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Editorial

Toivo Pilli

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This volume of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* (*JEBS*) comes in the 75th anniversary year of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS). The Centre, previously known mainly as the Seminary, was founded in 1949 in Rüschlikon, Switzerland. In 1997 this theological institution moved to Prague, and in 2014 to Amsterdam. On its journey, the focus of the study centre has transformed: from offering bachelor and master degrees to concentrating on supporting research at the doctoral level. The *Journal of European Baptist Studies* has been reflecting IBTS's research interests and theological exploration for almost twenty-five years, beginning in 2000. This issue adds to the wealth of previously published articles with additional research that demonstrates the varied scope of present Baptist or baptistic academic probing and search for understanding.

As IBTS has defined three areas — Baptist identity, contextual missiology, and practical theology — as its priorities, *JEBS* has published a considerable number of articles in these fields. However, the publication often also includes Biblical topics, historical studies, and others, as *JEBS* functions as a platform for both Baptist scholars as well as scholars writing on issues enhancing Baptist theological discussion.

The articles published in the present issue fall into two categories. Firstly, three authors remind the reader of the role of the Bible in Baptist and — more widely — free church thinking. While secondly, the rest of the articles highlight some areas where, when inspired by the biblical message, action needs to be taken. Action, for example, in engaging with issues of race and racism, developing theologically informed acts of compassion, ministering to the marginalised, and seeking ways for conflict resolution. The geographical

scope of authors in this volume represents different countries: Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Bulgaria. It is a goal of IBTS to strengthen academic conversations and enhance the development of an international research community. In this regard, *JEBS* is not only a channel for publishing in order to inform readers about the results of recent research, but it is also a forum for authors (and readers) to communicate with each other and raise awareness of belonging to a wider academic community.

The volume begins with a youthful note. Roald Zeiffert has researched how reading the Bible contributes to a meaningful life for young Evangelicals in Norway. 'In theories about what brings meaning to life, religion is often among the most important factors,' the author claims. The picture, however, is not monochrome, and the author has found and clarified different approaches regarding expectations related to reading the Bible. The Coherent group read the Bible often and find it offers meaning for their lives. The Frustrated group believe that the Bible is important, but they read it much less and experience a conflicted relationship with the Bible. The Distanced group finds neither meaning nor frustration from the Bible, and is not much interested in the text. In his article, Radostin Marchev asks the question how two different traditions — Orthodox and Protestant — might find better mutual understanding in discussing the theological authority. The author argues that the Protestant 'teaching of the witness of the Spirit' is one of the several means that could be used in the complex and nuanced discussion of theological authority between the two traditions. Marchev also claims that the Scriptures help to distinguish between divine Tradition and human traditions. If both sides agree on this, it would be much easier for Protestants to 'appreciate the Orthodox perspective of the Bible as part of the Tradition', the author concludes. The third article that, from another angle, touches upon the topic of the Bible is a historical analysis of the life and ministry of George Henry Borrow, written by Ian Randall. This piece of research examines Borrow's work in St Petersburg and his engagement in the translation of the New Testament into the Manchu language in the nineteenth century. Borrow was not a Baptist, but the article gives the reader a glimpse into his Christian faith, 'an aspect which has been ignored or misinterpreted in much of the literature about him'. In his efforts to make the Bible accessible, and working in cooperation

with the British and Foreign Bible Society, this gifted scholar added significantly to the Protestant picture of Bible-centred faith.

The next four articles discuss theological and practical aspects of baptistic faith. Julian Gotobed raises the question as to what extent British Baptists have identified racism as a significant problem 'impacting British society and Baptist Churches'. The author analyses why, in the 1990s, the discourse about race and racism remained limited in scope and depth, and he argues that remaining unaware of deep realities of racism is what produces 'flawed readings of Christian doctrine and deficient social analysis and social engagement'. Re-telling the story of British Baptists, race, racism, and the church's witness gives the reader helpful insights for evaluating both the present situation as well as looking further into the twenty-first century. Thomas Sears focuses on another aspect of baptistic witness and explores the organising of relief efforts for those affected by war in Ukraine. The article describes practical steps and theological reflection related to the Ukraine Relief Fund established by TCM International Institute, an educational organisation based in Indianapolis, USA, with study groups in other countries. However, despite its primary educational aims, with Russian aggression in Ukraine in the background, TCM became a channel of donations, including monetary help, food, and medicine. The author locates this practical work into the framework of Oliver Davies' theology. Specific acts of financial giving function as a lived-out theology of compassion, which is rooted in ontological reality: God is compassionate. The following author, Victoria Aleksandravicene, offers another aspect to the topics Gotobed and Sears have explored, though Aleksandravicene's research emerges from a different context: it deals with mission and ministry among a marginalised group — the Bulgarian Roma. The article seeks 'patterns of transformation' which become evident in the process of the church's engagement with the marginalised and in efforts to make a difference in the lives of the Roma in the surrounding community in Bulgaria. Baptist mission — taking a holistic approach — has helped to bring transformation into the individual lives of Roma people as well as assisting in meeting the social, educational, physical, and spiritual needs of this group.

Jari Portaankorva takes the reader into the midst of conflict in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The article is not directly about Baptist efforts to meet the political and cultural challenges in these countries, even if Baptist presence is part of the story. However, analysing Muslim-Christian relations in seeking solutions to conflicts and discussing 'faith-based peace building in just peace using non-violent means', the discourse is highly illuminating for baptistic theologians who meet similar challenges in African or in other countries. Peaceful co-existence of religious communities, different religious conflict resolution strategies, building stronger links between governments and local social forces — these are questions that should be analysed thoroughly, by Christians in general and baptistic believers in particular. Portaankorva offers material for further reflection and discussion. Some lessons for Baptists have been delineated in his concluding remarks, such as the necessity of mediating peace with neutrality to both sides of a conflict or helping to re-integrate migrated and displaced people anew into the society.

This issue of *JEBS* brings together a variety of topics and ideas. Some are directly engaging with Baptist theological research, others step into discussion as conversation partners, so to say, from a helpful distance. Both types of articles bring valuable material 'to the round table' where ideas, questions, and research results are shared and tested. This is a baptistic way of doing theology, which IBTS has implemented and developed through seventy-five years of its existence.

The Contribution of Bible Reading Habits to Finding Meaning in Life: A Study of Young Evangelicals in Norway

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Abstract
Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data, this mixed-method article investigates how reading the Bible contributes to a meaningful life for young evangelicals in Norway. The analysis shows that three groups emerge from the data. The Coherent group regularly read the Bible and find it important for how they live their lives. Bible reading is an integrated part of their lives; they often read together with their peers and use the Bible as an important source of meaning. Members of the Frustrated group find the Bible important for their lives but read less. They experience a stressful, conflicted relationship with the Bible and a weaker experience of meaning. Those in the third group, the Distanced, do not find the Bible very important, or read it very often; for them, the Bible is neither a source of meaning nor a source of frustration. They do not seek meaning from the Bible.

Keywords
Young people; Bible; meaning; evangelical; Norway; mixed-method research

Introduction

In theories about what brings meaning to life, religion is often among the most important factors.[1] Research from the United States, for example, indicates the significant impact that the Bible can have on readers. This is acknowledged as both positive and negative, where certain research shows that a literal view of the Bible may be harmful both for society as a whole and for individuals,[2] while other scholars

[1] Tatjana Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2020).
[2] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

underline that people who read the Bible are, in general, happier than those who do not.[3] Despite the recognition of religion as a key factor in notions of meaning and purpose, among Scandinavian scholars religion has not received much attention as a resource that holds importance in the lives of young people.[4]

This article thus seeks to take a step forward in contributing to this field by offering an empirical study with a mixed-method research design that focuses on the way a particular group of young people in Norway that I have identified as 'young evangelicals' both relate to the Bible and assess its contribution to what they consider a meaningful life. The specific question posed in this article is, 'In what way and to what extent does the Bible contribute towards meaning in life for young evangelicals in Norway?'

After identifying some important contextual parameters, the article sets out the theoretical framework for the study in terms of what is understood by 'meaning in life' and presents a brief overview of previous research on patterns of Bible reading that has bearing on the investigation at hand. The methodology for the empirical work is then detailed, before turning to an analysis of the data collected. The article ends with a discussion of the results that seeks to draw some conclusions with respect to the question of whether and in what ways the Bible is considered a resource for young evangelicals in Norway.

In terms of the Norwegian context, I suggest that not paying sufficient attention to the issue of religion in relation to meaning in the lives of young people represents a notable lack or gap in research thus far. Most young people in Norway have some kind of relation to the (Lutheran) Church of Norway. Even though its status as a state church ended in 2012, the church still holds a prominent and privileged position in Norwegian society.[5] One of the important connections for young

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[3] Rodney Stark and Jared Maier, 'Faith and Happiness', *Review of Religious Research*, 50, no. 1 (2008), 120–25.

[4] Mia Lövheim and Jonas Bromander, *Religion som resurs?: Existentiella frågor och värderingar i unga svenskars liv* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma bokförlag, 2012).

[5] Ingunn Folkestad Breistein and Inger Furseth, 'A Coherent Public Policy on Religion in Norway? An Analysis of the 2013 Report "A Society Open to Religious and Worldview

people is the confirmation programme of the Church of Norway and, even though numbers are decreasing, 52 percent of fifteen-year-olds in Norway still participate in it.[6] Certainly, to be part of the confirmation programme does not necessarily indicate a personal faith, and the overall trend seems to be for fewer and fewer young people to be interested in religious questions. However, the church connection remains important, and there is an observable presence of young religious people in other settings in Norway,[7] among whom are those involved in various evangelical movements. It is these young people, aged from 15 to 25, who are part of the free church or the prayer house movement in Norway that are the focus of my research. As the term 'evangelical' is rarely used in Norway, it is important at this point to set out what is meant by evangelical movements in the Norwegian setting, and the bearing the naming of the young people as 'evangelicals' has on the study.

A key aspect of the movements designated evangelical is their relation to the Church of Norway. As a result of a number of revival periods during the mid to late 1800s, various prayer house movements and free churches were established. The majority (the prayer house movement) remained part of the Church of Norway, working with an inner mission strategy and differentiating themselves religiously from the wider Church of Norway, while a minority left the Church of Norway and established various free churches as independent denominations.[8] The young people in my sample affiliate with one of six denominations/organisations, each of which has its own independent youth organisation and all of which associate with the Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne movement.[9] All are officially recognised by the state and report their work to the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, who hold a register that gives an overview of the

Diversity'", in *Public Commissions on Cultural and Religious Diversity Analysis, Reception and Challenges*, ed. by Solange Lefebvre and Patrice Brodeur (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 217–239.

[6] Andreas Østhus, *Antall Konfirmasjoner Synker Jevnt* (Oslo: Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2021).

[7] Ida Marie Høeg, *Religion Og Ungdom* (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 2017).

[8] Hans Try, "Lekmannsrørsle og 'associationsaand' ca1820–1880, in *Bedehuset: Rørsla, bygda, folket,* ed. by Olaf Aagedal (Oslo: Samlaget, 1986), pp. 7–38.

[9] All the organisations are members of The Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelization <www.norme.no>.

size of the organisations and membership figures.[10] In total there are almost fifty thousand[11] members of these youth organisations. Two organisations, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM)[12] and Inner Mission Federation (ImF), are part of the Church of Norway but call themselves inner mission organisations. The four free-church denominations represented in the survey are the Lutheran Free Church, the Mission Church, the Pentecostal movement, and the Baptist Union.

In terms of the designation of the young people as 'young evangelicals', the second point to note here is the basis from which the young people who are the focus of my research approach the Bible in contrast to other young people in Norwegian society. There is an ongoing scholarly debate concerning who is evangelical and who is not.[13] According to the Scottish historian David Bebbington,[14] who has provided the most widely used definition of evangelicals, understanding the Bible as the word of God that has authority is one of the key markers of evangelical religion. This is reflected in the survey I have conducted, where most of the young people within the various organisations named above view the Bible as God's direct word or at least inspired by God.[15] In contrast, the majority of young people in Norway are quite secular and see the Bible as an ancient book with legends written by ordinary people.[16] Thus, in examining the link between Bible reading habits and meaning in life, 'evangelical' brings further focus to the issue that might

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10 Fordelingsutvalget, *Medlemsutvikling Enkeltorganisasjoner 1977–2021*, 2022 <https://www.fordelingsutvalget.no/Statistikk/> [accessed 8 August 2022]. All the membership figures used in this study are taken from the 2019 register.

11 ImF: 5530 members; NLM: 12 041 members; Lutheran Free Church: 8123 members; Mission Church: 5983 members; Pentecostal: 17 863 members; and Baptist: 4451 members.

12 NLM does not have a tradition of registering members in their youth organisation, and there is reason to believe that in total they attract more people than the formal membership figures indicate, partly because they own almost 30 schools and more than 40 kindergartens. See Norwegian Lutheran Mission <https://nlm.no/om-oss2/vart-arbeid/> [accessed 14 August 2022].

13 M. Noll, 'What is "Evangelical"?', in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. by Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 19–32.

14 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

15 See the method section for details.

16 Tore Witsø Rafoss, *Nordmenns Bibelbruk: KIFKO Rapport* 2017:1 (Oslo: KIFO Institutt for kirke-, religions- og livssynsforskning, 2017).

be more specifically phrased as whether and in what ways the Bible is considered a resource for young people who perceive the Bible as holding some authority and reflecting the word of God.

Theoretical Framework

My main theoretical perspective is taken from the Austrian researcher Tatjana Schnell, who works with existential psychology and has done extensive work on what gives meaning in life.[17] While her theories consider the population in general, my aim is to look more specifically at how the Bible and Bible reading contribute to meaning in the lives of young active Christians.[18]

Tatjana Schnell's emphasis is on meaning *in* life, and she defines meaning as 'the direction — or purpose — that someone pursues, and the ensuing subjective and dynamic evaluation of their life as meaningful'.[19] She claims that religion is the third most important source of meaning, after generativity and care. Those who are religious tend to score high on meaning in life. This makes it interesting to look at how this works among young people who are highly involved in religion. Schnell defines meaningfulness as trusting that life is worth living, and operationalises this with the help of four key concepts: *coherence,* that the different aspects of our life fit together and ideally strengthen each other and do not contradict each other; *significance,* an understanding that what we do is important and has an effect; *orientation,* that life is going in a direction, heading somewhere you want to go; and *belonging,* that you are part of something greater, that you have a place in this world. These concepts all involve personal engagement, and they cannot be taken for granted.

Schnell emphasises the philosophical definition of meaning as what is 'attributed to a thing, action or event by a person in a specific situation'.[20] For young Christians, the Bible is both a physical thing, but

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17 Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*.
18 'Active' refers to being actively involved as participants in a religious youth event.
19 Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*, p. 6.
20 Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*, p. 28.

in terms of the process of reading it, it is also a practice in which they are involved in various ways. Schnell has developed a hierarchical model of meaning (Figure 1) with five stages. From the bottom, it starts with *perceptions*, which are the results of the *actions* one performs that are according to the *goals* a person has for their life. These are often meaningful, though they can be meaningless if they are goals that have, for example, been inherited from parents or one's environment without making them one's own. These goals are then connected to *sources of meaning* that end up in *meaning in life*. In this article, I will use Schnell's model to examine how the Bible works as a source of meaning in life. I will do so by analysing the vertical coherence and studying how the different layers relate to each other: for example, how the goals relate to actions and how the assumptions come from actions. If the internal contradiction exceeds a critical level, it will result in a crisis of meaning. A crisis of meaning is often associated with adverse effects such as pessimism, depression, and anxiety. Furthermore, if something lacks meaning for a person, then it is not so essential for that individual, and thus does not have either the positive effect of being meaningful or the adverse effect of a crisis of meaning.

Previous Research: The Role of the Bible and Bible Reading

As already noted, religion is an important source of meaning. Being a frequent reader of Scripture is one of the most significant factors in predicting strong religiousness.[21] Tore Witsø Rafoss has contributed to research on the role of the Bible in a Norwegian setting. He found that young Christians, especially from free churches, read the Bible regularly and that young men read the Bible more than young women and Norwegian people on average.[22] Further, he found that young adults from free churches often read frequently and according to a plan. The

[21] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[22] The research is based on both existing quantitative data from Tore Witsøe Rafoss, *Nordmenns Bibelbruk, KIFO Rapport 2017:1* and on qualitative research by Rafoss: Tore Witsø Rafoss, *Å tilbringe tid med Gud. En kvalitativ studie av unge voksnes bibelbruk, KIFO Rapport 2018: 3* (Oslo: KIFO, Institutt for kirke-, religions- og livssynsforskning, 2018).

main reason given for reading is to meet God, though some also express reading the Bible as a duty and that it is a tool for spiritual warfare between God and the Devil. Furthermore, they also read the Bible as a source of knowledge and guidance in their daily lives. In contrast, some of Rafoss's respondents who belonged to the Church of Norway saw Bible reading as a minor part of being a Christian and therefore expressed a low degree of guilt about not reading. Even though the findings in Rafoss's research are relevant for this study, they also raise some questions. The qualitative interviews only had six participants from free churches and all the rest were part of the Church of Norway, and in terms of those Church of Norway participants, the researchers did not distinguish between low and high church affiliation. Additional studies from both the United States and Norway indicate that people with a literal and non-literal view of the Bible are among those who read the Bible regularly, but those with a literal view read more often.[23]

According to Bebbington's definition of the evangelical tradition, the Bible has a strong authority for how people should live their lives, yet there is a growing shift in perception:

> Young Americans' assurance that the Bible, or any other alleged authority, contains the truth by which to live has, compared to evangelical convictions, been severely weakened. And in the intervening years, for complicated reasons, final authority has decisively shifted from the Bible to the individual reader.[24]

This shift of view away from the Bible having authority is also seen in Scandinavian research. Maria Zackariasson has studied young people in the Uniting Church in Sweden.[25] She found that the role of the Bible, and the possible authority it has for one's life, is not at the forefront in the stories young people from Sweden tell their friends regarding their engagement in a free church.[26] Ida Marie Høeg found the most

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[23] Aaron B. Franzen, 'Reading the Bible in America: The Moral and Political Attitude Effect', *Review of Religious Research*, 55, no. 3 (2013), 393–411; see also both of Tore Witsø Rafoss's reports as detailed above.

