highly educated Sudanese man who speaks excellent Arabic and English and who is studying for his Ph.D. in Germany. During a field trip to the River Nile in February 2023, Mr. Omda was asked in English which birds made the round nests hanging from the trees by the river. Although he is skilled in many languages, Mr. Omda shared that he only knew this particular word in the language he spoke growing up in Sudan, that is, Beria (Zaghawa), a Saharan language spoken in Sudan and Chad. For him, the name of the bird was '*oreoreda*' [ɔrɛɔrɛda] (a weaver bird) (Elsadig Omda, personal communication, February 9, 2023).[7] This illustrates the need to engage

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[6] Prayers of Blessing for Tools and Seeds, as well as many other relevant resources can be found in Norton and Malgwi (2022, 110). I am grateful to my colleague Yunana Malgwi and other farmers for sharing stories with me about this aspect of farming life since I did not grow up experiencing this as they did.

[7] My thanks go to Elsadig Omda for letting me use this helpful illustration. He adds that the word *oreoreda* [ɔrɛɔrɛda] is composed of the lexical morpheme (also known as meaning carrier in linguistics) *ore*, meaning hanging, dangling, or floating, plus *-da*, meaning nominalizer. Neither the repeated part *ore* nor *da* can stand alone but the whole combination can be conceived as "the hanging."

with people on environmental issues in the language that they use as they engage with their environment because the informal education in the local context has taken place in the local language.

This is in stark contrast to most formal educational contexts such as kindergartens, schools, and universities which often do not take place in the local language but rather in a language of wider communication such as English, French, or Swahili. Automatically, the language of instruction creates a disconnect between the information taught and the local context. Furthermore, the information taught may not connect with the local environment. The hours spent in the classroom often do not relate to the experiences of the day-to-day life of the students playing in the bush, hunting, fishing, and farming. Tragically, school-based formal education is regularly valued over locally-learned informal indigenous wisdom. "Traditional knowledge and value patterns in relation to ecology and human life have always been intrinsically engrained in the lives of indigenous people. They have, however, not always been met with an open-mind by developed nations" (Bardy, Rubens, and Azupogo 2018, 8). This disconnect between indigenous knowledge and formal education often leads to a disengagement with precious knowledge of local languages, flora and fauna, and sustainable ways of interacting with the environment (Malgwi 2022).

Furthermore, the lack of Scripture or Scripture use in the local language can lead to disengagement between this local environmental knowledge and the daily outworking of faith. Local people may therefore revert to or continue with solutions from traditional religions to solve environmental challenges since these operate in the local language that they use as they engage with the environment. Without Scripture in the local language, there is no opportunity to understand fully what Scripture says about godly stewardship of the environment (Malgwi 2022).

In most contexts, church services are conducted in a language of wider communication rather than in the language that people use as they engage with their environment, thus obscuring that with which they are familiar. This is despite the fact that there are copious references to engaging with the natural environment in Scripture. For example, in Job 28 we are urged to seek wisdom as earnestly as a miner seeks treasures in the earth. Psalm 23 reminds us that the Lord is our Shepherd. Jesus used the birds of the air and the flowers of the field in his teaching (Matt 6:26, 28). James urges us to be patient like a farmer as we wait for the Lord's return (Jas 5:7–8). These kinds of Bible passages should be easily understandable to local people who engage with their environment in activities such as farming, herding, or mining. Yet, the lack of Scripture in the local language creates a disconnect between the day-to-day work engaging with the environment and the mention of these environmental features in the Bible. As Yunana Malgwi (2022) puts it: "Farmers risk becoming foreigners to the Scriptures and the church if the Scripture is not translated into the language through which they understand farming."

5. The Role of the Church

The church has a vital role to play in developing a Scripture-infused eco-theology for a community. The majority of people in African churches are land users such as farmers, herders, fisherfolk, hunters, and miners. These are the people who are out in the environment every day, changing it (for better or for worse) with their work. However, these occupations and the related environmental issues are rarely addressed in church. For example, many farmers complain that the only time they hear farming mentioned in church is at harvest time when they are asked to bring a tenth of their harvest as a tithe offering (Norton and Malgwi 2022, 109). Therefore, it is vital that church leaders engage with the activities of land users in their

teaching and preaching. This will help their congregants to apply Scripture to the whole of their life and it will help communities to develop a Scripture-based eco-theology.

A pastor will need more than a superficial understanding of the issues at hand. He can preach against a certain activity, such as excessive tree cutting, but if he does not address the underlying attitude, the preaching will be in vain. He needs to research the reason why people are cutting trees and what is driving them to do so. Usually, it is simply for survival (e.g., the search for fuel for cooking food), which is combined with a lack of spiritual connection with the environment. In the past, trees may have been plentiful, so cutting them freely did not seem to be an issue. However, as populations grow, the demand for wood for activities such as cooking, building, and furniture increases. Demand tends to outstrip supply.[8] Even if trees are planted as fast as they are leveled, which they rarely are, they cannot grow fast enough to replace the trees that are cut down. Therefore, a pastor can talk from the Bible about the importance of trees, the significance of trees in Scripture, and investigate local practical solutions for cooking options that reduce fuel.[9]

Churches also have a vital role to play in teaching the Bible in the language that people understand best. There are many challenges with this. Scripture in the local language may not be available. There may be many local languages represented in the church. The pastor may not speak the local language if he has been posted from a different area or he may have forgotten the language due to years spent away studying. These and other issues can lead to churches settling on a language of wider communication, which may be helpful in some respects, but ultimately will lead to a situation where many people understand something of the Bible but very few understand it well. The emphasis in a church must be good Bible teaching in the language that people understand best so that everyone can understand and apply the richness of God's word in every aspect of their day-to-day life.

6. Recommendations for Hope on the Way Forward

1) It is vital to acknowledge that humanity is intrinsically connected to nature. It is the environment that provides food to eat, water to drink, and air to breathe. Although there are differing views on climate change or eschatology that impact individual perspectives on environmental action, the reality is that when the environment suffers the people who live in that environment also suffers. Weakened soils cannot produce daily food, polluted waterways cannot provide clean drinking water, and unclean air cannot maintain health.

2) Continual observation of our environment is also required to assess the state of the environment. This follows the biblical example of the Psalmist. For example, Psalm 8:3: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place." Psalm 104 is another example of observation, as the writer considers the hills, the trees, and the lakes, all providing a healthy flourishing habitat to sustain people and animals.

3) This observation may lead to concern about environmental issues and then personal responsibility is needed. Each community member must see what they can do about the pressing issues. For example, if there is plastic waste blowing on the streets, blocking ditches, or piling up in rubbish heaps, each individual should consider how they and their family are contributing towards this. For example, what happens to the plastic

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8 See "The Importance of Trees" in Norton and Malgwi (2022, 98).
9 For an example, see Creation Stewards International's (n.d.) fireless cookers.

brought to homes and neighborhoods every day from shops and markets, or the plastic rubbish generated by church hospitality events? Once communities have recognized their own contribution to this mess, they can move to confession, and then begin looking for solutions. Often African cultures have very appropriate local solutions to issues like this that should be highlighted and valued. For example, woven baskets can be carried to the market instead of collecting plastic bags that end up on the rubbish heap.

4) There is a need to read the Bible from a fresh perspective. An important aspect of forming a Scripture-infused eco-theology is noting Bible verses and passages about farming, herding, and other engagements with the environment during our regular Bible reading times. As one Gbari farmer in Nigeria put it: "I've been reading the Bible and preaching for many years, and I never noticed before that Noah was a farmer! (Gen 9:20) It's wonderful to read about so many farmers in the Bible. If you relate the gospel to someone's life work, they will understand it and accept it much better." When farmers and other land users see heroes of the faith in Scripture doing the same work that they do, it has a huge positive impact on their lives and how they feel about themselves and their work. It gives them pride and joy in their livelihood and a positive attitude towards creative problem-solving when the burden of negative perceptions is lifted. It gives them hope that the pattern of degeneration can be reversed.

5) In order to develop a Scripture-infused eco-theology for a particular environment, there is a need to value and appreciate each context. It is clear from Scripture that God is sovereign over our birth (Psalm 139:13). This affirms the location and culture that each person is born in. We also know from Revelation 7:9 that every language will be represented before the throne of God when worshipping the Lamb. This reminds us of the value of each context and language. No culture or language can be considered inferior; each is valuable and worthy of attention.