[24] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 291.

[25] A denomination established in 2011 by the merger of the United Methodist Church, Baptist Union of Sweden, and Mission Covenant Church of Sweden.

[26] Maria Zackariasson, 'Being Yourself: Identity and Self-Presentation among Youths in Christian Youth Organizations', *YOUNG*, 22, no. 2 (2014), 153–170.

important reason given by teenagers who continued to be active members of the Church of Norway after their confirmation class was the wish to be part of a cultural community in the church. They were not particularly interested in the Bible and its authority, and they did not adopt many of the church's classical dogmatics.[27] Irene Trysnes and Ronald Synnes noted that when young people from migrant (free) churches in Norway describe their relationship to the Bible, this is done as innocuously as possible, emphasising the positive aspects.[28]

The Protestant idea of reading the Bible by oneself was a key element in the Reformation, and for the following five hundred years, this idea has shaped how Norwegian Protestants (including those in evangelical movements) have used and viewed the Bible,[29] although not without challenge from scholars who advocate for a broader span of Bible reading methods, with a particular emphasis on reading in a community.[30] In terms of the Bible reading under examination in this article, I acknowledge that there are cognitive, social, and emotional factors that are important and relevant to this discussion.[31]

Data and Method

The research underlying this article was conducted using a mixed-method, sequential explanatory design.[32] The mixed method has the

[27] Ida Marie Høeg, 'Fellesskap og kulturell tilhørighet Kristen identitet hos ungdom i Den norske kirke', *Prismet*, 4 (2012), 199–217. As a counterpoint to this, although from a British context, one might refer to the research carried out by Ruth Perrin who observed that emerging adults argued according to evangelical orthodoxy when she studied how they interpreted biblical texts in evangelical churches in Britain. Ruth Perrin, 'An Observation and Analysis of Ordinary Bible Reading among British, Evangelical, Emerging Adults' (doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2015) <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11271/> [accessed 4 May 2023].

[28] Irene Trysnes and Ronald Mayora Synnes, 'The Role of Religion in Young Muslims' and Christians' Self-Presentation on Social Media', *YOUNG*, 30, no. 3 (2021), 281–296.

[29] Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

[30] Emily K. Ronald, 'More than "Alone with the Bible": Reconceptualizing Religious Reading', *Sociology of Religion*, 73, no. 3 (2012), 323–344.

[31] Erling Birkedal, *Noen Ganger Tror Jeg På Gud, Men-? : En Undersøkelse Av Gudstro Og Erfaring Med Religiøs Praksis i Tidlig Ungdomsalder* (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2001).

[32] William Hanson, John W. Cresswell, Vicki L. Plano Clark, Kelly S. Petska, and J. David Cresswell, 'Mixed Methods Research Designs in Counselling Psychology', *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52 (2005), 224–235.

advantage of enriching the data with different methods. Using a sequential design, the analysis starts with the quantitative data and then uses the qualitative data to explicate the findings. The research began with a survey of 661[33] young people between 15 and 25 years of age who had attended a youth camp or festival held by a free church or prayer house organisation in 2019.[34] One finding from this survey was that young evangelicals considered the Bible to be God's exact word (59 %) or inspired by God (27%). To find out more about what this meant, I arranged six[35] focus group interviews in the spring of 2021. These interviews were conducted online via Zoom, and 25 young people between 17 and 24 years old participated. Groups had between three and five members, and both genders were represented in all groups. The participants in these groups were recruited by the youth organisations in which they were involved.[36] Included among the six groups were two separate focus group interviews with people from the Baptist Union to ensure that I also obtained data from young people with a migrant background since this denomination has a large proportion of migrants in their youth organisation.[37]

In the interviews, the Bible was one of two themes. The interviews had a semi-structured design, and I started by asking what the Bible meant for the informants personally and then added several questions to follow up on the conversations they had amongst themselves. A reduction analysis, whereby I condensed all the

[33] The survey was sent to 2162 participants, and 825 people responded. 164 were excluded because they did not give informed consent (40) or completed less than half of the questionnaire (124). This gives a response rate of 31%. Of the respondents, 37% were male and 63% were females.

[34] The survey was carried out online in 2020; it was planned to be done in person at summer events 2020, but due to the covid-19 pandemic all the events where cancelled. The online survey was sent to those who had participated in events arranged by the six different organisations in 2019.

[35] ImF was not included in the focus group interviews due to lack of capacity in the organisation to recruit participants.

[36] A requirement was that they had been part of the organisation for at least two years. As the survey was anonymous, a possible overlap of participants in the qualitative and quantitative data would be incidental.

[37] Roald Zeiffert, 'Easy Come – Easy Go Om Frafall Og Tilvekst i Det Organiserte Barne- Og Ungdomsarbeidet i Norske Frimenigheter' (master's dissertation, Ansgar Teologiske Høgskole, 2018).

interviews, revealed that every participant across all groups had different experiences of how much they read the Bible, with specific regard to reading the physical book. They also expressed different attitudes regarding how important the Bible was in their lives. With these findings, I went back to the quantitative material and, from the data, created four groups based on how often the participants read the Bible and how important they considered it to be for them. Table 1 shows these four different groups and how the respondents were categorised. I returned to the qualitative material once again to carry out a new reduction analysis of all the participants. Based on how the participants self-expressed their reading habits and the importance of the Bible in their lives, I placed the 25 participants from the group interviews into one of the four categories in the model.

	Bible is very important for how I live my life	Bible has some or little importance
Read the Bible often or very often	(N=217) Eight informants Group A 'The Coherent'	(N=53) 0 informants Group D
Read the Bible seldom	(N=152) Nine informants Group B: "The Frustrated"	(N=239) Eight informants Group C "The Distanced"

Table 1: The four groups showing the distribution of participants by how often they read and how important they find the Bible

Based on Table 1, I analysed the qualitative material using inductive coding and the quantitative material using descriptive analyses, comparing means and bivariate correlation (Pearson's r). In the following analysis section, I will use findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data.[38] The discussion concerns three of the four

[38] I have used the SPSS statistical analysis software for the quantitative data, and NVivo software for the qualitative data. Both the survey and the focus group interviews were conducted in Norwegian.

groups, with less attention on group D because there was no supporting qualitative data and only 8 percent in the quantitative data. In the quantitative material, the vast majority (N=546) identify themselves as part of one of the organisations specified in this article, while 17 percent (N=115) relate to another organisation outside those groupings but attended an event held by one of the evangelical organisations.

The groups are all typologies, where findings are generalised from the quantitative data and then explained by the qualitative data. Furthermore, it must be remembered that even though the data material contributes towards understanding the young evangelicals in Norway, it does not express all there is to say about them. It is not the whole truth about how the young people interviewed relate to the Bible, which is affected by several factors such as, for example, what the church they belong to expects them to say, how their peers in the group interview react, and how their own day has gone at the time of the interview.

Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the three different groups into which the respondents fall, and here, as already noted above, the quantitative and qualitative data are used to inform each other.

The Coherent (group A)

One-third of the young people find the Bible very important for how they live their lives, and they read the physical Bible often or very often (33 percent of the boys and 32 percent of the girls). A bivariate correlation analysis reveals a positive connection between being in this group and age (r .284, p< .000). The older you are, the more likely you are to be part of this group. To see if age has an impact on reading the Bible or its relative importance, I carried out two additional bivariate correlations. There is a r .257 (p<.000) correlation between age and reading the physical Bible; and a r .250 (p< .000) correlation between age and how important the Bible is perceived to be. As we might expect, there is a strong correlation (r .588, p< .000) between reading the Bible often and finding it important for how one lives one's life.

Regarding the interviews, the first observation is that members of this cohort have a structured type of Bible reading. Several of them are part of a programme or a collective agreement with peers to read the Bible together every day. Others read alone. They do so because they have chosen this practice voluntarily, and none of them express a feeling of outside pressure to read. A few commented that earlier in their lives they had felt internal pressure when they read little, but not anymore.

Secondly, they express a low level of frustration. The lack of 'should' in their stories is striking and in contrast to the frustrated group. The Coherent in general read the Bible as it is (a literal way), and do not question the text, as the Frustrated tend to do. The questions they ask are mostly directed toward themselves, as one of the girls demonstrates: 'When I read, I try to think and reflect, what does this mean in my life? What do I have to change in my life?'

Thirdly, several of them lived with peers in a student collective where they had some religious practices as their joint commitment. Reading the Bible together was one of these practices. As one of the respondents frames it, 'We read at the same time every day, and that makes it easier for me.' Another interviewee spoke about the daily experience and said, 'When we all read, it is kind of natural, and you know I also must read what the others read. We kind of all read the same text, and you must read it because we are talking about it. I like that a lot.'

The importance of reading together was also a topic in the quantitative data, showing that those belonging to the Coherent group also read much more frequently than those in other groups (mean 4.2 on a 1–5 scale), while the average mean is 3.6.

The quantitative data also shows a strong correlation between being in this group and a traditional conservative attitude towards living together before marriage (r .385, $p < .000$) and towards same-sex relations (r .339, $p < .000$), and a slightly weaker but still significant trend towards refraining from alcohol (r .237, $p < .000$).

The Frustrated (group B)

The Frustrated are categorised by viewing the Bible as very important for how they live their lives but, at the same time, reading less often. Altogether, 25 percent of the boys and 21 percent of the girls were in this group. A correlation analysis reveals age is not a significant factor to explain this group, as it is for the other two groups.

Members of this group express high expectations of themselves for reading and talk a lot about reading the Bible less than they want to. Here is a short conversation from one of the group interviews to illustrate this:

> Respondent A:
>
> […] I kind of feel that I use time with God in other ways, but I feel at least for myself that I wish I would use more time with the Bible.
>
> Respondent B:
>
> Yes, you are not alone. The Bible is maybe the book I think most about during my day and in my life. I doubt there is any day I don't think about it, and at the same time, it is the book I read the least […], I don't read, or I read very seldom. And it demands more of me than I think it should.

Members in this group express an internal conflict because they think the Bible is important, and they want to read it more, but for some reason, they do not. Later in the same interview, the issue of spare time comes up as a central factor. They express that they do not have enough free time to do the reading.

In all the group interviews, those who fit into the Frustrated group talked a lot about interpretation, and they all struggled with the process of understanding the meaning of the text. Two concrete examples came up concerning homosexuality, how that topic should be understood, and how their attitudes towards questions related to sexuality were misunderstood in society. Another difficult topic was the perceived conflict between science and creation. When they talked about science and the Bible, one person commented, 'It is hard when I don't understand when it doesn't add up kind of. Yes, I find it hard, and it affects my faith.' Earlier in the conversation, this person used the same theme as an example of what the Bible means to them. The Bible is

there to explain *why* something happened (referring to creation) while science shows us *how*, but still, as the later remark shows, they still found themselves conflicted about it.

Another source of frustration was an important topic in one of the free-church interviews. The conversation focused on what they expected would happen when they read the Bible and what this meant for them. However, their reading was a mixed experience. They found verses for guidance and comfort but also lacked what they would see as concrete experiences of God's presence. One boy said, 'I open the Bible and expect that something is going to happen to me, and it doesn't.'

The most common phrase used by people in this group was 'I should,' and most of them expressed frustration and that they were not good Christians. None of them indicate that pressure was coming from the outside. It was their own expectations that they did not manage to fulfil. Reading was also something that they mostly did on their own. One boy stated, 'I try to read some verses in bed right before I go to sleep, but that doesn't work well [and the rest of the group laugh in recognition].' In contrast to the Coherent group, they do not involve peers in their reading routines, and they express fewer routines for their reading. The quantitative data shows they are also less than averagely involved in Bible groups (mean 3.63 on a 1–5 scale).

In the quantitative material, I find there is a much weaker correlation between the Frustrated group and theological attitudes. There is no significant correlation between this group and the question of living together before marriage. There is a moderate to weak correlation between a conservative view on same-sex relations (r .144, $p < .000$), and a weak correlation towards a restrictive view on alcohol (r .104, $p < .008$).

The Distanced (group C)

The Distanced are categorised by finding the Bible of medium or less importance for how they live their lives and by reading the Bible only sometimes or hardly at all. Thirty-seven percent of the boys and 36 percent of the girls were in this group. There is a tendency that the youngest are more likely to be part of this group (r -.215, $p < .000$).

There was some use of 'should' in this group, but they did not dwell on it, and no one mentioned a lack of time to back up a feeling of something they felt they should do but did not. Even though they considered the Bible to be God's word, it was not important for them to read it. They simply found other things more relevant to them, well documented in the conversation between these two participants:

> Respondent C:
>
> For me it is like, I have kind of mixed feelings. I know it is the Word of God, and that it is holy, but I don't have a strong connection to it […] So a little mixed feeling about what I know and feel.
>
> Respondent D:
>
> I am also there, kind of, I don't have a very strong connection to the Bible. I don't know why, but it has never been my go-to when it counts […] When I want to spend some time with Jesus, my first choice is worship [music] and fellowship, I understand that the Bible is very important and God's word and all that, but it is not my connection with Jesus.

For a few, there are some signs of frustration, mostly expressed by statements like 'yes, I probably should have read more', but further on in the conversation, they do not experience it as a conflict. They do not have any specific goals or expectations when they read the Bible, and they do not mention missing much value by not reading.

For this group, the Bible is not very important and it does not influence their social life. Bible reading is not something they do together with friends. They also attend Bible groups less often than the two other groups (mean 2.95 on a 1–5 scale).

The quantitative material also reveals a strong correlation between being in the Distanced group and having more liberal attitudes towards living together before marriage (r -.440, $p < .000$) and same-sex relations (r -.435, $p < .000$), and a more liberal attitude towards alcohol (r -.337, $p < .000$).

Conclusive Discussion

This article asks the question of how meaningful the Bible is for young people who are actively involved in evangelical movements in Norway. The majority describe the Bible as the word of God and find the Bible (very) important for how they live their lives. Four out of ten also read the Bible (very) often. Their experience of how important the Bible is to them is, to a large degree, related to how often and in what way they read the Bible. In the analysis section I have shown three different ways young evangelicals in Norway relate to the Bible in daily life.

A: The Coherent	B: The Frustrated	C: The Distanced
Structures around their Bible reading	Not very structured, do not have time for reading	No need for structure, find worship and fellowship more important
Involvement from peers	Low involvement from peers	No involvement from peers
Low or no frustration	High frustration	Low or medium frustration
Low expressed pressure	High expressed pressure	Medium expressed pressure
Read the Bible 'as it is'	Asking questions	Bible is not personal
Correlates with conservative theology	Weak correlations towards either liberal or conservative theology	Correlates with liberal theology

Table 2: Summary table of the three groups and their main characteristics

The summary table (Table 2) presents the main differences between the groups. The three groups have different experiences when it comes to both how they read the Bible and what they get out of it. Group A(Coherent) have a clear structure and involve their peers more than groups B and C. Group B (Frustrated) express both much higher pressure and frustration than groups A and C. Group C (Distanced) do

not find the Bible to be of much importance for their lives and therefore have a more distanced relationship to the Bible than groups A and B.

For group A, the Bible contributes to a meaningful life. They have an understanding that the Bible is very important for how they live, and they read it often. They have a feeling of coherence: what they want to do, is also what they do. Reading the Bible also fits well with their lives in general, and they involve their friends in the reading. They have the desire to read; they describe it as an inner motivation to read often and let the Bible influence their lives. None of them express pressure from outside, though some said they had felt pressure before but now it was their inner motivation that drove them. They describe the Bible as important and that it has *significance* in their life, which is clearly expressed through the focus they give to having solid structures around their reading routines. Since their reading has such an impact on their life, it also gives a deep feeling of *belonging*, both to a godly plan and to a community of peers. All this contributes to the Bible being a source of meaning for them, which also gives a clearer *orientation* and a feeling of *coherence*.