6) The use of local language Scripture in church activities should be intentionally encouraged and supported. Each church leadership team should know which local languages are represented in the congregation. Local-language Bibles need to be made available in hard or soft copy format for all members of the congregation, remembering that some members may prefer audio versions. In multi-lingual churches, a team of interpreters should be trained and available to interpret entire services, with two or three languages used each Sunday in turn. Midweek Bible study groups can be set up according to language so that anyone whose language was not used that particular Sunday has a chance to study the passage together with others in the language that they understand best so that everyone has the best opportunity to understand fully the richness of the whole Bible.

7) The training of pastors in Bible colleges should include guidance on how to reach out to the many farmers, herders, and other land users in their congregations and how they can relate the word of God to their day-to-day work in the local environment. This should include training pastors to use and encourage the use of local language Scripture, whether they speak the language of the area or not. Pastors should be trained in how to lead community discussions in the local language to help communities develop a Scripture-infused eco-theology that is relevant to their unique context.

8) School curriculums should include the use of local languages as well as connecting each subject with the local environment. Even if textbooks are from outside the community, teachers can be trained and encouraged to make connections where possible. For example, local languages can be used for greeting, morning prayer, and classroom commands. Traditional groups can come into school for music classes to teach songs and dances. Children can do nature walks with local traditional hunters (Malgwi and Norton 2023). During maths lessons, children can learn to count using local seeds or wild fruits. During science classes, children can learn the names

of local animals and how to identify the different parts both in their own language and in the language of instruction, if different. There are already Faith and Farming workshop participants across Africa looking at how they can include this kind of knowledge in school curriculums to help children connect with and value their local environmental knowledge.

7. Conclusion

Despite the many challenging environmental situations across the continent, traditional African wisdom and local language Scripture give reasons for hope. Firstly, valuing indigenous environmental knowledge highlights the pre-existing eco-theologies of African cultures. Secondly, Scripture in the local language is easily understood so it helps Christians to weigh that local wisdom alongside God's Word. This can enable the development of transformative, Scripture-infused eco-theologies to guide and inform sustainable and biblical engagement with each local environment.

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Deconstructing Transhumanism: A *Metanoia* from *Homo Deus* to *Homo Kenosus*[1]

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Abstract

A debate is raging between bioconservatives and bioprogressives regarding transhumanism and its potential for yielding *homo deus*. However, the bioconservatives leave unscathed the philosophical underpinnings of transhumanism. Transhumanism has grown out of the womb of the biomedical model, which is founded on a reductionistic method of Baconian pedigree, a body-mind dualism of Cartesian breed, and a technological imperative of the Promethean stripe. Thus, we need a *metanoiac* turn that counterbalances the excesses of the *active life* of the Baconian approach with a *contemplative life*, a stance of gratitude for the gift of creation. Furthermore, the denigrated body, put asunder from the favored mind, has to be re-valorized by affirming the incarnation and the bodily resurrection of Christ. Such a *metanoiac* reversal is possible if we turn toward Christ, who has equilibrated an active life with a contemplative life. Similarly, Christ's kenosis is a reversal of the gnostic disparagement of the Cartesian "extended body." Such a kenotic embrace of the incarnate life is vindicated by a bodily resurrection, which oppugns the cybernetic immortality envisioned by transhumanism. Moreover, the *logos* of technology implodes if it is not suspended by an ethos of kenotic service. Hence, the audacity of *homo deus* could be rectified by the ethic of the kenotic Christ, *homo kenosus par excellence*. After making introductory remarks on transhumanism and reviewing African engagements with it, I deploy Michel Foucault's genealogical method to deconstruct transhumanism. This is followed by a discussion on how the kenotic life of Christ could deconstruct the ethos of transhumanism.

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

One of the critical tasks of theology is to discern the signs of its contemporaneous age. After making such a discernment, the church is in a position to undertake the task of being a prophetic voice in a proactive manner. When we scrutinize our age, we note it is marked by an incessant and unprecedented encroachment of technology in our lives. Ted Peters, an American Lutheran theologian and Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics, calls for theologians to respond urgently to the challenge posed by technoscience before they become obsolete (2019, 97). The unharnessed growth of technology has moved from facilitating our routine tasks to altering the condition of humanity. The alteration of the human condition via technology is vigorously pursued by the movement of transhumanism. Max More, one of the founding architects of transhumanism, defines it as follows: "Transhumanism is a class of philosophies that seek to guide us towards a *posthuman* condition" (1990, 1; emphasis his). For More (1990, 1), such a posthuman condition entails that techno-scientific advances could radically alter the possibilities and the nature of our lives.

In this regard, the ultimate aim of transhumanism is to surpass the presumed weakness of humanity to attain a state of immortality by employing technology in its myriad forms (nanotechnology, genetic engineering, robotics, and artificial intelligence). The upshot of the process of transhumanism is a posthuman condition. This final outcome of transhumanism is often taken as a kind of *homo deus*, an upgraded form of humanity into immortal gods (Harari 2016, 66). Albeit no one downplays the role of technology in improving our lives and alleviating human suffering, the highly inflated confidence of transhumanism in considering technology as the ultimate savior from bodily weakness into immortality should not be left unchastised. N. T. Wright (2008, 82) posits that such an escape from embodiment into immortality could be considered a parody of the ultimate hope of Christians—bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:12–26). The resurrection of Jesus Christ functions as the springboard from which our worship and work in the world is ordered (Wright 2008, 259, 269).

Therefore, rather than taking a reactionary pose, the church should be proactive enough to raise the high-water mark of the hope of resurrection. In this regard, Peter Scott (1994, 185) argues that "across tragedy, across death, for the Christian there is the hope of continuity." This continuity is grounded firmly by resurrection, which is "a revolution in embodiment" (Scott 1994, 186). The sting of death, the ultimate enemy that transhumanism attempts to undo via technology, has been vanquished by the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:55). The staunch proponents of transhumanism like Ray Kurzweil are rendering a travesty of the truth of resurrection by resorting to technology in securing cybernetic immortality (radical life extension). According to Kurzweil (2005, 166), cybernetic immortality could be attained by "uploading the human brain." This is undertaken by "scanning all of its [the brain's] salient details and then reinstantiating those details into a suitably powerful computational substrate." In this manner, the whole of a person's personality, memory, skills, and history could be preserved (Kurzweil 2005, 166). Similarly, Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli professor of history, posits that we are witnessing an emerging religion called *Dataism*. In this religion, what is worshipped is data, whose flow is the foundation of the universe (Harari 2016, 978). Such a techno-religion assumes that the electronic and mathematical algorithms that run machines could be applied to explain biological mechanisms. In Dataism, the nature of life would be transformed through the embrace of biology and computer science (979–982).

Furthermore, Harari (2016, 65–66) states that the project to upgrade the current human condition into gods, or *homo deus*, is a continuation

of the success that *homo sapiens* have achieved in the struggle against starvation, disease, and violence. He opines that *homo sapiens* have saved humanity from abject misery. The contemporary project of *homo deus* takes the baton from "evolutionary humanism" which aimed at the creation of Hitler's "superhuman" by the use of selective breeding and ethnic cleansing. Harari contends that, *pace* Hitler's approach, this new project deploys genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and brain-computer interface in a peaceful manner. In this regard, Elaine Graham (2002, 66) argues that the *Übermensch* of Friedrich Nietzsche finds its culmination in transhumanism's vision of creating the posthuman or superman. Thus, transhumanism inherits the values of Enlightenment humanism. Even though engagements on the issue of transhumanism are predominantly found in the Western world, there are discussions by some African intellectuals on this issue. We now turn to these engagements.

2. African Perspectives of Transhumanism

As noted above, the emergence of transhumanism can be traced to the Western world. Since its emergence, it has attracted enormous attention from philosophers, scientists, theologians, and other intellectuals. However, there are only a few engagements from the African context. On the one hand, these discussions revolve around whether the ethos of transhumanism is congruent with African notions of personhood or communality. On the other hand, some writers attempt to engage transhumanism from the point of view of the technological needs of Africa. I will attempt to show some representative scholars who engaged with transhumanism with a focus on the African personhood or communal perspective, and from the angle of the technological necessities of the continent.

For instance, Ademola K. Fayemi (2018, 54) argues that the basic question that must be addressed regarding transhumanism is whether or not it is congruent with the African concept of personhood. More specifically, Fayemi uses the Yoruba concept of personhood to dialogue with transhumanism. In this regard, he asserts that the dynamic and capacity-enhancing features of transhumanism are consonant with facets of the metaphysical beliefs and values of personhood inherent in the Yoruba culture (70–71). He blends such a notion of personhood with non-evolutionary ontological values of personhood to propose an Afrofuturistic account of personhood. According to Fayemi (72), such an account counters a fixed and non-malleable notion of personhood that is exhibited by cultural essentialism. Thus, the Afrofuturistic rendering of personhood facilitates an optimistic prospectus for transhumanism in the African context (71). The Afrofuturistic studies that he envisages are given the task of integrating the African concept of personhood with "censored essentials" of transhumanism in such a way as to transform the African predicament (73).

Such an understanding of personhood is not left unchallenged. Amara E. Chimakonam (2021, 43) contends that the Afro-communitarian concept of personhood is incompatible with the ethos of transhumanism. This incompatibility casts doubt on the permissibility of transhumanism in Africa (53). Rather, Chimakonam (2021, 52) contends that the notion of personhood as explicated by Ifeanyi Menkiti's Afro-communitarian conception better explains the African context. Chimakonam notes that Menkiti's notion puts personhood as a thing to be acquired as one complies and performs the obligations and responsibilities of the community. In this regard, the "technologized personhood," which is the outcome of Fayemi's enhanced humanity, will be technologically engineered to conform to communal norms. This short-circuits the moral development

as elucidated by Menkiti's notion of personhood. Chimakonam (2021, 52) argues that Fayemi's technologized personhood eliminates the African value of striving to attain personhood.

On the other hand, Leo Igwe (2021, 89) is a scholar who argues from the perspective of the technological demands of the African continent. He laments that the discussions of transhumanism are oblivious to the technological life situation and context of Africa (89). He cites the colossal benefits of technological applications that could elevate the standard of living for Africans. The limitations of the living conditions could be drastically ameliorated via technological interventions. While the gains from technology in the African context are enormous, the debate around transhumanism lacks due consideration of the African situation (89). In order to tackle the problems of poverty, hunger, and diseases that burden the African continent, Igwe (2021, 92) posits that Africa should exploit the possibilities and potentials of emerging technologies. In this regard, a conservative approach that does not support the intervention of transhumanist technologies in the African context would only perpetuate the existing problems (92).

In the same vein, Igwe (2021, 92–93) propounds that the approach that Africa should follow is to design policies and programs that would facilitate the ethical use of emerging technologies. Such an approach would help to narrow the technological gap between Africa and the Western world. Rather than attempting to reconcile transhumanism with the African concept of personhood and notions of communality (like *ubuntu*) as pursued by Fayemi (2018) and Metz (2018), Igwe (2021, 90) suggests that African thinkers should propose a philosophy of "trans-ubuntu." This is because the nature of transhumanism is not based on an interest to align with traditions or validate classical humanism. Instead, the essence of transhumanism is driven by the desire "to transcend, or go beyond, previous or current ideological frameworks and worldviews" (Igwe 2021, 90).

As could be seen from the above discussion, Igwe's proposal to embrace transhumanism arises from the need to ameliorate existential predicaments that ravage the African continent. There is no question that emerging technologies would be of immense use to snatch Africa from the quagmire of poverty, hunger, and diseases. However, the technologies that exist in the Western world are not shared to the extent of elevating Africa from its present dire situation. It would be naïve to think that future and advanced technologies envisaged by transhumanism could be widely disseminated to developing countries. One needs only to consider the outcomes of the previous industrial revolutions to predict the future availability of advanced technologies in Africa. In this regard, Benyera (2021, 20) avers that the previous industrial revolutions and the current data (technological) revolution have not brought sustainable development, human rights improvement, and dignity to Africa. Transhumanism serves as the dominant ideology for this data revolution, or the Fourth Industrial Revolution, to advance the interests of multinational technological corporations like Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft (Giesen 2018, 189–203).

Similarly, Igwe's proposal to forge policies and programs that facilitate the dissemination of existing technologies is commendable. However, he seems to conflate existing technologies that could help Africa catch up with the rest of the developed world with the utopic and esoteric ambitions of transhumanism. It seems illusory to talk of acquiring advanced technologies of the order envisaged by transhumanism while Africa is prevented from sharing the existing technologies that could have enormously enhanced the standard of living for the people of Africa. Moreover, Igwe's proposal is focused only on the policies that facilitate the opening up of

the African continent to the deployment and development of existing technologies. He seems to neglect the role that Africa should play to exert pressure on the developed world to avail existing technologies that Africa needs at an affordable price.

In a similar vein, Igwe does not delineate how the policies and programs could develop the concept of "trans-ubuntu." Igwe has argued that transhumanism is driven by the ambition to transcend the humanism of the Western world, which exhibits features of individualism. However, he does not explicate what is meant by the transcendence of *ubuntu*, which is based on communal living. The virtual nature of the technologies of transhumanism has disembodied properties that do not rhyme with the values of *ubuntu*. In this regard, Graham (2006, 58) argues that the deprivation of face-to-face engagement in virtual reality can result in the degradation of communal life. Despite the advantage of facilitating communication via digital technologies, we could be lured to the illusory world of companionship that shuns the responsibilities of real friendship (Turkle 2011, 1). Hence, one could question whether there is conceptual congruence with the neologism of *trans-ubuntu*. This is because the ideals of transhumanism have grown on the soil of Enlightenment humanism which features individualism, while *ubuntu* is a relational notion that characterizes African communal living. While Igwe (2021, 90) disowns any effort to align the African conceptions of personhood or communality with transhumanism, he seems to commit what he discredits by merging *ubuntu* philosophy with transhumanism.

Overall, we can see that engagement with transhumanism from the African perspective is replete, on the one hand, with discussions about the concordance of African notions of personhood or communality with the ethos of transhumanism and, on the other hand, with the technological necessities of Africa. Such discussions are very important to delineate further engagements with transhumanism. However, such engagements betray a theological lacuna because considerations from theological perspectives are lacking. Furthermore, there is a haste in either reconciling or rejecting transhumanism before unearthing and critically reviewing its anthropological underpinnings in its own Western context. Hence, any discussion of transhumanism should proceed from digging at its Enlightenment roots. This can help us reach conclusions that will enable us to have sound and profound theological engagements with transhumanism. In this manner, we could go back in history to delineate the genealogical inklings of the ethos of transhumanism before making a theological response.

3. A Genealogy of Transhumanism

In order to deconstruct transhumanism, one needs to track its historical meanderings. To undertake this task, we can employ a genealogical method. According to Michel Foucault (1984, 81), this approach is a method of tracing the descents of complex courses of thought. This helps "to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion" in such a way as to recognize changes and deviations. Furthermore, a genealogical approach helps to locate "the complete reversal—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" (81). Hence, a genealogical approach critically examines the present in light of the complex historical processes and struggles. In other words, historical contingencies are analyzed as to how they shaped the present situation (Garland 2014, 367).

One can begin a genealogical reevaluation of the present state of transhumanism by analysis of the thoughts of Francis Bacon (1561–1626). Bacon's scientific method was founded by downplaying the life of *abstraction* and *contemplation*. The contemplative life is considered as a

"destructive and inveterate habit," and should be curtailed by "the active tendency" to prepare the road to human knowledge. Such knowledge is equated with power (Bacon 2000, 103). According to Max More (2013, 9), the inductive method introduced by Bacon renders him a precursor to the realization of the transhumanist agenda. This is reiterated by Nick Bostrom (2005, 2), a Swedish-born philosopher and Oxford professor with a background in artificial intelligence, computational neuroscience, and theoretical physics, who underscores that empirical methods could lead to "mastery over nature." The emphasis on the inductive method resulted in a mere collection of *facts*, leading to the abnegation of *speculation*, or the contemplative life, including Aristotelian philosophy (MacIntyre 2007, 79).

In a similar vein, Lesslie Newbigin, a British theologian and missiologist, laments that the *facts* that Bacon deploys to forge the inductive method are reduced to mere things that are tangible and measurable. This is contrary to the original meaning of the word fact, derived from the Latin *factum*. Newbigin (1995, 55) underscores that *factum* represents "something which has been done or accomplished." Similarly, the reductionist impulse of Bacon is also reflected in his preference of pre-Socratic philosophers like Democritus, who, for instance, attempted to describe the building blocks of matter as being constituted of atoms (Bacon 2000, 51). For Bacon, nature is studied as a mere artifact that does not possess any intrinsic worth or purpose of its own (Hawkin 1999, 70). Newbigin (1995, 56) contends that the atomistic and inductive study of matter is oblivious to the notion of purpose as an explanatory category. Hence, one of the consequences of Bacon's reductive endeavor is the creation of fact-value dualism. Bacon's inductive strategy is not concerned with the *telos* of a thing. Therefore, the obsession with the atomistic method does not tell whether a thing is good or bad (56).