For the second group (B), Bible reading does not contribute to a meaningful life. They also have an understanding that the Bible is very important for how they live, but they do not read that often. This lack of coherence between what they want and what they do leads to frustration. It looks as if they have less inner motivation for reading, and express much more of a sense of pressure to read the Bible more often than they do. None of them mention concrete examples of such external pressure, but it probably arises from a combination of social pressure from the social environment of which they are a part and their own wish to read more than they do. In contrast to the first group (A), in terms of reading, they lack both clear routines and have low involvement with friends in their Bible reading. They do sometimes participate in organised Bible groups, but reading together with friends is not a part

of their daily routine. They experience a *lack of coherence* between what they want to do, and what they are doing. This results in a *lower degree of orientation*, and they struggle with feelings that if they were to read more it would have a *significant* impact on them. All this also gives them a *weaker experience of belonging*. As noted earlier, Schnell[39] describes crises of meaning. This has more severe psychological consequences than I found in the interviews, although the conflict this group experiences has the potential to create a risk of a crisis of meaning.

The third group (C) differs from the first two in several ways. First, they do not find the Bible very important for how they live their lives, and they read it less than the other groups (A and B). They have other ways of participating in religious life. They express some of the same relations to the Bible as the main findings from the study of young adults in the Church of Norway.[40] For them, the more emotional aspect, such as worship and the social experiences of being part of a religious community, are more important to them than reading the Bible. The Bible is not something they need in order to *belong*. This group do not expect to gain much by reading the Bible and therefore do not put pressure on themselves to read. Even though they express that they should read the Bible more, they do not seem troubled about their lack of reading in the way group B is. This indicates that even though there are some signs of lack of *coherence*, they are not very concerned. For this group, the Bible is not part of what gives meaning in their life, nor does it seem to be a risk for creating a crisis of meaning. Since the Bible has less *significance* for them, they are not using it as a *direction* in life.

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39 Schnell. *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*, pp. 105–116.

40 Rafoss and Bangstad, *Å tilbringe tid med gud en kvalitativ studie av unge voksnes bibelbruk* (KIFO, Institutt for kirke-, religions- og livssynsforskning, 2018).

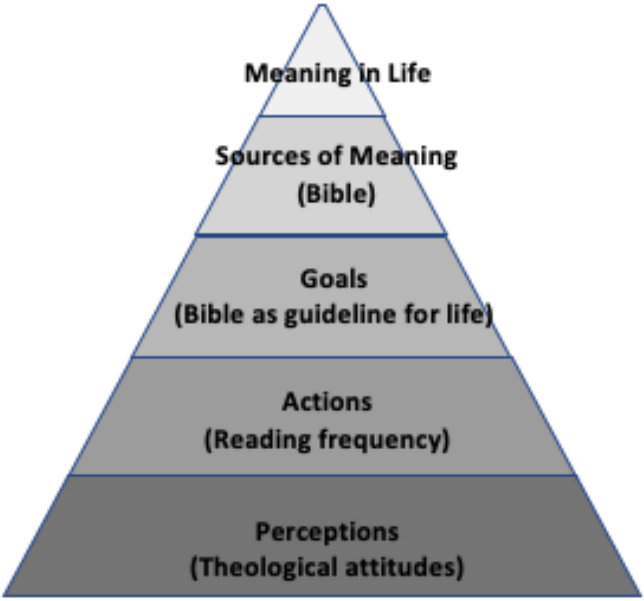

Figure 1: The hierarchic model of meaning, applied to the Bible as a source of meaning, modified from Schnell.

Using a vertical coherence strategy to analyse the relationship between the different layers in the hierarchic model of meaning (Figure 2), we can better understand what is going on in the life of the young people. The model starts with *meaning in life* at the top, then *sources of meaning* is the next layer. In this article, we have examined how the Bible, both as an authority and in terms of practical Bible reading, can be a meaningful resource for religious people. As we see from the discussion above, the three groups relate to the model in different ways. Group C does not seek to use the Bible as a resource for experiencing meaning. The first two groups (A and B) both seek meaning from the Bible but have very different experiences of how this works. The first two groups have the same *goal:* they want the Bible to be very important for how they live their lives. The difference appears in the second-to-last layer, *actions*. Group A have a structure for their Bible reading, they read together with peers, and they express low frustration regarding both the Bible reading and the text. Group B have less structure, are less likely to

involve peers, and express conflicts both towards Bible reading and the text itself. These two groups differ both in their actions and their own emotions about their actions. Group A have a vertical coherence between *actions* and *goals,* while group B do not. This also results in differences in *perception,* where group A subscribes to a conservative theology, while we do not find this in group B. This lack of vertical coherence between goals and action explains why the Bible contributes to a meaningful life for the Coherent but not for the Frustrated. These findings also help us to better understand previous research on young people and Bible reading. It explains why some young people in Norway read the Bible frequently, and demonstrate that it is an integrated and meaningful part of their lives.

This research also highlights that there is a notable group of active young evangelicals in Norway who find the Bible of little importance for their religious life, a finding more in line with previous research on young people in the Church of Norway. Young people who are part of this distanced group (C) do not share the same goal as groups A and B, meaning that the Bible is not very important to them. The Bible is neither a source of meaning in their lives nor is it a source of frustration. Their focus is mainly on social aspects of religious life, such as being part of a community, and emotional and/or spiritual aspects such as worship.

The Nature of Theological Authority in Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy: Searching for Common Ground

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Abstract
At first glance the understandings of theological authority in Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism are quite different. This fact has the potential to hinder effective dialogue between the two traditions. This article examines the possibility of the Protestant understanding of theological authority being read and interpreted through the reformer's doctrine of the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti Internum* (the Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit) such that it meets the Eastern Orthodox objections. Applying the teaching of the Spirit's witness provides an opportunity to emphasise some important features and highlight nuances in the understanding of authority that otherwise could be easily neglected. While it does not solve all the problems in the dialogue, this approach could possibly lead to important rapprochement of the two positions.

Keywords
Authority; Eastern Orthodoxy; Protestantism; witness of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

The question of authority in Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy is at the same time important and often underestimated. It is not unusual for either of the two sides to enter into dialogue not only without complete understanding of the other view but also without having thought carefully through their own presuppositions. As a result, they soon find not only lack of agreement but also lack of understanding of the arguments presented, even when participants use more or less identical vocabulary.

In what follows, I first seek to briefly present some specific aspects of the Orthodox and Protestant conceptions of the nature of theological authority and then to suggest what might be a possible way

for dialogue.[1] I will use the term 'authority' in the sense of both ultimate authority and its proximate expressions that enable the believing community to understand what is entailed in and meant by its revelation.

Aspects of Theological Authority in Eastern Orthodoxy

The starting point of the Orthodox theological model is its lack of formal, external authority. Georges Florovsky succinctly says, 'In the Church there is not and cannot be any outward authority.'

But what does this mean in practice? Obviously, there are many sources on which Orthodox theologians base their views, such as Scripture, Tradition,[2] ecumenical councils, defined dogmas, church cannons, liturgy and its symbols, fathers of the church, and icons to name just a few. Nevertheless, none of them stand 'over' the church as some formal authority.[3] For example, in Eastern Orthodoxy the main way of taking decisions is conciliar, and the teachings of the ecumenical councils have non-negotiable status. Nevertheless, their authority is not derived just from the fact that they are ecumenical and that at a certain time and place the officially gathered delegates reached a certain conclusion. In history, there were councils that were both ecumenical and conducted in an orderly manner which were subsequently rejected by the believing community.[4] What makes certain conclusions

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[1] The question of authority in the dialogue between Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism runs on at least two connected but different levels. The first relates to the nature of the authority itself, while the second concerns the convergence of the sources used in the two traditions. In this article I will limit myself mainly to the first level.

[2] I use 'Tradition' (capital 'T') for the tradition that preserved the authentic Christian teaching. Respectively, I use 'tradition' (small 't') for the 'human traditions' that could be either personal opinions, a mixture of truth and error, or sometimes even flatly wrong. With some adaptations, a similar but more nuanced elaboration could be made on the basis of the terminology used in *The Fourth Word Conference of Faith and Order, Montreal 1963*, ed. by P. C. Roger and L. Vischer, (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 50, para. 39. It is important to note that the report from which this section is derived represents the common work of Orthodox Georges Florovsky and Methodist Albert Outler.

[3] Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 47; Alexander Schmemann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, trans. by Lydia W. Kesich (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston), p. 235.

[4] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), p. 187; John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Place in the World Today*

authoritative is the acceptance of these decisions by the church. This is, though, not quite the same as formal adoption in the juridical sense. As John Meyendorff comments,

> [T]he cannons of these councils that it [the church] acknowledged as authentic were regarded merely as an expression of the Church's nature under certain concrete circumstances, a kind of 'jurisprudence of the Holy Spirit', as it were, reflecting the eternal *order* of the Body of Christ. They were never transformed into a kind of juridical supergovernment and were never looked upon as a means by which to exercise an effective control over all members of the Church, centrally or from above.[5]

Alexander Schmemann says something similar about the Bible:

> If we proclaim Scripture to be the supreme authority for teaching the faith in the Church, then what is the 'criterion' of Scripture? Sooner or later it becomes 'biblical science' — i.e., in the final analyses, naked reason. But if […] on the other hand we proclaim the Church to be the definitive, highest and inspired interpreter of scripture, then through whom, where and when this interpretation is brought about? And however we answer this question, this 'organ' or 'authority' in fact proves to be standing *over* the scriptures as an *outside* authority […] [I]f Orthodox theologians firmly hold to the formal principle that the authoritative interpretation of scripture belongs to the Church and is accomplished in the light of tradition, then the vital content and 'practical' application of this principle remain unclear and in fact lead to a certain paralysis of the 'understanding of scripture' in the life of the Church.[6]

On the most general level, authority in the Orthodox Church is perceived as a result of the communion and union between God and humanity and the sharing of divine life. The result of this is 'the fullness of revelation given to the true witnesses, to the sons of the Church, enlightened by the Holy Spirit'.[7] But this seemingly simple statement is actually much more complicated. As Schmemann points out, the revelation of the Spirit is not an authority understood as power but is

(New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), pp. 24–26. See also Georges Florovsky, 'The Authority of the Ancient Councils and the Tradition of the Fathers', in *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View: Vol 1 of the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), pp. 93–104; Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy*, p. 12.

[5] Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 207–208.

[6] Alexander Schmemann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. by Paul Kachur (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), p. 67.

[7] Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 243.

entirely different in nature.[8] It is much more like an inner leading to the truth. This revelation to the truth is neither encapsulated (mainly) in the Bible as in Protestantism nor is seen as coming from two separate sources (Scripture and Tradition) as in Catholicism. For the Orthodox believers, Scripture is seen as a part of the Tradition, but again, this notion is understood in a much larger sense as, in the famous words of Vladimir Lossky, 'the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church'.[9]

Following this understanding of Tradition, it is possible to call Tradition 'experience' — as some Orthodox theologians actually do: 'The experience of the Church is the primary source and measure of every genuine effort to construct theology.'[10] This understanding of the nature and source of theological authority, at least in part, transcends rational understanding and explains why apophatic theology has such an important place in contemporary Orthodox thought. Part of this revelation just cannot be fully and adequately expressed through human language. As a consequence, the Orthodox Church claims both that it has never given a full expression of its faith (even in the creeds and the decisions of the ecumenical councils) and that its 'symbolic books' are by no means definitive and binding expressions of its teaching.[11] For this reason, the influence of different Orthodox catechisms and confessions of faith is relatively smaller than that of the Western ones. To approach the same question from a different angle, it is believed that the fulness of the Orthodox faith can be grasped not so much with rational human capacities as through immersion in the liturgical life of the church, by 'taste and see'.

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[8] Alexander Schmemann, 'Freedom in the Church', in *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy and the West*, by Alexander Schmemann (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), pp. 179–191.

[9] Vladimir Lossky, 'Tradition and Traditions', in *In the Image and Likeness of God*, by Vladimir Lossky (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 141–168 (p. 152). See also John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), pp. 83–102; John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), pp. 168–178.

[10] Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology: Part 2,* trans. by Robert Nichols (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), p. 53. See also Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 13.

[11] Paul Ladouceor, *Modern Orthodox Theology: Behold, I Make All Things New* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 28–29.

From what we have just said, several conclusions could be deduced: authority in the Orthodox Church (1) cannot be reduced to any external source; (2) it is experiential and proceeds from the communion with God and sharing of the divine life; (3) it is strongly pneumatological; (4) it cannot be fully expressed with language and reduced to rational propositions; and (5) it is more communal than individualistic and sustained by the corporate liturgical life of the church.

Protestant View of Theological Authority

The traditional notion of theological authority in Protestantism[12] is closely connected with the Bible. The Bible can function as the highest source of authority because it is seen as divinely inspired, as revelation from God, and therefore rightly can be called the Word of God.[13] These claims lead to several very important consequences. The understanding of the Bible as revelation defines its authority as *delegated*, which means that it is derived neither from the book itself nor from its human author but from someone else — in this case from God.[14] Its divine inspiration means that while the Scriptures are written by people, those people were moved by the Holy Spirit and therefore could be called its authors in a true but qualified sense. This also means that while undoubtedly written in the church, it is, according to Protestants, somewhat misleading to claim that the church produced the Bible. In the words of N. T. Wright,

> This makes a rather obvious logical mistake analogous to that of a soldier who, receiving orders through the mail, concludes that the letter carrier is his

[12] By 'Protestants' I mean representatives of all branches of the Reformation that hold to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and Trinitarian beliefs and start their theological quest with the Bible. These criteria effectively exclude both later liberal movements and earlier rational and spiritual offshoots of the Radical Reformation.

[13] Here I very intentionally do not enter into the extremely complicated and highly nuanced debates concerning questions such as what is the nature of inspiration, whether the Bible is revelation or a record of revelation, and whether it is God's Word, contains God's Word or becomes such at a certain level of interaction with the listener/reader. In most cases the conclusion, which is important for our case, is that the Bible could in some way function as the highest authority.

[14] Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 11, 27–28, 55–56.

> commanding officer. Those who transmit, collect and distribute the message are not in the same league as those who write it in the first place.[15]

John Calvin uses inspiration and revelation to point to the inner quality of the Scriptures as the means of its self-authentication as such, thus rejecting any need (or right) of the church to pronounce a decision on the matter.

> As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that it came from God without recurring to a decree of the Church? it is just the same as if it were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their colour, sweet and bitter of their taste.[16]

Calvin pushes his claims even further insisting that not only can the church not decide nor make any judgements about the Scriptures but it is actually the opposite — the Bible stands over the church and judges it as God's revelation and Word.[17]

This argument is sometimes expressed in a different way. Reformers were ready to accept the claims of the Roman Catholic Church that the divine revelation cannot be restricted to the Bible but has existed and was preached even before it had been written. They were ready even to agree that not everything revealed by God had finally found its way into the Scriptures and therefore the notion of revelation is wider than the Bible. However, the reformers forcefully denied any idea that the church which has received, kept, and preached this revelation has status and authority equal to the Bible. Their answer was that the Scriptures are basically a record of the *euangelion,* revealed gospel, and that there is no way to say that the church precedes the gospel because it is exactly the gospel that has created the church in the first place. This is articulated by Bernard Ramm:

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[15] N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God – Getting Beyond the Bible Wars* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 63.

[16] John Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. by Henry Beveridge <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes/institutes> [accessed 3 March 2023], I.7.2. See also Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of the Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 12–14.

[17] Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 11–22.

> [I]t must be remembered that the Church was founded by both redemption and special revelation. *Salvation and revelation are the absolute presuppositions both logically and temporally for the salvation of every single person and therefore for the entire church*. The Church by definition is the redeemed and enlightened people of God. Before there is a Church there must be both revelation and redemption. Before there can be tradition there must be revelation and redemption. *No real headway could be made in the debate over tradition until it is clearly seen that revelation and redemption are absolutely prior to the Church*. The Church has no existence apart from these, and she exists by the virtue of them. She does not partake of them in *any originative sense* so that she may become a lord of revelation and a dispenser of salvation.[18]

It is exactly because it is a record of the gospel that the Bible in its final form can function as a cannon — a measuring stick — for the Christian truth and as its highest authority. In their performance of this function, the Scriptures are placed over both the church and the tradition.

It is easy to see how such a way of reasoning leads to the Protestant idea of the Bible as the 'formal principle' of the Reformation and *Sola Scriptura* — Scripture alone. However, we should be careful to understand what exactly this means. While in some Protestant circles, especially at the grassroots level, the Bible is seen as the only source of theological authority, this was never the original idea of the mainstream movement. *Sola Scriptura* does not mean *Solo Scriptura* or *Nuda Scriptura*.[19] Instead '*sola'* here once again expresses the idea of highest or final (proximate) authority to which everything else conforms and might better be named *Prima Scriptura*, or, as the well-known Baptist theologian Oliver Crisp calls it, *norma normans*, the norming norm.[20]

Once this notion is established, Protestants are ready to consider a host of other theological sources. Probably the most popular grouping is the so-called 'Wesleyan quadrilateral' whose influence goes

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[18] Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), pp. 170–171, emphasis original. See also the more elaborate treatment of the same line of thought in Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 24–25. According to Ramm, the Bible cannot be seen as 'exclusive authority' because even before it the revelation has existed in oral form and has functioned as such. It is just the final form of this revelation, revelation inscripturated, that contains the gospel, functions as a measure, and is used by the Spirit.