Similarly, John Milbank (2022, 105) locates the roots of such fact-value dualism in the disturbance of the symphonic unity of the pragmatic or the active life with the contemplative life. Milbank (2022, 105) states that Bacon's reductionist method has disavowed "the symbolic aspect both of the natural world and human works and workings." This method counters the perspective elucidated by Nicholas of Cusa, a philosopher and religious reformer of the early Renaissance, who considers "all the processes and upshots of reality, including our human working and results of working, as a participation in the Trinitarian and Creative operations of God" (Milbank 2022, 105).

The second genealogical vestige that has left its indelible etch on transhumanism is the body-mind dualism of René Descartes. As noted earlier, Ray Kurzweil (2005, 25) hopes that we can one day scan the brain in such a way as to upload its contents onto a suitable computer substrate. This is necessitated by the fact that our physical bodies are weak and subject to infirmity and death. For Kurzweil (2005, 25), such bodily weakness will be transcended at the point of singularity, where the consummation of the merging of biological thinking (cartesian mind) with technology is materialized. Such a proposition betrays that transhumanists are cartesian dualists because of their belief that personhood and the sense of self could "exist in an immaculate reality separate from their bodies" (Nagoshi and Nagoshi 2011, 304).

It is not the mere valorization of the mind leading to the denigration of the body that marks the dualistic nature of cartesian anthropology. Such a dualistic appraisal also lays an emphasis on the autonomy and the freedom of individuals. When the mind is favored in this way, we are appraising our freedom and eliminating any trace of limitation or responsibility (Lake 2013, 14). Transposing this in Paul Ricoeur's parlance, cartesian dualism puts asunder the dialectical tension between our freedom or voluntary

will, which corresponds with the mind, and our nature, which correlates with the involuntary aspect that represents the body (Ricoeur 1966, 4–13). In transhumanism, the shattering of such a dialectical relationship empowers the voluntary will to subjugate the involuntary body, thereby creating a reductionist account of nature (Verhoef and Janse van Rensburg 2022, 11–14). In the same vein, Brent Waters, an American computer scientist, propounds that the body is considered an encumbrance "to the will," thereby necessitating disposal (Waters 2017, 70). When the cartesian mind or will is given free rein, it not only unfetters the shackles of the body, but it will also enable us to attain lordship and mastery over nature. This is attained by the deployment of medical practice patterned on the biomedical model. The mastery is expressed in terms of the curative aspect of biomedicine. At this junction, one needs to remark on the presentiment of René Descartes who anticipated the employment of medical science, under the order of the biomedical model, for furthering the cause of transhumanism. Descartes hoped that medical knowledge might extend its help toward freedom from the ailment of aging (McKenny 2010,152–153).

The final important element of the genealogical footprint of transhumanism is "the technological imperative" that is assumed by the biomedical model (Freund and McGuire 1999, 243). The coupling of the biomedical model with technology has catapulted the offer of medical practice beyond its traditional combat zone of the curing of diseases and alleviation of suffering. With Promethean prowess, medical practice envisages "a nonreligious version of 'salvation' from human sickness, death and finitude" (Freund and McGuire 1999, 243). Such vision is pursued by transhumanism in the process of attaining cybernetic immortality. In this regard, Stanley Hauerwas, an American theologian and ethicist, concurs that the obsession of modern medical practice has become the prevention of death (Hauerwas 1986, 36).

Similarly, the technological salvation envisioned by transhumanism betrays a sense of exceptionalism (Bauman 2017, 33). Thus, on the one hand, such an esoteric mindset builds a fence between humanity and the rest of creation. On the other hand, it creates a barrier between the beneficiaries of technological advancement and the disadvantaged others. In the race to attain technological salvation, transhumanism focuses on the deployment of technology only for the betterment of humanity at the oblivion of the natural order. This is because humans are considered "above the rest of nature." This could be taken as a humanity-nature dualism. Not only have humans delineated "distinct species boundaries," but they have also created a gulf between the self and other, or a kind of individual-other dualism (37). Nonetheless, such exceptionalism flies in the face of our embeddedness and interdependence with the rest of the planetary community. Even our presumably individual bodies are now recognized as ecosystems (37) rather than individual living organisms because of the presence of microbiome in our bodies (Surana and Kasper 2022, 3690).[1]

Overall, such a genealogical survey of transhumanism has revealed some of the historical contingencies and deviations. This brief description of the descent and genealogy of transhumanism could help us to evaluate its contemporary status. From the above historical contingencies, one can decipher the traces of transhumanism in the series of the processes examined. Hence, we have seen that Francis Bacon's introduction of the inductive method has given rise to a reductionistic appraisal of matter. This resulted in the dissonance between the active life and the contemplative life. Such disjunction has yielded the fact-value dualism that marks the mindset

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1 The strong symbiotic relationship between humans and the microbiome is known as *holobiont,* a description that shows an ecological understanding of self.

of the modern world. Similarly, Descartes's philosophical approach has yielded a dissected anthropology, thereby shearing humanity into body-mind dualism. This serves a pivotal role in the emergence of transhumanism because of the accent on the mind at the debasement of the body.

Such a dualistic anthropology serves as a launchpad for medical practice by undergirding its foundation, the biomedical model. Moreover, this model necessitates the utilization of technology not only for preventive and curative purposes but for bracing for the final combat against death itself. This technological imperative, tailored to effect cybernetic immortality, betrays a sense of exceptionalism and individualism (individual-other dualism). This creates a gulf between humanity and nature and between the beneficiaries of technological enhancement and the unprivileged others. In saying this, we now move to the evaluation of transhumanism in the light of the kenotic act of Jesus Christ.

4. A *Metanoiac* Turn from *Homo Deus* Toward *Homo Kenosus*

From the above discussion, we have seen how the genealogical footprints of transhumanism have left a series of dualisms: fact-value dualism, body-mind dualism, and individual-other dualism. The desired outcome of all these dualistic genealogical contingencies is to facilitate victory upon the last enemy of humanity—death. Upon vanquishing death, humanity will celebrate the enthronement of humanity as *homo deus*. Therefore, in order to deconstruct the underpinnings of transhumanism, the above dualistic

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fractures have to be mended. To undertake this task, we resort to the kenotic act of Jesus Christ, *homo kenosus par excellence* (Demo 2021, 168–177).[2]

According to Michael J. Gorman (2009, 9–39), the story of Christ recapitulated in *Carmen Christi* (Phil 2:6–11) is Paul's "master story" as it captures the salvific act of God in the world. Thus, its significance lies in challenging "all other claims to universal salvation on offer, whether ancient or modern" (38). Similarly, Wayne A. Meeks (2002, 111–112) avers that this hymn is a "master model" that delineates the pattern of thought and action of the kenotic Christ. In this manner, this model offers "a practical moral reasoning" that exhorts the Philippian Christians to participate in the kenotic life of Christ (111–112). It is in this master story that we have to search for a "spiritual enhancement" that supplants the ethos of transhumanism (Trothen 2017, 107–120). The type of enhancement that this master story narrates is to transform us into the image of God (*imago Dei*) as manifested in Christ. Thus, in order to attain such divine likeness, we have to tread the path that Christ has trodden in his kenotic act which embodies humility and rebuffs any scent of grandiosity (Graham 2006, 66).

First, in line with Lesslie Newbigin's explication of fact in its original connotation as *factum*, as something which has been accomplished, this hymn narrates the kenotic act of Christ in his incarnation, death, resurrection, and exaltation as a historical fact. In this regard, John B. Webster (1985, 110) posits that Philippians 2 is not an abstract account, but the narration of a historical fact of a salvific event. Thus, this historical fact is loaded with moral injunctions. Pace Ernst Käseman, the historical fact of Philippians 2 does not require a mere acknowledgment of the lordship of Christ, as a kind of disembodied contemplative response. Rather, it demands obedience from believers (Webster 1985, 109). For Gorman (2009, 32), the call of obedience is not a remembrance and imitation of

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2 The application of the notion of the kenotic mindset and act of Christ as *homo kenosus* for the problem of ethnic diversity is dealt in the cited book chapter.

a story. More profoundly, Paul prompts the Philippians to participate in the "transformative work of the triune God" in history, which is also called *theosis* (32).

The kenosis of Christ is not limited to thought or contemplation (Phil 2:5); rather, it has been demonstrated in concrete bodily action in obedience to the Father (Phil 2:6–8). Paul's exhortation to have the mind of Christ in kenotic imitation restores the imbalance of the contemplative and the active life in Francis Bacon's inductive method. We have seen that the dissociation between the contemplative and the active life is correlated with the fact-value dualism. Thus, the kenotic elucidation mends the rupture of the fact-value dualism entailed by the inductive method. Whatever condition that could be defined as factual or concretely accomplished, as in Newbigin's parlance, should not be scraped of its ethical connotation. Therefore, the untrammeled action of transhumanism could be harnessed to a morally sound and value-laden technology.