[19] See Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2001).

[20] Oliver Crisp, 'Christological Method', in *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology*, by Oliver Crisp (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), pp. 8–33.

far beyond Wesleyan churches.[21] Alongside the Bible, it also lists tradition, reason, and experience as sources of theological authority. Originally formulated by the Methodist theologian Albert Outler,[22] 'the Wesleyan quadrilateral' is sometimes modified to accommodate additional sources such as the church[23] or culture.[24] All are important, deserve careful attention, and are extremely helpful in understanding the meaning of the Bible.

Finally, Oliver Crisp points to another widely used way of grouping Protestant sources of authority, identifying the difference between dogma, doctrine, and personal opinion.[25] The dogmas are beliefs shared by the great majority of Christians. They are most clearly formulated in the pronouncements of the ecumenical councils[26] and deemed as most authoritative. Second, we have the so-called doctrines, which constitute a lower level of authority and are connected with the specific beliefs of different Christian groups like Baptists, Roman Catholics, or Eastern Orthodox. Often, they are expressed in their different confessions — such as the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), or the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). In Protestantism, they are usually highly influential and binding for their own communities and sometimes could be quite elaborate and systematically arranged.[27] Finally, we have personal theological opinions. Although, according to Crisp, there is a substantial difference between how we should evaluate these. The opinions of noted theologians like

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[21] Crisp, 'Christological Method'. See also N. Clayton Croy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

[22] Albert C. Outler, 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley', *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 20, no. 1 (1985), 7–18.

[23] Graham McFarlane, *A Model for Evangelical Theology: Integrating Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience, and Community* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2020); Ramm, *Pattern,* pp. 56–59.

[24] Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

[25] Crisp, 'Christological Method', pp. 17–20.

[26] There are numerous Protestant groups that refuse to accept such formulations as official statements of faith. Still, most of them practically hold to the theology of at least the first four ecumenical councils.

[27] Grenz and Franke mention that sometimes there is real danger that the searching for 'facts' in the Bible results in replacing the Scripture itself (theological source of first order) with some kind of theological system (theological source of second order) which, according to them, is a grave mistake. See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* pp. 16, 63.

Basil the Great or Martin Luther should be seen as much weightier than the opinion of the average Christian.

From the above, we can conclude that in the Protestant understanding, theological authority (1) is delegated and proceeds from God; (2) can be found most importantly in the Bible which has the highest place as *norma normans* — the norming norm; that (3) it functions as a kind of formal, or external authority, and (4) stands over the church and judges every kind of tradition; that (5) *Sola Scriptura* does not mean that the Bible is the only source of authority, and there exist a host of additional, secondary sources which are invaluable for the proper understanding and interpretation of the Bible; that (6) in many cases (but not always) it is expressed in propositionally defined and binding confessions of faith.

A Possible Way To Dialogue

These short notes cannot give sufficient due to the host of highly complex and nuanced questions concerning the nature of theological authority in Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism. Still, from some of the aspects they touch it becomes obvious that there exist serious differences between the conceptions of the two Christian traditions, and if the understandings of religious authority are too different, this without doubt will severely hinder the possibility of dialogue between them. The question that should thus be raised is whether they are really so remote from each other, or whether this impression is at least partly a result of different religious vocabulary and emphases.

My tentative suggestion is that the answer is somewhere in-between, but that there is possibility for real progress on the topic. While there are several different ways to approach it, here I will concentrate on what is known as the Protestant doctrine of *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti Internum*, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Since there are several versions of it,[28] I will follow mainly the classic presentation of the Baptist

[28] For the presentation of different versions see James Sawyer, 'The Witness of the Spirit in the Protestant Tradition', Bible.org, 14 December 2005 <https://bible.org/seriespage/4-witness-spirit-protestant-tradition> [accessed 30 January 2023]. See also Barry D. Jones, 'The Spirit's

theologian Bernard Ramm in his book *The Witness of the Spirit* (first published in 1959),[29] which is a sequel to his earlier work *The Pattern of Authority* (1957). The doctrine simply states that God's Spirit testifies to the human spirit that Jesus is God and Saviour.[30] While this testimony is direct, it is at the same time usually connected with the Bible.[31] This means that when the Bible is read or heard, the Holy Spirit witnesses that it is true, creates an inner awareness in the trustworthiness of its message, and leads the person to Christ. There are at least five important points closely connected with our topic that could be deduced from this teaching.

First, as has already been said, what Protestants call the authority of Scripture is in practice the authority of God exercised through the Scripture. According to Ramm, the Bible is revelation from God which is not impersonal but always personal and gracious. 'There is no impersonal force in grace, and God's authority is sealed by grace, not by impersonal force […]. In subjection to this authority the Christian is subject to a Person.'[32] N. T. Wright states this idea even more clearly:

> When we take the phrase 'the authority of scripture' […] we recognize that it can have Christian meaning only if we are referring to scripture's authority in a delegated or mediated sense from that which God himself possesses […]. It must mean, if it means anything Christian, 'the authority of God exercised through scripture'.[33]

While it could be rightly said that the final authority lies in God because the Bible is God's revelation that God has inspired in the first

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Witness: A Historical and Theological Examination of the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti Internum*' (doctoral dissertation, Wheaton College, 2008), available at the Theological Research Exchange Network <https://www.tren.com/>; Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 22–27.

[29] See also the very helpful presentation of G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture: Studies in Dogmatics,* trans. by Jack Rogers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), chap. 2, pp. 39–66.

[30] In *Witness*, pp. 22–27, Ramm notes that the teaching appears in several of the fathers of the church, Protestant confessions of faith, and in the works of important theologians. See also Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture,* pp. 41–42; and Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 30–33.

[31] Ramm, *Witness,* pp. 30, 62–63, 98–99.

[32] Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 21, 26. See also p. 37.

[33] N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), p. 23. See also Ramm, *Witness,* pp. 14–15, 57–58, 70–71; Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 19–23; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 64–69, 74, 83, 115, 117.

place, the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit puts the emphasis in a different place. According to this, the Bible is not so much an authority by itself but the instrument that the Spirit has chosen to speak through. In a narrow sense this happens when the Spirit leads people to Christ through the Scriptures. In a wider sense, it also includes the consequent application of the Word in the current situation and practical life of the believer, sometimes called illumination.[34] As Ramm summarises, 'In reading the Bible, in applying the Bible to personal life, in interpreting the Bible, and in using the Bible theologically, the believer must conscientiously through prayer seek the ministry of the Spirit through the Word.'[35]

Ramm goes even further. Pointing to some cults, he observes that while they accept the Scriptures as authority, their theologies are obviously different from the historical Christian orthodoxy. According to Ramm, this shows not just a combination of right authority with wrong hermeneutics but outright wrong authority — because the Spirit does not work to give them light.[36]

This clear and strong emphasis on God as the supreme source of theological authority in Protestantism is extremely important. Because Eastern Orthodox believers share the same belief,[37] it could serve as an effective common base and starting point for further dialogue between the two traditions.

Second, the work of God's Spirit through Scripture creates an *experience*. Speaking about Martin Luther, Ramm observes that

> [t]he actual bringing of Christ to the consciousness of the believer by the Spirit through the Word results in an 'experience'. By 'experience' Luther did not mean 'religious experience', but rather the act whereby the Holy Spirit takes Christ out of the realm of idea and history and makes him a reality to

[34] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism,* p. 66.
[35] Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 35. See also pp. 38–39.
[36] Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 35. See also his view that an unbeliever cannot fully understand the Bible in Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 46–47.
[37] See John Meyendorff, *Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), pp.192–193.

> the believer. This is no metaphysical something, but is the direct action of God himself, the working of the Holy Spirit of God.[38]

It is important to observe carefully what Ramm is stating here. The fact that the word 'experience' is common for both traditions does not mean that it is used in the same way and with the same meaning. In general, Orthodox theologians are quite suspicious of various religious experiences that could be observed in Protestantism.[39] Neither does the 'experience' correspond to the Orthodox understanding of 'Tradition' that was described above. Ramm also sharply distinguishes it from the 'experience' of liberal Christianity.[40] What he is specifically trying to point to here is the personal encounter between Jesus Christ and humanity accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures. The immediate result of this event, or experience, is a communion between humanity and God in trinitarian dimensions[41] — the very source of every theological authority that Eastern Orthodox Christians emphasise.[42]

The idea routinely appears in the Protestant literature. Beyond the already cited passages from Ramm's works, one good, contemporary popular presentation, among others, can be found in Fred Sanders's

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[38] Ramm, *Witness*, p. 21. See also pp. 89–90, 104; Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 105–110.

[39] See Карл Кристиан Фелми, *Въведение в съвременното православно богословие*, прев. Свилен Тутеков, Даниел Йорданов (София: Омофор, 2007), pp. 18–19 [Karl Christian Felmy, *Introduction to Contemporary Orthodox Theology*].

[40] Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 49, 119–123.

[41] Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 28–41, as well as pp. 44, 49; Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 21; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, p. 117.

[42] Meyendorff comments, 'The really important implication of this attitude concerns the very notion of Truth, which is conceived […] not as a concept which can be expressed adequately in words or developed rationally, but as God Himself personally present and met in the Church in His very personal identity. Not Scripture, not conciliar definitions, not theology can express Him fully; each can only point to some aspects of His existence, or exclude wrong interpretations of His being or acts. No human language, however, is *fully* adequate to Truth itself, nor can it exhaust it. Consequently, Scripture and the Church's magisterium cannot be considered as the only 'sources' of theology. Orthodox theology cannot fail to check its consistency with them, of course, but the true theologian is free to express his [sic] own immediate encounter with the Truth. This is the authentic message maintained most explicitly by the Byzantine 'mystical' tradition of Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory Palamas.' (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 11)

book *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*.[43] There Sanders cites Henry Scougal, a seventeenth century Scottish Puritan who in his highly influential book *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* writes the following:

> They know by experience that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle's phrase, 'It is Christ formed within us'. — Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed, than by calling it a Divine Life.[44]

While it would be an overstatement to claim full convergence between the two traditions at this point — for example in the Eastern Orthodoxy this experience is by no means mainly connected with the Scriptures — here the ideas as well as the vocabulary are quite close: personal experience of the divine life through communion with Jesus Christ accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Seen in the common context of the theological authority in which they are expressed, these ideas present an opportunity for fruitful further engagement.

Third, the witness of the Holy Spirit through the Bible is by default pneumatological.[45] This means that the Bible cannot work by itself if it is not made alive by the Spirit. As Ramm says,

> [T]he Word without the Spirit is mere letter, mere law, mere writing […] [T]o the heart untouched by the Spirit it is like any other book […] The Lord must speak its inner Word to the inner ear if the Word of God is to be heard as the Word of God.[46]

It should be noted again that according to the Protestant reformers, Scriptures are the fully divinely inspired Word of God in the qualitative sense, even without the witness of the Spirit. But without this witness,

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[43] Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, 2nd edn (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

[44] Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/scougal/life/cache/life.pdf> [accessed 26 December 2022] (p. 3). See also Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 57, 76, 96. Note also how on pp. 99–105 Ramm refuses to separate the form of Scripture (the idea that it is inspired and true) from its content (Jesus Christ as Saviour). This, according to him, would inevitably lead to a 'paper pope' — the exact problem in Orthodox understanding of the nature of authority.

[45] Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 16–17, 33, 55.

[46] Ramm, *Witness*, p. 21. See also pp. 63–64.

the sinful person will never recognise it as such and will neither comprehend it fully nor will believe it for his or her own salvation.[47] This understanding is the theological ground for the teaching of the witness of the Spirit. We can call these two sides objective and subjective, although the names are not entirely adequate.[48]

On this basis, Ramm is able to claim that the Protestant principle for religious authority is two-sided, consisting of 'Scripture, sealed by the Spirit and Spirit speaking in the Scripture'.[49] Each element has its own specific purpose: the Scripture contains the revelation and the Spirit enlightens it.[50]

> In the matter of religious authority, the Spirit and the Word are insolubly conjoined. The Scripture functions in the ministry of the Spirit, and the Spirit functions in the instrument of the Word. In this vital relationship of Spirit and Scripture the Reformers grounded their doctrine of religious authority.[51]

This link can be broken from both sides, which results in serious problems. Scripture without the Spirit is just a dead letter. But any attempt to live under the single authority of the Spirit who supplies the cognitive content of faith without the written Word is no less deadly. This, according to Ramm, was the mistake of a part of the radical Reformation at the time of Luther and Calvin.[52]

In the light of the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, Scripture can function only pneumatologically or internally. While it is possible to see it as objective, external authority, without the inner work of the Spirit in the heart of the person the Bible will produce no good. This, I suggest, leads to a very important qualification to the conception of the external source of authority in Protestant theology that is able to overthrow the serious objections from the Orthodox tradition.

This naturally leads to the fourth characteristic: the witness of the Spirit neither bypasses nor ignores the intellect but at the same time

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47 Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 104.
48 For the question why the term 'subjective' is not entirely adequate see Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 116–117. See also p. 33.
49 Ramm, *Witness*, p. 29.
50 Ramm, *Witness*, p. 106.
51 Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 29. See also p. 103.
52 Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 15–16; Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 34, 46, 103–104.

is not restricted to rational human understanding. This is so because while witnessing to the trustworthiness of Scripture, the witness of the Spirit goes beyond the intellect — it is an inner persuasion that appeals to the whole person.[53]

This understanding is a natural part of Ramm's wider view of the interaction between revelation, reason, and authority. Since God is outside and beyond humanity, religious authority can start only with a revelation. The Bible can function as such exactly because it is a revelation from God. Human intellect does not deny the revelation, just the opposite — it demands it as the only logically possible way to reach God. In this sense the revelation and intellect are in accordance.[54] Even further, since this revelation is revelation of the truth (or Truth, with a capital 'T' — a favourite expression of many Orthodox theologians[55]) it could never expect us to discard the intellect. However, the movement toward knowledge here is, in direction, opposite to that in science. We are not moving toward the object of knowledge, it (or He) is moving toward us. Even more than that, Ramm strongly emphasises the noetic effect of sin and the need of the intellect to be humbled and brought into submission to the revelation.[56] Lastly, Ramm refuses to rely on logical proofs for the trustworthiness of revelation for two reasons. One is the already mentioned noetic effect of sin and the second is that such proofs would produce only human faith.[57] Instead, he turns to Calvin's idea of the witness of the Spirit that transcends reason and does not need additional proofs.

> The witness of the Spirit is primordially divine and if it is, no assisting witness to its divinity is necessary. It is […] a *persuasion* — a state of conviction induced by direct perception, no reasoning; a *knowledge* resting upon a perception which transcends reasoning; and a sense that is able to taste the divinity of the Scriptures. It is therefore autopistic — credible within itself and needing no additional divine ratification.[58]

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53 Ramm, *Witness*, p. 19. See also pp. 45–46, 51–52, 74, 84–87, 112–113.
54 Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 19–20, 38. See also pp. 44–47.
55 Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 43.
56 Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 23.
57 Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 28–29, 33, 104–105; Ramm, *Witness*, p. 16.
58 Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 106.

From this basis, Ramm is able to launch a serious criticism of a purely rationalistic and intellectual approach to Christianity on both sides. He claims that philosophers and liberal Christians in his own time, with their purely rationalistic methods, will never be able to reach God.[59] But he is equally unhappy with the fundamentalists of his own time who, he notes, are so concentrated on the Bible as 'the inspired Word of God' that they forget 'the revealed Word of God' that alone can make this Word alive. Thus, they operate from the wrong assumption that Scripture has life of its own.[60]

Ramm, following Calvin, goes even further and criticises an apologetic that tries to prove God, Christianity, or Scripture with purely rational arguments. Such arguments are not wrong by themselves, he claims, but they are unable to bring anyone to faith without the working of the Holy Spirit and therefore could serve only as 'secondary aids'.[61]

Again, while not entirely identical with the Orthodox position concerning the interaction between reason, revelation, authority, and experience, this view has strong affinity with it and emphasises many points that are characteristic of it.

Lastly, this witness of the Spirit addresses the Orthodox concern that Protestant readings of the Bible are often helplessly individualistic and subjectivistic. Ramm is well aware of this very real danger, and clearly states that the exchange of God's word for a human one is 'not only the end of authority, but the end of truth'.[62] However, he claims that the witness of the Spirit is able to make the reading 'personal but not individualistic'.[63] By this, he means that the Holy Spirit works personally in every heart according to the specific human condition, but the Spirit's witness cannot be separated from the common witness of the church in which it is tested and therefore 'does not lead to subjectivism'.

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[59] Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 16, 33, 38–39, 54, 61, 64–66, 82–86, 111.
[60] Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 123–26. See also pp. 58–59, 64–65, 74, 120.
[61] Ramm, *Witness*, pp. 12–13, 106, 117–119, 126–127.
[62] Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 25.
[63] Ramm, *Pattern*, p. 81 and the wider section 16 on pp. 79–81. See also pp. 52, 76, 117.