Second, the self-abnegation of Christ in his kenotic act to embrace humanity repugns the gnostic disparagement of embodiment. Christ as *homo kenosus* revalorizes the body in his embrace of humanity. Christ's kenotic act reverses the trajectory of transhumanism's progress to attain a god-like immortal state as *homo deus* by "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7 RSV).[3] This underscores the significance of embodiment. Hence, the transhumanists' emphasis on the mind that attempts to discard the body is found wanting. As the emptying or kenotic act of Christ is taken as a weapon to confront the "empty glory" or conceit (Phil 2:3), as argued by Gordon Fee (1995,186–187), his kenotic embodiment also tackles the transhumanists' disdain for the body.

Moreover, when seen in the context of the Roman Philippi, Joseph Hellerman (2005, 129–130) posits that Christ has trodden a downward descent of a "course of ignominies," or *cursus pudorum*. Hellerman (2005, 129–130) contends that the descent of Christ takes progressive stages: descending from the apex of his divine status, taking on of humanity and slave status, and finally, dying an ignominious death on the cross. This oppugns the upward mobility of the Roman ideology of *cursus honorum*, or a race for honor, which has infiltrated nearly all classes of society (Hellerman 2005, 108, 129). In this regard, the deployment of *Carmen Christi* by Paul to the Philippians could be intentional. This is because the Roman Imperial Cult was firmly established in Philippi (Heen 2004, 134).

The kenotic act inverts the gist of transhumanism in its ascent of attaining *homo deus* by climbing on the technological ladder. Christ as *homo kenosus* has demonstrated what is meant by divinity in becoming a servant and suffering a humiliating death on the cross. In this regard, Gorman (2009, 27) argues that the descent of Christ is an exercise of divinity. Thus, what seems to us "*out* of character for normal divinity … is actually *in* character for *this* form of God." In this manner, Christ as *homo kenosus* subverts and deconstructs our expectations in revealing "the *true* form of God" (Gorman 2009, 27; emphasis his). This act of kenosis as an exercise of divinity has been vindicated and recognized in Christ's exaltation from the humiliated state (Phil 2:9–11). Hence, resurrection and exaltation are the works of God, not a fabrication of technology. The exaltation of Christ in his being given "the name which is above every name" (Phil 2:9) has a political connotation--the displacement of Caesar by Christ (Horsley 2004, 4). Therefore, in his descent to death on the cross, Christ has demonstrated that lordship is a matter of servitude, not a manifestation of empty conceit as exhibited in the Roman Imperial Cult. In the bodily resurrection and

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3 All quotations from the Bible are taken from Revised Standard Version (RSV).

exaltation of Christ, we are reminded that the body is a good gift of God (Waters 2006, 191), not "mere jelly" to be scrapped off (Moravec 1988, 117).

The last, but not least of the dualisms, the individual-other rapture, could also be repaired by the mediation of the kenotic act of Christ. As indicated earlier, the sense of exceptionalism reflected in the ethos of transhumanism springs from the acquisition of technology to transform the human condition. The sole endowment of humanity by advanced technology has fenced off humanity from nature and also created a barricade of individualism. This could be deconstructed by invoking the mindset of Christ, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil 2:6). This attitude is not a navel-gazing, narcissistic curtailment of divinity around himself. Rather, such disposition of the being of divinity is a disposal for the benefit of others. With an outstretched hand, this kenotic mindset enabled Christ to embrace the other, the different, and the weak. In the other-orientation of Christ, the divinity of Christ is rendered for the service of others. In this manner, the kenotic Christ has identified with the weak and the despicable others by obliterating any sense of exceptionalism.

In this vein, the exhortation to have the mind of Christ is meant to be imitated by the Philippian Christians in their relationship among themselves (Phil 2:5). Christ's kenotic disposition is a pattern that demands a relationship of the interdependence of one with the other. Whatever one possesses is to be shared with others. Christ's other-focused attitude cuts off any aberration of conceited exceptionalism or individualism. In our context, the power of endowment with advanced technology should not be a source for a curtailment of nature, the unprivileged others, and the poor. Christ as *homo kenosus* deconstructs the self-aggrandizing bent of transhumanism in its deployment of technology to make an edifice of *homo*

deus. Such a Promethean identification with divinity is contrary to the ethos displayed by the kenotic Christ. While Christ "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped," transhumanism endeavors to produce a parody of divinity in its utilization of technology in the search for digital immortality. Thus, individual-other dualism begotten by transhumanism could be effectively mended by a tincture of, emulation of, and participation in, the disposition and the action of Christ, the *homo kenosus par excellence*.

5. Conclusion

Our age is marked by an inexorable progress of technological advancement. It attempts to digitize whatever it finds on its way. The ethos of transhumanism is an attempt to transpose the human condition in a digital format in such a way as to construct the edifice of *homo deus*. In Ted Peter's (2006, 20) parlance, this process could be dubbed a "technologizing [of] the organic world." The reductive and dualistic smack that has been transmuted from Francis Bacon has continued unabated in the cartesian body-mind dualism, and in the technological imperative that underpins modern medical practice. A head-on encounter with transhumanism's gist can be undertaken by a *metanoiac* turn to the kenotic life of Christ. Christ as *homo kenosus* can mend the ruptures of the fact-value divide, the body-mind dualism, and the exceptionalism and individualism bequeathed by transhumanism. What was in the mind of Christ has been revealed in his kenotic act of obedience, thereby offsetting the fact-value rapture. The revaluation of the body has been demonstrated in the embrace of humanity, thereby countering the body-mind dualism. The sense of exceptionalism has been demolished in the other-oriented mindset of service demonstrated by Christ. In this manner, the morality undergirded by Christ's kenotic disposition and action reveals the true nature of divinity and humanity. The life of Christ as *homo kenosus* narrates a master story, a

blueprint of the way of discipleship that beckons us to participate in it. This marks the way of theosis, a transformation into the likeness of God. It is high time that the church proclaims and demonstrates this transformative model embedded in Jesus Christ as our world languishes in the search for a parody of immortality in technology.

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Book Review: *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*

DeSilva, David A. 2022. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. xv,388 pp. ISBN 978-1-5140-0386-2. Approx. 595.66 ZAR (31.49 USD). Paperback.

This work is the second edition of an earlier version published in 2000. After twelve years of circulation during which David A. deSilva used it to teach in various academic fora and institutions, he saw a need for the improvement and expansion of the content, and the addition of existing literature on the subject matter (pp. x–xi). The present work is composed of eight chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. DeSilva's core aim is exposing New Testament scholars to the cultural conundrum and nexus of the New Testament era. This is to help interpreters delineate the meaning of texts with a cultural emphasis and to avoid out-of-context interpretations. It provides an alternative and addition to the usual historical, social, and literary contexts that have been the dominant consideration in New Testament interpretation. The author defines culture as,

> [That which] includes those values, ways of relating, and ways of looking at the world that its members share that provide all framework for all communication. The readers of the New Testament shared certain values, such as honor; ethical codes that shaped and maintained typical social forms of relationship, such as patronage and kingship; and ways of ordering the world, expressed frequently in terms of purity and pollution. If we are to hear the texts correctly, we must apply ourselves to the culture out of which, and to which they spoke. We need to recognize the cultural cues the authors have hoven into their strategies and instructions. (pp. 1–2)

This definition by deSilva observes that humans relate and communicate with others within their ethos/tenet of life, and that the New Testament was communicated to receptors that understand the authors' values and stratagems of communication. These have to be understood by interpreters of the New Testament documents for context-effective interpretations.

Chapter one concentrates on how personhood is determined by the connection to fundamental values of society and the honor and shame it could attract. DeSilva relies on the propositions of Seneca and Aristotle to argue that people in ancient Mediterranean society would often ask the question of what values would be attained and emphasized before taking a decision or action. Persons who prioritized pleasure were classed with animals that were governed by their passions and desires. Hence, the art of persuasion is focused on societal values against personal interests (pp. 10–13). Shame connotes being regarded as less valuable based on an act or decision that is contrary to the values of society. DeSilva states that

> The person who puts personal safety above the city's well-being, fleeing from battle, loses the respect of his neighbors as far as the report of his failure travels. His worth is impugned, and he 'loses face'; he is disgraced and viewed as a disgrace.... 'Shame' can also refer to

a positive, even essential, character trait, namely a sensitivity to the opinion of the group such that one avoids those actions that bring disgrace. (pp. 14–15)

Avoiding shame requires the sacrifice of personal interests and desires. Consideration for the good of the other and the entire community/group brings communal benefit to all. Honor or shame starts with one's parents, place of birth, ethnicity, profession/occupation, gender, and religion, among other factors. Whether they are good or bad can be changed by the moral character of the individual. Honor and shame are the critical elements of group values and identity (p. 36).