Stated in another way, the subjective reading of the Bible can be avoided when the individual is not elevated over the community.[64] This reading in the context of the whole community, according to Ramm, is imperative because the revelation (as well as redemption) is not only individual but also communal[65] and because the Spirit is the driving agent who has created the community for this reason in the first place.[66] Ramm, echoed a generation later by Stanley Grenz, further notes that while very important and immediate, the local church does not constitute the whole community of faith that should be consulted during such a reading. It should include the wider Christian community both in space and time.[67] This in turn leads to the at least partial rehabilitation of Christian tradition in Protestant theology as was sketched above.

In this reading, therefore, Scripture cannot be separated either from the Spirit or from the church.[68] While in practice (as we all know) this does not always happen, at least in theory Protestant theology could be seen as strongly communal.

Conclusion

The Protestant teaching of the witness of the Spirit is only one of the several means that could be used in the complex and nuanced discussion of theological authority between the Protestant and the Eastern Orthodox traditions. As we have already hinted, the closely connected doctrine of the illumination of the Spirit could very usefully supplement and reinforce all that was said here.[69] Another promising route is the contemporary awakening of understanding and appreciation among Protestants of the ways in which the Bible addresses not only the

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[64] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, p. 68.
[65] Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 26–28, 58.
[66] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 81–83.
[67] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 91–92.
[68] This is why Ramm prefers to speak not of a single element that carries the theological authority in Protestantism but of a pattern of authority in which the elements should be 'properly related'. See Ramm, *Pattern*, pp. 18, 37, 46, 62, 103.
[69] It seems to me that Bernard Ramm does not distinguish clearly the two teachings to the point that he sometimes even flattens them together. Other theologians keep them more separate. See for example Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, chap. 3, pp. 57–92.

intellect but also the feelings, imagination, and will of the reader through stories, poetry, and different figures of speech. This in turn could lead to a more holistic understanding of its function, going far beyond a purely propositional level and, by analogy, to a renewed and more positive attention upon Christian liturgy, worship, symbolism, tradition, and arts in the pattern of theological authority.[70] A third option is an emphasis on the practical function of the Scriptures for distinguishing between divine Tradition and purely human traditions that exist in the church. If both sides agree on this, it would be much easier for Protestants to accept, or at least to appreciate, the Orthodox perspective of the Bible as a part of the Tradition which has a very important and specific function. This move has already been fruitfully done in some discussions with Lutherans and Anglicans.[71]

The brief remarks presented here by no means solve all the problems concerning the nature of theological authority between the two traditions. More concretely, we still have in our way at least (1) the Protestant understanding that the Bible has more authority than the church;[72] (2) the much more liturgical understanding of this authoritative experience in the Orthodox church;[73] and in terms of Protestantism, (3) a more optimistic view of the role of propositional language, (4) a much stronger emphasis on the written revelation as final authority, and (5) a stronger bond between Spirit and Scripture — to name just a few.

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[70] See for example Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, p. 84.

[71] See for example, The Anglican Communion, 'The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984', <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/103812/the_dublin_statement.pdf> [accessed 25 March 2023] (para. 48–49); and 4th Plenary of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, 27 May–4 June 1987, Crete/Greece <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue/> [accessed 25 March 2023].

[72] See especially Ramm, Witness, p. 114. It is notable how on the next page (115) he claims that the conception of authority is more predominant in Protestantism than in Roman Catholicism exactly because it is inner (the work of the Spirit) and not external (the Church magisterium).

[73] It could be said that this function in Protestantism is connected with Scripture (including the 'taste and see' moment — see Ramm, Witness, p. 87). But it also could be said that in some Protestant circles (especially Lutheran) Scripture and its preaching is understood in a quasi-sacramental (and therefore liturgical) way.

However, the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit shows that traditional Protestant understanding of theological authority is far more flexible and nuanced than is often thought and is open to being interpreted in ways that probably could further the dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Christians, meeting at least some of their objections. I maintain that it could help us, at least partly, to agree on some common conceptions which are expressed with different vocabulary, with different emphases, and that address different historical needs and problems. The skill of understanding and thinking between different vocabularies and theological frames of presuppositions is among the most important in the dialogue between Orthodox and Protestant traditions.

George Borrow (1803–1881) in St Petersburg and the Scriptures in Manchu

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Abstract
George Henry Borrow became well known in Victorian England as a novelist and travel writer. He wrote a brilliant description of the five years he spent working in Spain for the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), *The Bible in Spain* (1843). It became a best-seller. This article examines Borrow's multi-faceted work in St Petersburg — before his time in Spain — in which he was engaged in the translation of the New Testament into the Manchu language. This article also brings out Borrow's Christian faith, an aspect which has been ignored or misrepresented in much of the literature about him. In 1911, it was reported that a bundle of letters by Borrow had been discovered — 'a great literary treasure'. Here, his letters from St Petersburg, held in the Cambridge University Library, are used as the main primary source material to enable a picture of Borrow and his endeavours to be painted.

Keywords
George Borrow; Bible Society; Manchu; St Petersburg; translation

Introduction

George Henry Borrow became well known in Victorian England as a novelist and travel writer. He wrote a brilliant description of the five years he spent working in Spain for the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) entitled *The Bible in Spain* (1843), a book he described as narrating his 'journeys, adventures and imprisonments'. It became a best-seller: six editions were printed in one year alone.[1] He followed this with two books that partly told aspects of his own story but also sprang from his long-term interest in Romany-Gipsy people: *Lavengro* (1851), meaning 'Word-Master' in Romany, and *The Romany Rye* (1857), or 'The Gypsy Gentleman'. His last major work was a classic travel book, *Wild*

[1] Edward Thomas, *George Borrow: The Man and his Books* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1912), p. 6; George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain* (London: John Murray, 1843).

Wales (1862).[2] Borrow's early life was mainly spent in eastern England in East Anglia. His father, Thomas, was an army recruiting offer and his mother, Ann, a farmer's daughter. As a teenager he spent time with his father in Ireland, attending a Protestant Academy and learning Irish, Latin, and Greek. He completed his school education in Norwich, at the Grammar School, where his ability in languages was evident. It was reckoned at the age of eighteen that he knew eight spoken languages — Welsh, Irish, German, Danish, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese.[3] During the years that followed, up to 1832, he worked in a lawyer's office, travelled, and was involved in literary translation.[4] His later encounter with the Slavic world, living in St Petersburg, was anticipated in his translating some of the works of the Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz from his 1829 collection.[5]

In Norwich, Borrow's main association with Baptist life, when he was in his early twenties, was with Simon Wilkin, a scholar, a businessman, and in particular a publisher. He published Borrow's *Romantic Ballads: Translated from the Danish* (1826).[6] Wilkin's spiritual and educational mentor was Joseph Kinghorn, the influential minister of St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich. Kinghorn carried on an extensive correspondence, and Wilkin ensured this was later published. Wilkin also published work by William Taylor, a leading thinker in Norwich, the first advocate in England of German Romantic literature, and someone who had a powerful impact on Borrow. Taylor said that the sight of Jospeh Kinghorn in prayer 'reminded him of the benediction of the people by the Pope', which he had witnessed in Rome.[7] When at a later stage, Taylor became a guide to Borrow, a letter Taylor wrote to his friend, the poet Robert Southey, had this comment: 'A Norwich

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[2] George Borrow, *Lavengro: The Scholar, the Gipsy, the Priest* (London: John Murray, 1851); *Romany Rye* (London: John Murray, 1857); *Wild Wales* (London: John Murray, 1862).

[3] J. W. Robberds, *Life and Writings of the Late William Taylor* (1843), cited in Herbert Jenkins, *The Life of George Borrow* (London: John Murray, 1912), p. 34.

[4] Clement King Shorter, *George Borrow and his Circle* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), p. 135.

[5] George Hyde, "'Language Is First of All a Foreign One": George Borrow as a Translator from Polish', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 77, no. 1 (1999), 74–92.

[6] George Borrow, *Romantic Ballads, Translated from the Danish; and Miscellaneous Pieces* (Norwich: S. Wilkin, 1826).

[7] C. B. Jewson, 'St. Mary's, Norwich', *Baptist Quarterly*, 10, no. 6 (1941), 340–346.

young man is construing with me Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell", with the view of translating it for the press. His name is George Henry Borrow, and he has learnt German with extraordinary rapidity; indeed, he has the gift of tongues."[8] Much has been said about Borrow's literary work.[9] The focus of this article is the first period of Borrow's association with the BFBS, from 1832 to 1835, largely in St Petersburg.

Borrow as a Bible Society Recruit

In October 1832, Borrow wrote to Mary Clarke, a widow who was part of a vibrant evangelical circle in East Anglia, sending her 'the tale of Blue Beard', which he had translated into Turkish. The reason for the gift of a book in Turkish has not been explored by writers. The connection was probably the BFBS. Mary Clarke, and others she knew, were keen supporters of the BFBS, which was the leading agency for the translation and circulation of the Bible. Evangelicals in the Church of England were kept in touch with this work not only through the Society's publications but also through the *Christian Observer*, which in 1832 reported on translations of the Bible that had been produced in Turkish.[10] A friend and spiritual mentor of Mary Clarke's was Francis Cunningham, the Church of England Rector of St Margaret's, Pakefield, and Secretary of the Lowestoft Branch of the Bible Society. Borrow was introduced to Cunningham through Mary Clarke and her brother, Breame Skepper.[11] Francis Cunningham's brother John was a leading figure in the evangelical movement in the Church of England. In one episode, when the BFBS was attacked for not being purely Anglican — it was inter-denominational — Francis Cunningham sprang to its defence.[12] Borrow was entering a new world, which meant that previous

[8] William A. Dutt, *George Borrow in East Anglia* (London: David Nutt, 1896), pp. 25–26.
[9] There is a George Borrow Society, see <http://georgeborrow.org/home.html>. For a fine article on Borrow's religious convictions published by the Society, see Kathleen Cann, 'George Borrow and Religion', in *George Borrow in Wales: Proceedings of the 1989 George Borrow Conference*, ed. by Gillian Fenwick (Toronto: George Borrow Society, 1990), pp. 55–63. I am grateful to Ken Barrett for his help with this.
[10] *The Christian Observer* (London: J. Hatchard & Son, 1832), p. 255.
[11] William Knapp, *Life, Writings and Correspondence of George Borrow*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1899), 1, 149–152.
[12] Francis Cunningham, *Observations on an Anonymous Pamphlet* (Yarmouth: J. Keymer, 1817).

influences, such as that of the religiously sceptical Taylor, began to fade, and evangelicals such as Cunningham in the Church of England, Kinghorn, and a Nonconformist circle in Norwich would draw him into Christian undertakings.

On 27 December 1832, Cunningham wrote an enthusiastic letter to Andrew Brandram, a graduate of Oriel College, Oxford, who was a BFBS secretary, about Borrow's potential as a translator. Cunningham said he had 'long heard' of Borrow, presumably through Mary and Breame in his congregation, but also in all probability through Joseph John Gurney, a Quaker philanthropist, author, and evangelical supporter in Norwich. Cunningham was so impressed by Borrow after a conversation with him that he wondered if he could be a successor to T. Pell Platt, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and the librarian of BFBS, and William Greenfield, a widely-published philologist who had been the Society's editorial superintendent. Cunningham explained to Brandram that Borrow, without a university education, could 'read the Bible in thirteen languages'. Borrow's reading of the Bible was to become a major part of his life. The letter explained that Borrow did not have a particular denominational allegiance but held Christian convictions. Cunningham urged Brandram to meet Borrow in London. Cunningham himself was due in London (to attend the evangelical Islington Clerical Conference) and hoped to meet Borrow there and could facilitate a BFBS meeting.[13]

The timing of Cunningham's letter was propitious, because of renewed interest in the possibility of producing the Scriptures in Manchu, the imperial language of China during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). The Qing Dynasty is sometimes known as the Manchu Dynasty taking account not only of the language but of the early founding of the dynasty by the Manchu clan Aisin Gioro. Starting in what is today north-east China, the Manchu presence expanded into surrounding territories in China. What was established became known as the Empire of the Great Qing. The name Qing was taken first of all in 1636 and it was in 1644 that the Manchu conquest of Beijing took place, which is

[13] For Islington, see David Bebbington, 'The Islington Conference', in *Evangelicalism and the Church of England in the Twentieth Century: Reform, Resistance and Renewal*, ed. by Andrew Atherstone and John Maiden (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), pp. 48–67.

considered the start of the dynasty's rule. Through this the Manchu language was given considerable significance.[14] In 1821, the Bible Society had commissioned Stepán Vasiliévitch Lipoftsoff in St Petersburg, who had spent fourteen years with the Russian Mission in Beijing, to translate the New Testament into Manchu.[15] As a result of his work, an edition of 550 copies of Matthew's Gospel was printed from type that was cast for the undertaking. The BFBS in London took a hundred copies, with the rest, along with the typeface, stored in St Petersburg. Later, Lipoftsoff completed the translation of the New Testament. Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, a leading Sinology scholar, praised Lipoftsoff's work.[16] In 1832, the BFBS was looking for someone who could work with this text and produce and print the whole New Testament in Manchu for future use in China.

A further factor that heightened BFBS interest in Manchu in 1832 was a discovery made by William Swan, a Scot who served in Siberia with the London Missionary Society and was a translator of the Bible into Mongolian. He found in the remarkable library of Baron Schilling von Canstadt in St Petersburg a manuscript — amounting to 10 000 pages — of an unpublished translation into the Manchu language of most of the Old Testament and two books of the New. This translation was the work of Louis Antoine de Puerot, or Poirot (1735–1815), a French Jesuit scholar and missionary in Beijing, who at a later stage served the Russian Mission in China as a doctor. The discovery of the manuscript was felt by Swan to be crucial, and he informed the BFBS. It was so important to him that he decided to defer the journey he was due to make to Siberia and instead make a transcription of the text, which he was to complete over the course of the next two years. He wanted enquiries to be made to ascertain if someone could be found to facilitate eventual publication.[17] Encouragement also came from Isaac

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[14] Robert S. Elegant, *Manchu* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980).

[15] See Hartmut Walravens, 'Christian Literature in Manchu: Some Bibliographic Notes', *Monumenta Serica*, 48 (2000), 445–469; and 'Christian Literature in Manchu', *Central Asiatic Journal*, 58, no. 1-2 (2015), 197–224.

[16] Knapp, *Borrow*, p. 155. See Markus Messling, 'Representation and Power: Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat's Critical Chinese Philology', *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 44, no. 1-2 (2011), 1–23.

[17] William Swan to the Bible Society, 10 November 1832, BSA/E3 1/1/1. BSA references are to the Bible Society archive in Cambridge University Library. I am grateful to Dr Onesimus Ngundu, the Society librarian, for his help.

Jacob Schmidt in St Petersburg, who had been engaged in translation and commerce in Russia and who had some influence with the Russian government. He considered the Russian authorities might well be favourable to the production of a Manchu translation of the Bible.[18] An invitation was sent to Borrow to come to the Bible Society offices in London in January 1833 to discuss this possibility.

Borrow responded swiftly, and walked from Norwich to London, covering the distance of 112 miles in twenty-seven hours. His expenses, when he was offered reimbursement, were a pint of ale, a half-pint of milk, a roll of bread, and two apples. On 14 January 1833, at the offices of the Bible Society in Earl Street, Borrow was interviewed by Andrew Brandram and Joseph Jowett, the BFBS editorial secretary, and perhaps others. The conversation was about learning Manchu, and Borrow expressed his willingness to do so and conveyed his characteristic confidence in the area of languages. It seems that Borrow was convincing. His personality, his articulate way of communicating, and his breadth of knowledge generally evoked positive reactions. Coupled with this, his height and his prematurely white hair were impressive. It was agreed that he would have six months for the task, and his return journey to Norwich, by mail coach, was paid for by the Society. On 10 February 1833, Borrow wrote what would be the first of many letters to the Society, especially to Jowett.[19] He reported being 'almost incessantly occupied' in learning Manchu. He had brought from London a copy of Lipoftsoff's translation of Matthew. He had also been lent the French-Manchu dictionary produced by the eighteenth-century French Jesuit Jean Joseph Marie Amiot. With the help of this dictionary, which had been praised by Prince Hongwu, a member of the Qing imperial family, Borrow did not hesitate to offer an initial critique of what Lipoftsoff had done. He saw the Lipoftsoff translation as 'a good one' but believed that in various places it 'must be utterly unintelligible

[18] Isaac Jacob Schmidt to the Bible Society, 31 December 1832 and 12 January 1833, BSA/E3 1/1/1. Robert Pinkerton, a principal Agent of the BFBS, backed up this view.