In chapter two, deSilva applies his findings concerning honor and shame in ancient Mediterranean society to how the New Testament authors communicated the message to their readers with the objective of bringing persons considered to be deviant back to the norm of societal values. The authors of the New Testament engage the language and vocabulary associated with honor and shame to articulate the Christian value system. In doing this, they honor persons who demonstrate love, faith, hope, service, and humility. Conversely, those who do otherwise were left to shame (pp. 35–38). The honor of Jesus was derived from God by the various affirmations in the Gospels, where God is portrayed to be "well pleased" with Jesus (Matt 3:17, 17:5). It is to imply that God will be pleased with the followers of Jesus (p. 72).

DeSilva compares honor and shame in the ancient world and the contemporary church. He indicates that it was easier for the early church to whip up patronage for the Christian value system of honor and shame because it became a dominant culture which many would like to be identified with. A similar situation pertains to communities that share a common ethos with the first-century CE society. However, the case is different in North America and Western Europe where the majority culture is increasingly defined by "materialism, individualism, and relativism (p. 84) … that holds up position, wealth, and ownership of prestige items as measures for self-respect and that aggressively promotes individual 'rights' while marginalizing traditional values as 'oppressive'" (p. 85). The situation places the Christian faith within a context of dominant and majority cultures that do not share the primary value of the New Testament.

Chapter three focuses on patronage and reciprocity in a social and grace context. The Greco-Roman world was restricted in terms of goods and services, and access to them was based on personal acquaintances and bureaucratic networks. It necessitates a relationship of reciprocated exchange. The patron is available to provide, and the client does everything to enhance the relationship by demonstrating respect and loyalty, and providing services as may be required. This occurs among persons of unequal social status (pp. 98–99). There is also a friendship relationship between patrons of equal social standing. Some befriend public officers such as judges so that they may give favorable outcomes to their clients. The concept of reciprocity was also present among the poor agrarian rural communities in that they helped each other during harvest. Patronage and friendship among the elite and the poor is well documented, but this is not the case among poor rural folks. Besides personal patronage, there is also public benefaction where the wealthy elite builds theatres for the common good of the public (p. 103).

Grace (*charis*) is at home in the social context of patron-client relationships, friendship, and public benefactor in the first century CE. Grace was not primarily a religious concept but a social discourse. It is the willingness of a patron to grant some benefit or relief to another person or persons. In rhetorical terms, it is defined as offering help to the needy

without expecting any reciprocal benefit. It refers to a gift from a public benefactor. Grace also denotes the gift, and the gratitude expressed to the giver of the gift (pp. 107–108). Jesus was presented as God's gift of grace, and benefactors need to accept him in order to benefit from the grace (pp. 123–124).

Chapter four applies patronage and grace discussed in the previous chapter to the New Testament. DeSilva argues that Jesus and his earliest disciples ministered within the first-century context of patronage and friendship. A network of grace relationships was a reality in the time of Jesus and the disciples, as demonstrated in the beneficent character of the centurion who built a synagogue for the Jews (Luke 7:1–10) (p. 128). God was presented as a benefactor and patron to the recipients of the epistles. It reflects the "broad tendency shared by Greeks, Romans, and Jews to conceptualize God or the gods as the greatest benefactors and worship as a medium by which to honor and gratefully acknowledge divine beneficence" (p. 129). In this worship, Jesus is the mediator of God's favor through his death. Clients who accept and worship have a new identity and kinship which determine how they behave and relate to various issues in society. This requires a new way of ordering and language of purity devoid of elements and thoughts that pollute as indicated in chapters five to eight.

The exploration of four critical cultures—honor, patronage, kinship, and purity—is essential for a contextual interpretation of the New Testament documents. It equips readers with the necessary skills for the interpretation of the New Testament because they give reasons why the authors communicated in the manner they did and the responses that ensued from the audiences and recipients.

The strength of this work remains in the fact that deSilva embarked on an exploration of cultural values and applied the findings to the New Testament to deduce points of agreement and divergence. Before exploring the important issues of honor, patronage, kinship, and purity, he first lays a foundation of honor and shame in the first-century CE context (ch. 1) and then in the New Testament from the Gospels to The Book of Revelation (ch. 2). This provides essential insight. It makes the New Testament come alive in its historical and cultural context. This work gives further credence and a practical approach to cultural textures of socio-rhetorical criticism propounded by Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Textures of Text: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (1996a); *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (1996b); *Beginnings and Developments in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (2004). It emphasizes the Jewish culture of honor, patronage, kinship, and purity as a dominant culture in ancient Mediterranean society, and subsequently used as a means of discourse composition in the New Testament. This makes the New Testament document resonate well with persons who are conversant with the Jewish culture. The work of deSilva goes beyond New Testament cultural interpretation because the culture of honor, patronage, kinship, and purity can be traced to the patriarchal period. Hence, it is also useful for the cultural interpretation of some genres in the Hebrew Bible.

The weakness of the work is the lack of rhetorical reasoning underpinning honor, patronage, kinship, and purity because they are critical inputs in rhetorical criticism of the New Testament which deSilva is aware of (deSilva 1998). Does honor, patronage, kinship, and purity in the New Testament present a rhetography or rhetology? DeSilva indicates that the reasons for a second edition of the book were based on comments received when the first edition was used to teach at various academic fora and the discovery of additional literature on the topic (pp. x–xi). It would be more insightful for deSilva to give the first edition to some scholars in the field for review. These reviews would add up to the factors that influenced the second edition and be referred to in the second edition on the same tenets

of the academic fora. It will draw more attention to the second edition.

David A. deSilva considers the ancient Mediterranean world as one cultural group. This is problematic for the Gospels and the book of Acts because these books engaged audiences with varied backgrounds. The interpretation of the Gospels has shifted from a high-level consideration of principles and cultures and now focusses on the specifics. For example, the ancient Mediterranean world is composed of Jewish culture, Greek culture, and Roman culture. Although there are similarities, no doubt, there are stark differences that serve as a unique feature of each culture. DeSilva did not take note of this uniqueness of the cultures, else his subtitle whould read "Unlocking the New Testament Cultures," and not *Culture*. The approach used by deSilva creates the potential for minority cultures to be ignored or neglected. A third edition of the book must critically consider this or give a cogent justification for his approach. That notwithstanding, this second edition of *Honor, Patronage, Kingship, and Purity* is recommended for scholars and students of the New Testament who are interested in exegesis and interpretation in the cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean society.

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Book Review: *Spiritual Formation for the Global Church: A Multi-Denominational, Multi-Ethnic Approach*

Brandt, Ryan A., and Frederick John eds. 2021. *Spiritual Formation for the Global Church: A Multi-Denominational, Multi-Ethnic Approach*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. x, 238 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5518-6. Approx. 514.67 ZAR (27.99 USD). Paperback.

1. Introduction

Although the world has become more interconnected, evangelicals remain absorbed in their "narrow regional, national and denominational, and racial/ethnic boundaries" (p. 1). As a result, Ryan A. Brandt and John Frederick brought together in one volume the work of a truly diverse group of scholars to focus on exploring spiritual formation for the global church. The editors carry significant academic credibility with Ryan A. Brandt (Ph.D.) serving as Associate Professor of Christian history and theology at Grand Canyon University. Furthermore, he acts as the managing editor of the *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*. His co-editor, John Frederick (Ph.D.) serves as a Lecturer in New Testament and Greek at Trinity College Queensland, Australia. He has authored two other works and is ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church in North America. The selected contributors

are duly equipped and experienced to fulfill the bold ambition, outlined in the book's introduction, to pursue a "cohesive yet diverse constructive theology and praxis for spiritual formation for the global church in the twenty-first century" (p. 1).

2. Overview

Interest in the topic of spiritual formation has increased amongst evangelicals in recent decades, which has paved the way for more academic attention to be given to the subject. However, the various academic endeavors each explore the topic from a unique vantage point and contextual background. The editors, aiming to establish a general starting premise, outline the basic definition of spiritual formation for the purposes of this book as "the process by which personal change takes place in Christ by the power of the Spirit" (p. 2). To bring a degree of coherence to the diverse cultural and theological backgrounds of the contributors, as well as to allow them the freedom to express their unique global perspectives, the book is divided into three thematic sections, each containing four chapters. The sections explore 1) biblical and theological study as spiritual formation, 2) acts and elements of worship as spiritual formation, and 3) Christ, contemporary culture, and spiritual formation. These thematic overtures act as riverbanks to what sometimes, especially initially, feels like disjointed arguments. Maintaining an awareness of the broader theme each chapter forms a part of equips the reader with the necessary orientation to maintain perspective.

3. Spiritual Formation for the Global Church

The opening theme of the book is introduced by Michael J. Gorman who boldly states that it is time for the West to learn from the global church to move beyond the bifurcation of *spiritual* and *academic* readings of Scripture

(p. 33). Next, Sammy Alfaro argues that theological education through Latina/o Pentecostal Bible institutes provides both academic training and spiritual formation that will train much-needed spiritual academics as ministers for the church (pp. 44, 47). In turn, Alfred Olwa posits that churches are suffering from a lack of biblically faithful and spiritually formed leaders, yet ironically the pattern for a spiritually formed life is, in fact, faithfulness to the Bible that is properly pursued by means of the Spirit (pp. 53, 61). Finally, John H. Coe announces a "sanctification gap" evident in conservative evangelical circles due to the pursuit of an academic understanding of growth and spiritual formation at the cost of caring for souls and the process of growth offered by spiritual theology (pp. 63–64, 66).

The coherent message that ties all the distinct views in this section together is the unified plea not to promote the intellect alone without duly employing theology for its rightful purpose of spiritual transformation and growth, which is only achieved through the work of the Spirit. This emphasis on faithfulness to Scripture that leads to transformed lives by the work of the Spirit is both timely and crucial for the global evangelical church and a noteworthy observation from the theme of this first section.

Several causes for further thought arise, namely, that the centrality of Jesus in spiritual formation has been somewhat neglected in the discussion thus far. There is also an over-romanticizing of certain eras of church history by some contributors without considering the negative implication that some of the practices in those eras brought, and an overly programmatic approach suggested by some of the contributors. Although the contributors make a robust case for the necessity of Biblical study and theology as spiritual formation, not reflecting on the highlighted thoughts in greater depth could stifle spiritual formation.

The second section shifts the focus from theology and biblical study to the important role that acts and elements of worship play in spiritual formation. Robyn Wrigley-Carr introduces liturgical prayer as spiritual formation, which is the first act of worship to be considered. It is argued that using liturgy engages one's senses, acts as a reminder of the universal church one belongs to, presents a means of "unselfing" (p. 99) through praying prayers of saints who have gone before, and reminds us of the reality that God is the initiator of our spiritual formation (p. 101). Markus Nikkanen presents the Eucharist as a reminder to "center us on Christ" and in the process discover that spiritual formation is "an intra, inter and transpersonal experience" requiring every aspect of life to be affected (p. 104). John Frederick and Jonathan K. Sharpe argue that "contemporary evangelical worship would, on the whole, benefit from an intensified focus on the formative practices of grace empowered works of ecclesial love" (p. 136). The love of Christ is "embodied, enacted, received, and re-presented" and in the process, the church is formed into the same image of Christ whose love was demonstrated through sacrifice (p. 137). Ryan A. Brandt concludes this section by summarizing Augustine's argument for the beatific vision as a Christian's highest goal, namely, to gaze upon God and be transformed by him (p. 143).

The four examples that were presented demonstrate a hunkering back to age-old forms of worship and devotion that have been practiced by Christians for many centuries. The four acts and elements of worship are reminiscent of the sacraments elaborated on during the Reformation era. What appears to be evidenced here is that, as church history unfolded, the proverbial baby was thrown out with the bath water as a new era rejected practices from previous eras. Many of the Reformed and Catholic sacraments were not eagerly adopted with workful enthusiasm by early evangelicals. The authors in this section bring the centrality of Jesus and

God's preeminent role in spiritual formation to the front in a way that was neglected in the previous section. One further observation of value that was expressed by several contributors is the need to understand oneself in a bigger context, whether that context is praying the prayers of those who have gone before us or seeing the Eucharist as an interpersonal sacrament. Surveying church history reveals that many of the practices described can become ritualistic and empty religion. This is something to be guarded against by not simply practicing the acts of worship without keeping God as the primary focus.

The final section explores Christ, contemporary culture, and spiritual formation and is commenced by S. Min Chun outlining the role that Old Testament ethics plays in a New Testament understanding of spiritual formation. The climactic argument of this exposition is that the Old Testament acts as a channel to reveal Jesus's values and, therefore, a deeper understanding of the Old Testament will lead to a closer revelation of Jesus's heart and mind as well as deepening Christlikeness (p. 172). In the next chapter, Le Chih Hsieh proposes that spiritual formation is a "way of life that forms and transforms the person as a whole" and it includes the "soul, body, and the world that nourishes the body." In other words, the whole of the person and their environment (p. 175). This chapter includes a discussion on ontology that will require a paradigm shift in some streams of Christian thought, but it is significant seeing that Hsieh claims that spiritual formation "depends on how we understand ourselves in the world" (p. 185). Next, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu argues that Pentecostal interventionism matters, especially in a non-Western context, to inform spiritual formation. The focus is twofold: "release of persons from affliction and their empowerment for prosperity and flourishing" (p. 191). In closing the final theme, HaYoung Son expounds on the role of failure and faithful perseverance in spiritual formation. Learning in particular from Peter, Son highlights that spiritual growth will "providentially include tough times and failure" (p. 219). What matters is not momentary success or failure, but eternal spiritual growth. This growth is often only achieved through persevering through failure and allowing Christ's faithfulness in our failures to transform us (pp. 219–220). This section drew from the practical realities of human life and Christian ministry.

One of the greatest themes expounded on by several of the contributors is the holistic nature of spiritual formation that reaches beyond a set of practices or disciplines. The deep perspective on failure is a key notion of spiritual formation often neglected, and sadly many Christians are written off in failure rather than encouraged to turn to the faithfulness of Jesus to transform and restore them. One caution is that some of the contributors appear to have a significant personal bias and, as a result, do not apply the balanced exegetical principles expected in a robust academic conversation. In particular, the chapter on Pentecostal interventionism feels like it is written from a place of frustration rather than reflection. In that chapter the hermeneutics practiced is questionable and tends towards a prosperity gospel interpretation of Scripture rather than truly revealing what spiritual formation means in the African Pentecostal movement. At its best what was presented could be summarized as a perspective on African Pentecostal spirituality as opposed to spiritual formation. What is not acknowledged is the wide diversity of indigenous African Christians that would be of a different persuasion.

4. Strengths

It is an ambitious undertaking to write a work on spiritual formation for the global church. This volume succeeds in presenting an insightful introduction to a range of models, disciplines, and practices from a broad cultural and theological spectrum on the topic in question. One of the

key strengths is the level of engagement from such a diverse group of contributors; the thoughts presented are not from one church tradition, gender perspective, or culture. The editors carefully curate an exemplar of thoughts, practices, and paradigms that are of benefit to the contributors in their own individual settings. Most chapters contain additional commentary by the editors describing the context for each contributor, which helps to illuminate their thoughts even more. Through this analysis, readers are exposed to vantage points and practices of spiritual formation that may be new to them, albeit in some cases the practice itself may be centuries old. The reader encounters a safe and beneficial way of broadening horizons and breaking down barriers to what is culturally and theologically acceptable.

5. Weaknesses

In the process of presenting a broad exposure to various themes of spiritual formation, the risk of not going deep enough is exposed. There is a whole field of thought and academic study behind each of the chapters presented that in some cases, like the chapters on the beatific vision and suffering and faithful perseverance, could have benefitted from a deeper exploration. These chapters in particular focus on a transcendent idea rather than discipline, institution, or practice, which sets them apart from other chapters. If the global church could grasp the immense depth of these chapters, it may be worth more than learning to apply another method of spiritual formation. Furthermore, drawing attention to such a wide range of different Christian streams across theological and cultural lines could lead to espousing traditions surrounding spiritual formation rather than focusing on the Person spiritual formation should be centered on. This could in some cases enhance the spiritual formation for those trying something new for the first time; however, as history has proven, traditions can become religious, legalistic, and programmatic, acting as a restriction of true spiritual formation. In most cases, a robust level of academic discussion was adhered to, but in one or two chapters it seems the personal bias of the contributor watered down solid exegetic practices.