[19] These letters are held in BSA/F2/5. For the purposes of this article, I have page referenced the published versions from T. H. Darlow, *Letters of George Borrow to the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911).

to the Manchus from having unnecessarily made use of words which are not Manchu, and with which the Tartars cannot be acquainted'.[20]

Although Borrow had only recently come to know the Bible Society leadership, he was already referring to Brandram as his 'kind and respected friend' and Brandram had expressed interest in the possibility of Borrow being involved in outreach to gypsies. Borrow's evangelical convictions have tended to be characterised by biographers as hypocritically sanctimonious — 'cant', acceptable to the Bible Society, was how Clement Shorter dismissed it.[21] However, this fails to take into account the new evangelical influences on Borrow, especially through people connected with the BFBS. Among those in Norwich was Gurney, who was the founder of the Norwich Auxiliary of the BFBS.[22] For Borrow, Gurney was an advocate of 'the glory of Christ', as was Borrow's mentor, Cunningham, who had married Gurney's sister. Borrow wrote to Cunningham asking for prayer for 'speedy success' in learning Manchu.[23] As well as valuing his new experience of evangelical spirituality, Borrow appreciated the breadth of scholarship in the BFBS. In March and June 1833, he wrote to Jowett that he was using Julius von Klaproth's *Chrestomathie Mandchou* (a collection of Manchu texts), sent to him by the BFBS, and in turn he had undertaken translation into and from Manchu.[24] By June, Borrow felt he had 'mastered Manchu'. He sat an examination in London in which, as Jenkins notes, he had to translate a Manchu hymn to the Great Futsa, the Buddha of the Tartars. Borrow's work met with full approval and on 29 July 1833 he was duly appointed to the BFBS.[25]

[20] The whole letter of 10 February 1833 is in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 6–11. I am using 'Manchu' rather than other versions such as Mandchou. For Amiot, see Alexander Statman, 'A Forgotten Friendship', *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine*, 46 (2017), 89–118 (p. 101).

[21] Clement K. Shorter, *The Life of George Borrow* (London: J. M. Dent, 1919), p. 104.

[22] Roger H. Martin, 'Quakers, the Bible, and the British and Foreign Bible Society', *Quaker History*, 85, no. 1 (1996), 13–28.

[23] George Borrow to Francis Cunningham, 20 January 1833, BSA/F2/5.

[24] Letters of 18 March and 9 June 1833, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 11–13.

[25] Herbert Jenkins, *The Life of George Borrow* (London: John Murray, 1912), p. 104; Minutes of the Editorial Sub-Committee of the BFBS, 29 July 1833.

Settling in St Petersburg

It was only in the later stages of the conversations Brandram and Jowett had with Borrow that relocation to St Petersburg was mentioned as part of the appointment; and when it was, Borrow responded with enthusiasm. He left London on 31 July 1833. On the first leg of the journey, a voyage to Hamburg which took three days, Borrow became ill. He recorded in a letter to Jowett that he became friendly with two Jewish passengers from Copenhagen. A purpose-built synagogue in the city was opened that year.[26] The standard histories record how these two, Weil and Valentin, helped Borrow in his illness. However, writers such as Jenkins omit important details, such as the fact that Borrow conversed with them about the Talmud and described how 'the Lord took care of me' through them as 'His instruments'. In Hamburg, Borrow visited one of the main churches and found its interior 'very venerable and solemn, but the service seemed to be nothing more than a low-muttered chanting, from which it was impossible to derive much spiritual edification. There was no sermon.' He concluded this letter to Jowett by expressing the hope that he would soon be able to write from St Petersburg, 'provided it pleases the Almighty to vouch-safe me a happy arrival', and he presented to the BFBS staff 'a fervent request that you will not forget me in your prayers'. Indicators such as these of Borrow's spiritual outlook are not regarded as significant by those who have written about Borrow; his motive is seen as using language that would appeal to the BFBS.[27]

Borrow's excitement increased markedly when he arrived in the Russian capital. He immediately enthused to Gurney in Norwich about the Russian capital city.[28] In another letter, to Jowett, in August 1833, he described it effusively as 'the finest city in the world; neither London nor Paris nor any other European capital which I have visited has sufficient pretensions to enter into comparison with it in respect to beauty and grandeur'. However, his priority was to make connections. He found William Swan 'one of the most amiable and interesting

[26] Conrad Kisch, 'The Jewish Community in Denmark: History and Present Status', *Judaism*, 47, no. 2 (1998), 214–231.
[27] Jenkins, *Life of George Borrow*, pp. 107–108.
[28] Knapp, *Borrow*, p. 171.

characters I have ever met with'. In St Petersburg, Swan was part of the Congregational Chapel, known as the British and American Chapel, and it is likely that this is where Borrow normally worshipped, although he also attended the Armenian Church and came to know 'several very clever and very learned Armenians'.[29] Along with Swan, Borrow visited Isaac Schmidt, who was sure permission would be granted for printing the Manchu New Testament. A few days later, Borrow met Lipoftsoff, who to Borrow's great surprise was 'totally unaware' of any plan to print his translation. Nonetheless, Lipoftsoff promised to give Borrow any help he could. Borrow was pleased that their conversation would be in Russian — Lipoftsoff did not speak any other European language — since he saw that frequent conversation about the task that lay ahead would improve his spoken Russian.[30]

As well as talking to those who had a specific interest in translation, Borrow made other contacts. In Norwich he had come to know John Venning, a prominent member of the Independent (Congregational) Prince's Street Chapel, Norwich.[31] Angus Fraser notes the benefits Borrow gained through associating with forward-thinking Dissenters — Baptists, Congregationalists, and Quakers — while holding to the Church of England.[32] Venning was a long-established merchant in St Petersburg. He returned to Norwich in 1830. His work in Russia included not only his business interests but also a commitment to prison reform. In this he had the support of the Emperor, Nicholas I. Venning gave Borrow letters of introduction addressed to, among others, Prince Alexander Golitsyn, who had been the Russian Minister of Education and president of the Russian Bible Society. A crucial contact of Venning's for Borrow's work was to be Baron Schilling von Canstadt, a Lutheran from Tallinn, Estonia, who was at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was a member of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science. In 1832, the Baron returned from a two-year mission at the Russo-Chinese border. Venning's letters opened doors, and Borrow saw them as helpful both

[29] Letter of 20 February 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 73–79.
[30] Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 21–26. Letter not dated, but given as August.
[31] John Alexander, *Thirty Years' History of the Church and Congregation in Prince's Street Chapel, Norwich* (London: Jackson & Walford, 1847).
[32] Angus M. Fraser, 'George Borrow' (unpublished paper, 1981), p. 4, BSA/F2/5.

in his tasks and in case he was seen as a spy. A letter from Venning to Borrow was addressed 'My dear friend Mr George Borrow' and ended 'May the Lord bless you and make you a great blessing there'.[33] The biography of Borrow by Michael Collie (1982), referring to Borrow's arrival in St Petersburg, is entirely misleading in suggesting 'it is doubtful whether in any real sense he was a Christian'.[34]

The possibilities inherent in influential relationships were quickly taken up by Borrow. Two days after his arrival in St Petersburg, he was being introduced to Prince Golitsyn by John Venning's son James, and Golitsyn wrote to John in Norwich to report on this.[35] As well as making these contacts, Borrow began to investigate the manuscripts of the scriptures in Manchu. He assisted Swan in transcribing the version produced by Puerot and applauded 'the diligence and learning of him who, probably unasked and unrewarded, engaged in and accomplished it'. Borrow found the style, as far as he could judge, 'to an eminent degree elegant and polished'. In making comparison with Lipoftsoff, he was not fully aware that after Lipoftsoff produced his translation of the Gospel of Matthew in 1822 he made some changes to it.[36] Other points of comparison for Borrow were 300 copies of the modern Russian New Testament produced through the (by then disbanded) Russian Bible Society, and no less than 20 000 copies of what Borrow called the 'Sclavonian Bible', more often referred to as being the Old Church Slavonic Bible.[37] On 2 January 1834, Jowett wrote to Borrow to say, 'Your observations on Puerot's work, so far as you had become acquainted with it, are so striking and interesting that they have whetted our appetite for further information.' At this point Jowett and others in the BFBS were not sure how Borrow was progressing and wanted to know how far his 'introduction to the literary

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[33] John Venning to George Borrow, 25 July 1833, in Knapp, *Borrow*, pp. 162–163. The reference to the possibility of being taken for a spy was in a letter to his mother of 30 July 1833 (Jenkins, *Life*, p. 106).

[34] Michael Collie, *George Borrow: Eccentric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 65.

[35] Knapp, *Borrow*, p. 167.

[36] Chengcheng Liu, 'Report on the "questioned" 1822 edition of St. Matthew's Gospel in Manchu'. I am grateful to Chengcheng Liu (Helen) for the opportunity to read her unpublished paper written in 2023.

[37] For more, see *The Bible in Slavic Tradition*, ed. by Alexander Kulik and Catherine Mary MacRobert (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

circle of St Petersburg' had paved the way 'towards printing in the city any future portions of the New Testament in the Manchu'.[38]

Borrow had in fact, in accordance with his usual determination, been very active and was able to give an upbeat report. It was only to his mother that he complained of winter cold in St Petersburg that 'cuts your face like a razor'.[39] To Jowett, on 20 January 1834, he explained that he had taken 'a bold step', after consulting with Swan, his 'sincere, and most truly Christian friend', to approach the Russian authorities for permission to print the Manchu Scriptures. He presented a petition to Count Dmitry Bludoff, the Minister of the Interior. The hope was that Bludoff would be sympathetic, as he was known for his progressive views. Tolstoy described Bludoff's house on Nevsky Avenue, St Petersburg, as a place 'where writers, and in general, the best people of the time would gather'.[40] However, Bludoff told Borrow that the decision did not rest with him. Borrow became apprehensive, but with his deepening faith he 'prayed fervently to God, and confiding principally in Him, resolved to leave no human means untried which were within my reach'. Borrow's next step was to talk to John Bligh, the British plenipotentiary in St Petersburg, who had, Borrow said, been very kind and was 'a person of superb talents, kind disposition, and of much piety'. Bligh was happy to talk to Bludoff, and did so over dinner. The result of this diplomacy was that Lipoftsoff, who worked for the Asiatic Department of the Russian government, was appointed 'Censor' for the BFBS work, and on that basis, permission was granted to print the Manchu Scriptures. 'Thanks be to the Lord', Borrow added.[41]

In the meantime, Borrow was continuing to work on the Manchu language. He was now able to translate fairly readily from and into Manchu, and even, with his Church of England commitment in view, prepared a Manchu rendering of the Second Homily, *On the Misery*

[38] Letter of 2 January 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, p. 28.
[39] George Borrow to his mother Ann Borrow, February 1834, cited in Jenkins, *Life*, p. 116.
[40] *Tolstoy and the Genesis of 'War and Peace'*, ed. by Robin Feuer Miller and Donna Tussing Orwin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).
[41] Letter of 20 January 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 28–34.

of Man, as well as Homilies he translated into Russian.[42] However, he had become aware that the Manchu language was more demanding than he had realised. He was amazed at the 'copiousness' of Manchu, and often puzzled by the idioms. He compared the difficulty of the language with that of Sanskrit or Persian, but was wrong in suggesting that neither of those languages had ever been fully acquired by any European. Henry Martyn, who went out from Cambridge to India, completed a translation of the New Testament into Persian before his early death in 1813 and it was published in St Petersburg in 1815.[43] Borrow's reports to Jowett in January and especially February 1834, as well as referring to continued progress — now only 'tolerable' — with Manchu, gave more information about the typeface that might be used in publishing. At the Sarepta House, the BFBS house in the city, there was 'a chest containing Manchu characters'. The only other source for some type in Manchu was Borrow's 'learned friend Baron Schilling', who had 'a collection of Eastern manuscripts and other priceless treasures that was world-famous'. After his death, this was acquired by the Imperial Academy of Science at St Petersburg.[44] Borrow was, as Ann Ridler puts it, 'bowled over' by the 'the sheer excitement of the vistas of unbounded knowledge opened up to him in Baron Schilling's library'. Within this, Manchu was 'a lake of learning'.[45]

Problems and Progress with Print

For a good part of 1834, from March to October, two issues demanded all the energy Borrow could muster and at times proved exhausting. These were the issues of print and translation. He had not expected that

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42 R. A. J. Walling, *George Borrow: The Man and his Work* (London: Cassell, 1909), p. 90; For background, see J. Barrett Miller, 'The First Book of Homilies and the Doctrine of Holy Scripture', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 66, no 4 (1997), 435–470.

43 For Martyn's life and letters, see *The Letters of Henry Martyn*, *East India Company Chaplain*, ed. by Scott Ayler (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019).

44 Jenkins, *Life*, p. 111; letter of 4 February 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 36–39.

45 Ann Ridler, 'Obedience and Disobedience: George Borrow's Idiosyncratic Relationship with the Bible Society', in *Sowing the Word: The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1804–2004*, ed. by Stephen Batalden, Kathleen Cann, and John Dean (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), pp. 286–304 (p. 290), citing George Borrow to Francis Cunningham, November 1834.

achieving progress with facilities for printing in Manchu would be so difficult. On 15 April 1834, he wrote to Jowett to say that he was 'terrified at the enormous sums which some of the printers to whom I made application required for the work'. The aim was high quality production, including the paper, as was appropriate for Manchu as a court language. Borrow consulted Schmidt, who recommended the University Press. In typical style, Borrow immediately spoke to 'the directors of the establishment' and they sent an estimate, which Schmidt felt was a reasonable one. However, Borrow's range of contacts led him to two German printers, Schultz and Beneze, young men who had just entered the printing business. The link was probably made through John P. Hasfeldt, from Denmark, who was about Borrow's age and became a valued friend. Hasfeldt was attached to the Danish Legation and also gave lessons in languages. It became clear that whereas the University Press could 'take or leave' a printing contract, Schultz and Beneze were very keen to sign up a British organisation. Schmidt, who was a member of the Russian Board of Censors, saw no problem with that.[46] Borrow later used the firm to print some of Alexander Pushkin's writings which he had translated into English.[47]

Two weeks after his report on printers, Borrow wrote about his endeavours in looking for the quality of paper he wanted. He had 'hired a calash', which was a horse-drawn vehicle, with a driver, and spent almost a week being driven to all the places in and around St Petersburg where paper was made. 'Tall George', as he was known, became a recognised figure in European circles in the city. He was aware that it was 'the general opinion of the people of this country [the Russians] that Englishmen are made of gold, and that it is only necessary to ask the most extravagant price for any article in order to obtain it', so he did not tell companies he was English. He was often taken to be German, and he did gain assistance from Germans such as Freidrich von Adelung, who knew about publishing manuscripts.[48] He also employed two agents working on his behalf. In some places he failed to find anyone who

[46] Letter of 15 April 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 41–46.
[47] George Borrow, *The Talisman: From the Russian of Alexander Pushkin, With other Pieces* (St Petersburg: Schulz and Beneze, 1835). In 1892, Jarrold & Sons of Norwich reprinted this in facsimile.
[48] Jenkins, *Life*, p. 112.

could give him a quotation. When he did receive firm quotations he began to bargain, and eventually he struck a deal for high quality paper at a quarter of the typical initial figures quoted. 'In this country', he added in a postscript, 'the wisdom of the serpent is quite as necessary as the innocence of the dove.'[49] The BFBS was probably taken aback and certainly intrigued by Borrow's reports. His letters were sometimes read out at BFBS meetings. In East Anglia he was, as Mary Clarke put it in a letter to him, 'mentioned at many of the Bible meetings', and in particular his work was highlighted in public gatherings by Gurney and Cunningham, who was in effect Borrow's pastor.[50]

After Borrow's reports in April 1834, he was too busy to keep up with correspondence. His friend Hasfeldt later recalled that Borrow 'grew thin' through the amount of work he was doing, but this was not known in London, and in October 1834 Jowett wrote what one biographer, David Williams, justifiably described as a 'starchy, spiky, ungenerous and uncomprehending' enquiry as to what Borrow was doing. Borrow's letter of 8 October, which has been regarded as a reply, was, said Williams, 'one of the greatest letters' from the pen of someone who had become a master of letter writing.[51] In the summer of 1834 the BFBS had reported that Karl Gützlaff, the first Lutheran missionary to China, had been able to make use of some of the Manchu Gospels translated by Lipoftsoff. The report expressed the hope that in the light of what Borrow had achieved, 1000 copies of the New Testament in Manchu would be produced.[52] The hope was an expectation. While Jowett was fretting, Borrow was focused on making his mark. On 8 October 1834, he wrote at the beginning of his letter that 'by the blessing of God I have surmounted all my troubles and difficulties'. He explained that in recent weeks 'I have been working in the printing-office, as a common compositor, between ten and thirteen hours every day during that period; the result of this is that St. Matthew's Gospel, printed from

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[49] Letter of 28 April 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 46–48.

[50] Knapp, *Borrow*, p. 184.

[51] David Williams, *A World of his Own: Double Life of George Borrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 78–79, 81.