6. Conclusion

What is presented is best understood as a collection of introductions serving as an invitation to further study should any of the ideas presented be relevant to the reader. Those approaching this work as a means of deep diving into the topic of spiritual formation may walk away disappointed. What this book successfully achieves is presenting a rich depth of theological, practical, and ideological approaches to aid spiritual formation that is of tremendous benefit to the global church. It cannot be overestimated how transformative each of the examples given is when applied appropriately.

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Book Review: *The Rewards of Learning Greek and Hebrew: Discovering the Richness of the Bible in its Original Languages*

McDowell, Catherine L., and Philip H. Towner. 2021. *The Rewards of Learning Greek and Hebrew: Discovering the Richness of the Bible in its Original Languages*. Peabody: Hendrickson Academic. xvii, 134 pp. ISBN: 978-1-68307-401-4. Approx. 195 ZAR (11 USD). Kindle.

Catherine L. McDowell is an Associate Professor of OT at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte, North Carolina). A classical Hebrew Lecturer with archeological field experience, and practical ministry involvement, McDowell has extensive publications on a variety of OT topics, including OT study notes for the *ESV Archeological Study Bible* (2019).

Philip H. Towner is a former Dean and Director of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at the American Bible Society (New York) and is currently a Professor of Translation Studies at Pontifical Urban University in Rome. He is a translation scholar with a particular focus on the Pastoral Epistles. His publications include contributions to the *IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (2010); the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (2006); and the *International Critical Commentary* (A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, 2004). Both authors are well experienced and qualified to speak authoritatively on their subjects of Hebrew within the OT context, and biblical Greek study respectively.

As the title suggests, the book's primary purpose is to motivate the study of biblical Hebrew and Greek in order that Scripture may be better examined and understood. It is divided into two parts—the first being Hebrew (authored by McDowell) and the second Greek (authored by Towner). With catchy chapter titles such as "When God Uses Italics" and "A Preview of Coming Attractions," and bite-sized chapter lengths, it makes for an easy read. One is drawn into exploring each chapter as its own contained lesson, which provides thought-provoking learning experiences. Strategically chosen Scriptures are used to explain key grammatical terms, but through the study, insight into those Scriptures is also given. This all engenders a desire to delve deeper into the study of God's Word through the biblical languages.

The Hebrew section gives slightly more accessible learning points within the texts discussed than the Greek does, but that does not detract from the point being driven home; namely, that a reading knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is invaluable for good and intimate study of God's Word. The authors are not reticent to interact with significant grammatical terminology such as inflection, anaphora, case, euphemisms, assonance, paronomasia, apposition, yet they do so in a concise and tangible manner that makes the concepts comprehensible to those who have not yet studied the grammar of the biblical languages. But for the language scholar, the familiar terms are well-represented in the scriptural texts in a way that validates language study and also provides new insights.

The book is peppered with quotations and charming motivational testimonies to encourage language study from prominent academics and authors in the field (both current and classical) to graduate students (e.g., Bruce K. Waltke, Philip Melanchthon, Craig A. Evans, Robert Alter, F.W.

"Chip" Dobbs-Allsopp, Adolf Deissmann, Carolyn J. Sharp, Scot McKnight and many more). The book ends with extensive resources for further study—including QR codes to courses, institutes, and supplementary resources.

Part 1: Hebrew, comprises ten chapters that mostly highlight how the English translation falls short of capturing the full force of the original text, whether at the level of word or that of syntax. McDowell thereby makes the significant point that "Although our English translations are reliable and trustworthy, they are not perfect" (p. 6). She goes on to show in each of her chapters how an intimate knowledge of the Hebrew text allows one to understand more clearly the author's message, which can better inform spiritual formation, as well as preaching and teaching.

The following are merely examples of chapter *foci*. Chapter three presents a clever wordplay that spans not only pericopes or books but the greater scriptural witness. The point is made using the connection between Adam's responsibility in the garden (Gen 2:15) and the Levitical duties in the Tabernacle (Num 3:7–8, 8:26, 18:5–6) where the same word phrases are used. Therefore, Eden imagery permeates the Tabernacle not just visually, but also in priestly duties. Chapter six brings greater clarity to the idiom "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14). This chapter also gives an example of how extra-biblical literature can bring insight to biblical texts. Chapter seven explains the Hebrew language of idol imagery, particularly in prophetic writings, with attention given to nuance and irony. Chapter eight features the attention-grabbing power of puns and their value in emphasizing a point that can only be truly understood if one has a working knowledge of the original language.

In all that is stated, McDowell is wise and careful not to undermine the value of translations of the Bible. She does, however, show how interpretive choices made through translation inevitably lead to something of the original being lost. Therefore, she highlights that the knowledge of biblical languages allows one to understand these interpretive choices, fostering a capacity for critical thinking about potential alternatives. Furthermore, this knowledge advances the maturity of one's interaction with and study of Scripture. These are possibly the most worthwhile points that McDowell makes in her section of the book. Her summation is: "Studying biblical languages … is, I would argue, the most untapped means of spiritual formation" (pp. 30–31).

Although the motivation to study Hebrew is compelling throughout her chapters, McDowell does give the impression that mere knowledge of biblical Hebrew automatically unlocks wonderous insights into texts and themes across Scripture hitherto inaccessible. This is an unrealistic expectation. Any scholar of literature is aware that the nuances of themes or wordplays often require lengthy and careful study—even when done in one's mother tongue. The type of insights she presents are gained through in-depth study and meditation, often over an extensive period of time. These will not likely be gleaned immediately when reading in the source text language. But the point is certainly taken that interacting with a text through translation alone makes these rewards less attainable.

Part 2: Greek, comprises nine chapters in which Towner advocates for the study of Greek, not merely for NT interaction, but for greater comprehension and appreciation of Scripture as a whole. Towner (pp. 57–62) begins this section by mentioning two overarching benefits of studying *Koine* Greek, with which most biblical language teachers would agree: firstly, "proximity" (experiencing the text as if one were the original audience), and secondly, "disorientation" (having to read the text more slowly thereby creating a fuller awareness of its individual components).

Towner goes on to present other rewarding avenues Greek study may potentially take one down, such as providing a unique window into the NT's

cultural context and the subtleties of its rhetoric. In chapter twelve, the study of the Septuagint is presented as a means to deepen one's understanding of the NT because of the significant role it played in the NT production. He uses Matthew 1:23 (see Isa 7:14) and 1 Corinthians 15:54 (see Isa 25:8) as specific examples. Paralleled to this, in chapter thirteen, Towner explains the value of intertextuality in biblical research (the interplay between NT and OT texts)—which is often not overt, and therefore requires good and frequent interaction with the Greek text. In chapter fourteen, he unveils rhetorical argumentation in texts such as Romans 5 and the letters to the Corinthians that show traces of oral presentation (with assonance, repetition, and tempo). Many of these elements are difficult to capture in English and therefore their force and effect is lost in translation. These are merely samples of what the chapters cover.

Ultimately, in engaging with this section of the book, it becomes obvious that knowing Greek on a lexical or grammatical level is not enough. To receive the full benefit of what Towner envisions, one must have an intimate knowledge of the language—what he repeatedly calls "a reading knowledge of Greek." He contends that knowledge of the language at this level allows one "to participate in the research, discussions, and debates that comprise New Testament studies" (p. 117). In other words, Towner does present the more realistic expectation that identifying and understanding the elements he unveils requires a good and intimate knowledge of both Greek *and* the texts in question. However, for the potential language student (the book's target audience), this comes at the cost of fully comprehending Towner's chapters and therefore may be less motivating than those of McDowell.

Towner ends his section (and the book) with a call to approach biblical study through language study. He invitingly uses the metaphor of NT study as a house with many rooms, and a reading knowledge of Greek is the key that opens its doors to reveal the treasures within. In an earlier chapter he states that biblical study remains "an unfinished task" (p. 58) and "the Greek text itself, read today in conversation with what we are still learning about ancient culture, politics, and art, promises still more treasures for those who are able to read it with understanding" (p. 62). Therefore, the invitation is to open these doors. He chooses to highlight two specific fields of potential study: the "Pauline Tradition" and "Textual Criticism."

My final analysis is this: any experienced language educator knows that the primary challenge in teaching biblical languages is to maintain motivation because, for the most part, language study is difficult and time-consuming. Much preparation and hard work are required before the student is equipped to dig the soil of Scripture to unearth valid treasures often less accessible through a layer of translation. Therefore, it is like wind in our sails when books like this are released that speak with a voice of agreement and validation that biblical language study is truly worthwhile. It is a welcome publication.

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