[52] *Annual Report of the Bible Society*, Summer 1834 (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1834) pp. lxxxii-iv; Charles Gutzlaff (Karl Friedrich), *A Sketch of Chinese History (Ancient and Modern)*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1834).

such a copy as I believe nothing was ever printed from before, has been brought out in the Manchu language.'[53]

As well as Borrow's own enormous work-load, Harsfeldt recalled that 'you almost killed Beneze and his lads', and it seems that on occasion Borrow had to bribe them with gifts of vodka.[54] In his letter to Jowett, Borrow explained that the 'fount of type', the Manchu type, which was necessary for the printing was taken to the print-shop of Schultz and Beneze. Borrow wanted to stress the difficulties that had to be overcome. He described 'the state in which these types came into my possession. I found them in a kind of warehouse, or rather cellar. They had been originally confined in two cases; but these having burst, the type lay on the floor trampled amidst mud and filth.' Part of this destruction had been caused by the river Neva having flooded in 1824. It had been Borrow's task to clean and arrange them and then to teach the compositors the Manchu alphabet. He had, he added, been 'obliged to be continually in the printing-office, and to do three parts of the work myself'. He considered that since Matthew's Gospel had been ready for some weeks, waiting to be bound in a fine volume, this needed to be done urgently, or 'the paper with be dirtied and the work injured'. Borrow had, once more, made efforts to ascertain the best option in book-binding, as he had in all parts of his enterprise. He had found book-binding in Russia 'incredibly dear', but had approached Schilling for help, who had in turn 'prevailed on his own book-binder, over whom he has much influence', to do the work at a fraction of what might otherwise have been charged.[55] He had achieved the high quality he wanted, at very reasonable cost.

The Trials of Translation

Although the process of printing was a challenge, the task for which Borrow had been principally appointed was to work with Lipoftsoff to ensure that there was a readable New Testament in Manchu. The test that Borrow had been given in London had not been about his skills as

[53] Letter of 8 October 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 55–63.
[54] Williams, *World of his Own*, p. 78; Walling, *The Man and his Work*, p. 89.
[55] Letter of 8 October 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 55–63.

a printer but as a translator. However, as he put it, he was resolved to 'do or die', and, instead of complaining to the BFBS about what was at times an almost impossible situation, he was determined to succeed. Borrow was happy to report to Jowett in October 1834 that Lipoftsoff had made 'an immense number of alterations in his translation', and Borrow did not hesitate to describe these changes, which he himself had suggested, as 'excellent improvements'. While Clement Shorter, in his biography, found little of interest in what Borrow was doing at this point and referred to the outcome as 'useless',[56] that was emphatically not the view from the BFBS. Instead, there was 'much enthusiasm in Bible House' and the reports from Borrow were sent to Cunningham, his continued spiritual mentor. Across the circles associated with the BFBS there was 'high satisfaction' with the progress made. An apology was conveyed from Jowett, and instead of complaint there was an affirmation of Borrow as an agent who had been notable for his planning, diligence, and achievement.[57]

It gave Borrow considerable pleasure to be able to write to Jowett on 13 October 1834 and enclose a testimonial in Latin from Lipoftsoff. This read, *Dominum Burro ab initio usque ad hoc tempus summa cum diligentia et studio in re Mantshurica laborasse,* confirming that Borrow, 'from the beginning until this time', had 'worked with the utmost diligence' and had given himself to the study of Manchu. Borrow pointed out that Lipoftsoff was 'as little inclined to be prodigal of praise, as was of old the learned Scaliger himself, to whom in many points indeed, he bears no faint resemblance'.[58] Borrow went on to report that he was anticipating that Mark's Gospel would soon, like Matthew, have 'passed through the press' and that Luke and John would be printed by Christmas. He predicted that by May 1835 the entire New Testament in Manchu would be published. With something of a flourish, Borrow asked that 'this intelligence' should be 'communicated to the public, who are at liberty, provided the Lord does not visit me with some heavy affliction, to hold me culpable, if my assertion is belied by the event'.

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[56] Shorter, *George Borrow*, p. 104.

[57] Darlow, *Letters*, p. 68.

[58] Joseph Scaliger, a Calvinist, was an important European classical scholar in the years around 1600. See Philipp E. Nothaft, 'Josephus and New Testament Chronology in the Work of Joseph Scaliger', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 23, no. 3 (2016), 246–251.

He was not able to write more than a short letter since, as he put it in continued dramatic form, 'my proof sheets are rushing in so fast that time is exceedingly precious to me, and I grudge every moment that is not devoted to my Maker or to my great undertaking'.[59]

The time-table that Borrow had set out for himself was the topic of the ongoing reports in his letters. On 20 February 1835, he wrote to Jowett to say that a month before he had given Schilling bound copies of the Gospels and he had promised to ship them to London through one of the couriers belonging to the Russian Foreign Department. Borrow was now working on the Acts of the Apostles. He was not satisfied with what Lipoftsoff had done in translating Acts and this had, as he put it, 'rendered much modification highly necessary'. Despite this, Borrow felt he had been able to maintain a friendship with Lipoftsoff. Borrow was fully aware that 'Mr. L.', as he often referred to him, was 'the Censor of his own work, and against the Censor's fiat in Russia there is no appeal'. In addition, Lipoftsoff was 'a gentleman whom the slightest contradiction never fails to incense to a most incredible degree'. A further issue was that Lipoftsoff was a 'strict member' of the Russian Orthodox Church (Borrow continued to refer to it as 'the Greek Sclavonian Church') and believed that it was the Old Church Slavonic Bible — which Borrow attributed to the eighth century but the whole of which was translated for the first time in 1499 by Archbishop Gennady Gonozov of Novgorod — that was textually authoritative.[60]

Although there were challenges, Borrow was, overall, encouraged. When a possible revision of what Lipoftsoff had 'originally concluded to be perfect' in his translation was suggested, in the light of Borrow's study of the Greek text of the New Testament, Lipoftsoff almost invariably agreed. There was one notable exception. Lipoftsoff had undertaken some 'improvements', as he termed them, of his original translation, and one of these was that when God the Father Almighty was addressed, he erased 'the personal and possessive pronouns *thou* or *thine*' (to use the language of the King James Version), and so 'O Father, thou art merciful' became 'O Father! the Father is merciful'. Borrow

[59] Letter of 13 October 1834, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 63–68.

[60] E. J. Pentiuc, *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Orthodox Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 39; letter of 20 February 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 73–79.

objected to this strange usage, but Lipoftsoff argued that Chinese and Tartar custom was to address only the lowest levels of society in the second person; and that it would be indecent to speak to the Almighty as if he were a servant or a slave. Borrow's response was that God was not to be addressed as if he were 'a great gentleman or illustrious personage', but rather as children speak to their father, with a mixture of reverence and love. But Lipoftsoff was adamant that in China children never addressed their parents in that way. Borrow admitted that Lipoftsoff had on his side the Chinese scholars of St. Petersburg. Apart from this aspect, Borrow wanted to assure the BFBS in his letter of 20 February 1835 that 'the Word of God has been rendered into Manchu as nearly and closely as the idiom of a very singular language would permit'.[61]

This was something of a leap on Borrow's part, since there was still work to be done. On 12 August 1835, however, the last two parts of the Manchu New Testaments — altogether they were in eight parts — were ready for shipping. Permission was still awaited. The first six volumes had been safely despatched, but the authorities were now accusing Borrow of having printed them illegally and it seemed that his presence in St Petersburg was now being viewed as (he used their own words) 'suspicious and mysterious, and that there are even grounds for supposing that I am not connected with the Bible Society or employed by them'. It is possible that Borrow had aroused suspicion in this period through visiting Moscow and speaking to gypsies, the Russian Roma. He addressed them, he said, on 'the advent and suffering of Christ Jesus'.[62] When he returned to St Petersburg, however, his hope for satisfactory completion of his task was fulfilled. Although there were trials, 'there is One above who supports me in these troubles, and I have no doubt that everything will turn out for the best'.[63] He said goodbye to his considerable number of friends in St Petersburg and left for

[61] Letter of 20 February 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 73–79.
[62] A. G. Cross, 'George Borrow and Russia', *The Modern Language Review*, 64, no. 2 (April 1969), 363–371; report, 23 September 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 87–96.
[63] Letter of 12 August 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 85–86.

London on 28 August 1835. All eight volumes of the Manchu New Testament came to London.[64]

A Range of Outcomes

Clement Shorter, in his biography, poured ridicule on the outcome of Borrow's work. Shorter spoke of what was done 'at so great a cost of money, and of energy and enthusiasm on the part of George Borrow' having no ultimate value: when the New Testaments were later sent out to China and copies distributed by missionaries, it was found – 'why not before is not explained', he intoned — that the Manchus in China were able to read Chinese, preferring it to their own language.[65] The actual situation was much more complex. There were certainly disappointments. Borrow was willing to take Manchu New Testaments to China: he had written to the BFBS, 'I will now conclude, and repeat the assurance that I am ready to attempt anything which the Society may wish me to execute; and, at a moment's warning, will direct my course towards Canton, Pekin, or the court of the Grand Lama.'[66] He was undertaking research and had identified the town of Kiachta (Kyakhta), on the northern border of China, as a suitable headquarters for supplying Manchu Scriptures. This was a location known for the Treaty of 1727 which regulated relations between Imperial Russia and Qing Empire; it also set a framework for Orthodox mission work.[67] For a time, Borrow hoped that a passport for travel East could be obtained from the Russian Government, but he was informed that he would not be able to obtain a passport for Siberia except on condition that he did not carry any Manchu Bibles.[68]

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[64] The 8 volumes of Borrow's 1835 New Testament edition, the Old Testament copied by Swan (with Borrow) and Edward Stallybrass, and Lipoftsoff's manuscripts, are all in the Bible Society Archive in Cambridge University. Exhibitions have been held in Cambridge in connection with Borrow's work.

[65] Shorter, *George Borrow*, pp. 105–106.

[66] Letter of 20 February 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 73–79.

[67] For insight into Orthodox missions, see Lars Laamann, 'The Christian Manchu Missions during the Qing period (1644–1911): Perceptions and Political Implications', in *Early Encounters between East Asia and Europe: Telling Failures*, ed. by Ralf Hertel, Michael Keevak, and Thijs Weststeijn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 101–122.

[68] Letter of 3 May 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 80–82.

On his return to London, Borrow gave a report to the members of the committee of the BFBS. Much of it rehearsed what had been covered in his letters. However, at a time when there was relatively little understanding in England of the Russian Orthodox Church,[69] he described the Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, 'the splendid church of the Kremlin'. Borrow had an extended conversation with the priest who had the task of introducing aspects of Orthodox worship to visitors. The priest, Borrow told his BFBS audience, was 'a most intelligent and seemingly truly pious person, and well acquainted with English spiritual literature, especially with the writings of Bishops [Jeremy] Taylor and [John] Tillotson, whom he professed to hold in great admiration'. Having said that, the priest asserted 'that both these divines, great men as they undoubtedly were, were far inferior writers to his own celebrated countryman Archbishop Teekon [Tikhon of Zadonsk] and their productions less replete with spiritual manna'. Borrow, although indebted to English spiritual traditions, 'felt little inclined to urge any objection', as he had 'perused the works of the great Russian divine with much comfort and satisfaction', and he expressed regret that 'the devout part of the British public are up to the present moment utterly unacquainted' with this spiritual resource. Borrow also reiterated his belief in the BFBS's crucial endeavours in biblical translation. Without accurate translation, such as he had sought to undertake, 'the Prince of Darkness and the Enemy of Light' was able to spread untruth, 'as many a follower of Jesus from his own individual experience can testify'.[70] It is remarkable that Borrow's serious Christian scholarship and faith has been so largely unrecognised.

Discussions took place over the next few months and even years within the BFBS about the best use of the Manchu New Testaments. Robert Morrison, a missionary to China who translated the whole Bible into Chinese, was cited. He hoped that the Manchu Bible would 'be of great use in diffusing the knowledge of God throughout the northern domains of this [Chinese] empire'.[71] There were plans along these lines,

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[69] For background, see J. Courtney, 'Listening to Voices from the East: Nineteenth Century Anglicans and the Russian Orthodox Church', *Text Book Publishing*, 1, no. 5 (2014), 89–104.
[70] Report, 23 September 1835, in Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 87–96
[71] *Annual Report of BFBS*, Summer 1835 (London: BFBS, 1835), p. lxxi.

although they could not be fully implemented.[72] In anticipation of future use, the Manchu type for typesetting was sent to the BFBS China Agency in Shanghai. Editions of Mathew and Mark were printed in Chinese and Manchu side by side. It was not until 1869 that promising news was heard about the Manchu New Testament. In that year, Joseph Edkins, a graduate of London University who was well-versed in Chinese affairs and was a missionary with the London Missionary Society, told the BFBS that he had recently sold a number of the Manchu New Testaments to the Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church for use in Amur and Kamchatka (in the Russian Far East) and they were readily understood. Edkins wrote extensively on China. He was awarded a D.D. for oriental research, from Edinburgh University. In 1905, George Hunter of the China Inland Mission, while serving in Chinese Turkestan, came into contact with Manchu speakers and he received Manchu Gospels from Shanghai.[73]

An outcome not related to the New Testament highlights Borrow's interests in literature. Towards the end of his time in Russia, he selected a few of his own translations from a range of languages and varied literature, and asked the Censor for permission to publish these. Permission was granted. Borrow probably did the typesetting himself. Among the pieces included was 'Mystical Poem', which is a poetic version of the hymn Borrow was asked to translate for the Bible Society to test his Manchu. A short review of Borrow's publication, written by John Hasfeldt, appeared in 1836 in the *Athenaeum*, a London-based journal of literature, science, and the arts. Hasfeldt wrote, 'Just before completing this great work [the Manchu N.T.], Mr. Borrow published a small volume in the English language, entitled *Targum, or Metrical Translations from Thirty Languages and Dialects*. The exquisite delicacy with which he has caught and rendered the beauties of his well-chosen originals, is a proof of his learning and genius.' For Hasfeldt, the work was 'a pearl in literature, and, like pearls, it derives value from its scarcity, for the whole edition was limited to about a hundred copies'. Another production by Borrow was *The Talisman*, which was only the second

[72] Christopher A. Daily, *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).
[73] Darlow, *Letters*, pp. 96–97.

appearance in English of any of Alexander Pushkin's poems. Borrow never met Pushkin, but left copies of *Targum* and *The Talisman* with Hasfeldt as a gift for Pushkin. On receiving them, Pushkin penned a note to Borrow expressing 'profound gratitude' for the gift and sincere regrets 'that he had not the honour to be personally acquainted with him'.[74]

Conclusion

The period which George Borrow spent in St Petersburg, and his outstanding work on the Manchu New Testament, has not received the attention it deserves. In the history of the BFBS, his years in Spain have understandably received much coverage. However, it was St Petersburg which offered him an international spiritual and cultural setting that he relished. The biographies of Borrow have generally played down his Christian faith, but the successor to Joseph Jowett at the Bible Society, Thomas H. Darlow, who knew the correspondence between Borrow and the BFBS in detail, described Borrow as someone with 'a fierce sincerity of faith'.[75] This faith was nurtured in the context of evangelical circles in East Anglia and those bonds remained strong. In 1840 he married Mary Clarke, and he looked to Cunningham for pastoral guidance. Although from the 1840s onwards Borrow never again worked for the BFBS or any specifically Christian agency, he spoke of himself in 1857, in *The Romany Rye*, as a 'sincere member' of the Church of England.[76] He also had an independent 'dissenting' spirit. In 1899 *The Bible Society Reporter*, noting the two volumes on Borrow that had just been produced by Knapp, saw Borrow as the only one among the Society's early agents who had 'achieved high distinction in literature'. At that stage his *Bible in Spain* had passed through nearly forty editions.[77] In 1911, thirty years after Borrow's death, Darlow wrote in the BFBS publication *The Bible in the World*, about the bundle of letters by Borrow that had been discovered — 'a great literary treasure'. Of all the servants

[74] For these developments, Knapp, *Borrow*, pp. 223–225.
[75] Darlow, *Letters*, p. xi, Preface.
[76] George Borrow, *Romany Rye* (London: John Murray, 1900), p. 346.
[77] 'George Borrow', *The Bible Society Reporter*, April 1899, p. 74.

of the Bible Society, Darlow stated, George Borrow was 'perhaps the most remarkable'. He was someone with outstanding energy and capacity, and Darlow's conviction, which is confirmed by the St Petersburg years, was that Borrow was 'a Bible Christian'.[78]

[78] T. H. Darlow, 'An Unconventional Missionary', *The Bible in the World*, December 1911, pp. 357–359.

A Challenge to Change: British Baptists and Racism in the 1990s

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Abstract
Significant efforts were made in the 1990s to catalyse renewal in the life and witness of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Several key Baptist thinkers identified racism as a problem impacting British society and Baptist churches but ignored any detailed consideration of the issue. This article seeks to account for this paradoxical phenomenon among contributors to the discourse about Baptist identity, denominational renewal, and engagement with mission within the larger story of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and racism in the 1990s. The writings of Nigel Wright, Rob Warner, and Derek Tidball are considered. All three authors self-identified as evangelical and advocated denominational renewal in the service of mission. The article explores factors that informed and limited discourse about race and racism among British Baptists in the 1990s, and the significance and outcome of these for Baptist life and witness in the ensuing decades of the twenty-first century.

Keywords
Baptists; race; racism; imagination

British Baptists at the End of the Twentieth Century

At the start of the 1990s, the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), which accounts for most Baptist Christians in England and Wales, stood at a crossroads. Behind it lay a path, trodden over the preceding twenty years, littered with an eclectic mix of events and developments that posed searching questions to the unity, ministry, and mission of the churches, associations, and colleges in membership with BUGB.[1] These

[1] The Baptist Union of Great Britain in the decade of the 1990s has been examined by Andy Goodliff, lecturer in Baptist History, Regent's Park College, Oxford. See Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Baptist Institutional Life in the 1990s* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020).

elements included persistent numerical decline,[2] Christological controversy,[3] charismatic renewal,[4] new independent church networks,[5] fractured urban life,[6] growth in ethnic diversity,[7] calls for new initiatives in evangelism and church planting,[8] new patterns of ecumenical and interfaith relations,[9] questions about the nature of Baptist identity,[10] relocation of the national offices of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) from London to Didcot, Oxfordshire,[11] and the appointment of a new national secretariat to serve BUGB.[12] These factors in combination prompted a season of questioning and reflection.

What direction(s) should Baptist Christians pursue into a new millennium? Shortly after assuming office in 1991, the new General Secretary, David Coffey, and Deputy General Secretary Keith Jones, embarked upon a listening process across the BUGB constituency to begin discerning a way forward into the next decade and beyond.[13] This line of inquiry would eventually crystalise into asking, 'What kind of Baptist Union was needed in the twenty-first century?' It would culminate in a Denominational Consultation in 1996 to answer this question.[14] In the five years leading up to the Denominational

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2 Adult attendance at BUGB churches declined from 174 300 people in 1979 to 166 100 people in 1989. See Peter Brierley, *'Christian' England: What the English Church Census Reveals* (London: MARC Europe, 1991), pp. 39–40.

3 Ian M. Randall, *The English Baptists of the 20th Century* (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 2005), pp. 366–375.

4 Douglas McBain, *Fire Over the Waters: Renewal Among Baptists and Others from the 1960s to the 1990s* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997); Randall, *The English Baptists*, pp. 396–402.

5 Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985).

6 Church of England, *Commission on Urban Priority Areas, Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation: The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (London: Church House, 1985).

7 Randall, *The English Baptists*, p. 404 and pp. 508–510.

8 Rob Warner, *21st Century Church: Why Radical Change Cannot Wait* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), pp. 143–160.

9 Randall, *The English Baptists*, pp. 444–451 and pp. 491–496; p. 515.

10 Brian Haymes, *A Question of Identity: Reflections on Baptist Principles and Practice* (Leeds: Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1986).

11 Randall, *The English Baptists*, pp. 427–428.

12 Randall, *The English Baptists*, pp. 472–476.

13 Randall, *The English Baptists*, pp. 472–476.

14 Randall, *The English Baptists*, pp. 487–490.

Consultation, a variety of voices stimulated thinking and discussion across BUGB about the obstacles and opportunities facing the Christian Church in the United Kingdom and how Baptists might respond.

A Modest Proposal

Nigel Wright, a prominent pastor-scholar in the 1980s and 1990s, outlined a personal vision in 1990 of what the Baptist Union of Great Britain might look like in the twenty-first century. These thoughts were succinctly presented in the pages of the newsletter published by Mainstream: Baptists for Life and Growth (hereafter Mainstream).[15] An expanded version of Wright's theological rationale and re-imagining of what it might mean to be Baptist Christians on the threshold of the twenty-first century appeared in book form in 1991 under the title *Challenge to Change: A Radical Agenda for Baptists*.[16] A review of Wright's book and a study guide subsequently appeared in the *Mainstream Newsletter*.[17] His ideas commanded widespread attention among national officers, association officers, college staff, and local ministers.[18] Fellow Baptists actively discussed the signposts Wright erected to guide them into the twenty-first century, pointers he thought had the potential to revitalise Baptist life and witness.

Chapter One of *Challenge to Change* makes an appeal for Baptists to 'undergo a theological renewal, to re-appropriate and re-express the Baptist values which are at the basis of their life'.[19] The purpose of such a retrieval of core Baptist values is to act as a catalyst for 'a renewal of local churches and of wider denominational relationships', enabling Baptists to 'further the mission which they are called by God to fulfil.

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[15] Nigel Wright, 'An Agenda for Baptist Christians', *Mainstream Newsletter*, 35 (January 1990), pp. 2–6.
[16] Nigel Wright, *Challenge to Change: A Radical Agenda for Baptists* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991).
[17] Derek Tidball, 'A Challenge to Change Reviewed', *Mainstream Newsletter*, 40 (April 1991), pp. 2–3; Steven Hembery and Roy Searle, 'Study Guide to "Challenge to Change"', *Mainstream Newsletter*, 43 (January 1992), pp. 8–14.
[18] David Coffey, the new BUGB General Secretary wrote the foreword in *Challenge to Change*; Douglas McBain, General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area of the Baptist Union, commended *Challenge to Change* on its back cover, as did Paul Fiddes, Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford; I discussed Wright's ideas with local ministers in London.
[19] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, p. 22.

The potential is exciting but the cost is the challenge to change.'[20] Wright identifies four beliefs central to his notion of Baptist identity. First, the Bible is 'the supreme authority' in shaping the Christian life.[21] Second, the church is a community of believers and baptism 'a sign of freely chosen faith'.[22] Third, every member exercises a ministry and the local church is autonomous.[23] Fourth, he advocates freedom of conscience and 'the separation of church and state'.[24] Wright is persuaded that these beliefs make Baptists who they are and ought to determine what they do. A key theme throughout *Challenge to Change* is that doctrine matters. Let us really understand what we believe is right, let us be authentically Baptist in the convictions we adhere to, and Baptists can be transformed for the better:[25]

> This book […] is not a challenge to change from our basic principles but to change so that we truly recover them and embody them in the world of today. It is a call for us to be ourselves.[26]

By going back to their roots, re-appropriating core convictions, and expressing them in ways that connect with a new world emerging, Baptists will be better equipped to reform their local, regional, and national structures to be faithful to the gospel.

Challenge to Change is a book about identity written in a context where many Baptists worried that BUGB was on a path of numerical decline and diminishing spiritual vitality.[27] Some believed that intentional efforts were required to re-energise Baptist life and witness. Mainstream, which Nigel Wright joined and became closely identified with, actively sought to reverse the narrative of decline among Baptists.[28]

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[20] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, p. 22.
[21] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, p. 22.
[22] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, p. 27.
[23] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, p. 32.
[24] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, p. 34.
[25] Wright explored key Christian doctrines in a subsequent publication: Nigel G. Wright, *Vital Truth: The Convictions of the Christian Community* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).
[26] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, p. 35.
[27] Randall, *The English Baptists*, p. 414; McBain, *Fire Over the Waters*, pp. 82–85.
[28] Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination*, pp. 24–32. Mainstream: Baptists for Life and Growth was formed in response to perceived fatalism on the part of BUGB national officers in the face of gradual and persistent decline in numbers and spiritual vitality. For information about Mainstream's early history, see <https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_mainstream_01.php>

According to Wright, the recovery of authentic doctrine and living it out faithfully are potential catalysts for a new lease of life among Baptists.[29]

Chapter two proposes 'An Agenda for Baptist Christians' that calls for a change in approach among Baptists in worship, structures, government, evangelism, mood, and lifestyle. Wright perceives a need to shift 'from the conformist to the Christian' in lifestyle among Baptists at the tail-end of the twentieth century:

> Here, we raise the question of whether Baptist Christians are now so conformed to their society that they reflect more the image of the world than of Christ. We underestimate the degree to which we are pressed into the mould and in being conformist, we lose any possibility of presenting to the world an alternative society living by a better code in a higher strength.
>
> Take the issues of racism, sexism, materialism, and militarism. These four key issues for our society require a positive witness from the Christian community, and yet the instinctive reaction of many Christians in these areas would probably put them on the side of the reactionary status quo. What is worse, however, is the apparently uncritical way in which many hold their moral, social and political views, without reference to Jesus Christ as the One who determines our whole existence. Different political views in the church of Christ may be understandable and even possible. What is inexcusable is unwillingness to make this area the subject of careful Christian thinking so that we hold our opinions in the light of Christ.[30]

Wright does not explain the terms 'racism, sexism, materialism, and militarism'.[31] The meanings of all four terms are assumed to be self-evident to the reader. Nor is any evidence marshalled to support Wright's impression that in relation to the four 'isms' named, the 'Christian community […] probably' is 'on the side of the reactionary status quo'.[32] No attempt is made to develop substantive thinking on

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and for more recent developments, see <https://freshstreams.net/about-us/our-strory/how-fresh-streams-began>.

[29] Rob Warner commended biblical fidelity and cultural relevance as essential ingredients in revitalising Baptist life and witness in the 1990s. See: Warner, *21st Century Church*.

[30] Wright, *Challenge to Change*, pp. 68–69.

[31] Wright's quartet of 'isms' echo the triumvirate of 'isms' declared problematic by Martin Luther King Jr, namely, racism, capitalism, and militarism. See Martin Luther King Jr, 'A Time to Break Silence', in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. by James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 231–244. There is no evidence that Wright is familiar with King's social analysis and critique in *Challenge to Change*.

[32] Presumably Wright's contention is based on anecdotal evidence, which would certainly correspond to my own impression of views present in BUGB life in the 1980s and 1990s. The

'racism' or any of the other three 'isms' identified alongside it. The nature and concrete outworking (for example in social processes and institutions) of these 'isms' in church and society are not described or interpreted. In view of the attention drawn to these realities and their perceived role in conformity among Baptists and other Christians to cultural values and practices alien to the gospel, the absence of any further investigation of the four 'isms' represents a significant lacuna.

Simultaneously Identifying and Ignoring a Problem

Wright illustrates tendencies evident in other British Baptists in the 1990s.[33] First, the fact of racism is acknowledged. Second, the painful impact of racism on UKME (United Kingdom Minority Ethnic) people[34] is signalled implicitly or explicitly. Third, definition and careful analysis of the phenomenon is avoided or explicated in limited fashion. Fourth, attitudes contrary to Christian values are assumed to be present in Christians and the corporate lives of congregations. Fifth, it is assumed that the church should act to counter beliefs and practices

Zebra Project (Methodist), Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice (largely Anglican), and the British Council of Churches Community and Race Relations Unit all pre-dated *Challenge to Change*. An important account of racism in Britain appeared three years before *Challenge to Change*: Kenneth Leech, *Struggle in Babylon: Racism in the Cities and Churches of Britain* (London: Sheldon Press, 1988). Resources existed to marshal evidence in support of claims about racism and to assist with the description and analysis of race and racism. Local Baptist groups emerged in the 1990s to resist and challenge racism such as Progress Within (Birmingham) and Reach In, Reach Out (London). See Randall, *The English Baptists*, p. 478.

[33] This article focuses on prominent Baptist pastor-scholars engaging with issues around Baptist identity in theology and culture in the 1990s in relation to race and racism. The following accounts trace institutional developments on race and racism within BUGB in the same period: Andy Goodliff, 'A Summons To Be Heard: Towards a More Just Baptist Identity', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2022), 21–36; Wale Hudson-Roberts, 'British Baptists and Institutional Racism', in *Race for Justice: The Struggle for Equality and Inclusion in British and Irish Churches*, ed. by Richard S. Reddie (London: Monarch Books, 2022), pp. 46–50; *Journeying to Justice: Contributions to the Baptist Tradition across the Black Atlantic*, ed. by Anthony Reddie, with Wale Hudson-Roberts, and Gale Richards (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2017).

[34] BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) was a common acronym employed to describe people that are not white in the first two decades of the twenty-first century in the UK. UKME (United Kingdom Minority Ethnic) and GMH (Global Majority Heritage) are now more commonplace. See The Church of England, *From Lament to Action: The Report of the Archbishop's Anti-Racism Taskforce* <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/FromLamentToAction-report.pdf> [accessed 21 October 2023].

incompatible with Christian discipleship.[35] The writings of two other prominent Baptist authors in the 1990s lend support to the claim that the identification of racism and ignoring or absence of any further exploration of the reality named is a feature of British Baptist commentary in the closing decade of the twentieth century.

Catching the Tide: The Church and The Challenge of Today's Society by Derek Tidball, also a prominent pastor-scholar in Baptist circles in the 1990s, presents a brief sociological account of contemporary society to help Baptists address the question, 'What is the way forward for our churches?'[36] A section on 'Social Problems'[37] alerts the reader to Baptist involvement in the campaign to end slavery in the nineteenth century[38] and points to the existence of 'racial tension' in the present:

> Communities are often divided on racial lines entailing much prejudice and injustice. Christians are called to be peacemakers and to be active in reconciliation.[39]

The category of 'race' is explicit in the acknowledgement that 'communities are often divided on racial lines', and the existence of 'racism' is implied by the reference to 'prejudice and injustice'. Neither 'race' nor 'racism' are explained or explored any further. Tidball is persuaded that Christians are required to 'be peacemakers and to be active in reconciliation'. He concludes the section on 'Social Problems' by illustrating that Jesus demonstrated a concern for the powerless. By implication the followers of Jesus should do the same. Tidball then proceeds to challenge the reader to select one of the social problems discussed, or one they choose to nominate, and engage in action to improve it for the common good.

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35 Wright does not indicate in *Challenge to Change* how to counter beliefs and practices incompatible with the gospel.

36 Derek Tidball, *Catching the Tide: The Church and The Challenge of Today's Society*, rev. edn (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1991), p. 63.

37 Tidball, *Catching the Tide*, pp. 50–53.

38 Tidball, *Catching the Tide*, p. 51. Tidball's stress is on past activity to end slavery rather than examination of the ideas and attitudes that justified and enacted slavery in the first place.

39 Tidball, *Catching the Tide*, p. 52.

Tidball was elected President of the Baptist Union for 1990–1991.[40] He published 'Reflections on the Presidency' in the *Mainstream Newsletter*[41] that includes the following observation:

> Then I was struck by our ethnic diversity. Admittedly we have a long way to go and our brothers and sisters from ethnic minority groups have some painful stories to tell us at the way we are so often blind to them still. Notwithstanding that, was encouraged by the racially mixed nature of a church like Windsor Road, Slough or Yardley, Birmingham.[42]

The experience of these 'brothers and sisters from ethnic minority groups' made an impression. Tidball is sensitive to the stories he encounters but confesses that 'we have a long way to go'. He laments 'we are so often blind to them still'. What do white Baptists (inferred) not see? Are we 'blind' to the experiences of 'brothers and sisters of ethnic minority groups', and the stories of their lives? Tidball takes some encouragement from the fact of ethnically mixed congregations within the Baptist constituency.

Rob Warner, editor of *Mainstream Newsletter* in the early 1990s,[43] reflected on the findings of the English Church Census in 'The Changing Face of the Church in England' in the summer of 1991.[44] The census indicated that 86 percent of Baptists are evangelicals. Warner contends that the evangelical identity of Baptists needed to be reflected in Baptist structures and that Baptists should seek cooperation with like-minded Christians. 'Our nearest neighbours with whom co-operation should be most ready at local and national levels are in fact the independents, Pentecostals and Afro-Caribbeans.'[45] This conclusion underestimated significant differences in polity (church structures and governance), doctrine (understanding of the person and work of the

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[40] Derek Tidball also served as BUGB Secretary for Mission and Evangelism and Principal of London Bible College (now London School of Theology). Randall, *The English Baptists*, p. 476.
[41] Derek Tidball, 'Reflections on the Presidency', *Mainstream Newsletter*, 41 (July 1991), pp. 3–5.
[42] Tidball, 'Reflections', p. 4.
[43] Rob Warner held pastorates at Buckhurst Hill, Essex and Herne Hill Baptist Church, SE London. He became a teaching pastor at Queen's Road, Wimbledon, London, where his time and energy were split between the local congregation and a wider trans-local ministry. Randall, *The English Baptists*, p. 497 and p. 503.
[44] Rob Warner, 'The Changing Face of the Church in England', *Mainstream Newsletter*, 41 (July 1991), pp. 1–2.
[45] Warner, 'The Changing Face', p. 2.

Holy Spirit), and the experience of racism familiar to many black Christians from a Caribbean background. In January 1992, Warner penned an editorial under the title 'The Cross and Racism'[46] that challenged Baptists to proactively expose and resist racism. The article describes the intentional efforts of the leadership of Herne Hill Baptist Church, to address the issue of racism. These initiatives arose from an awareness that, historically, black people had not always been treated with understanding and dignity within the congregation,[47] and a recognition that the contemporary demographic composition[48] of the church necessitated an intentional and positive response to bear faithful witness to the Gospel in a city, London, with an increasingly diverse population. Warner incorporated this material in his subsequent book *21st Century Church: Why Radical Change Cannot Wait*.[49] The existence of racism is acknowledged but nowhere defined in either the newsletter editorial or the book, nor is consideration given to the causes of racism and the factors that perpetuate it within church and society in either publication.[50]

These authors reflect a tendency in evangelical thinkers in this decade to admit the existence of racism as an uncomfortable reality. But they do not dwell on it. No attempt is made to understand the nature of racism and its impact on church and society. The remainder of this article seeks to render some explanation for this paradoxical phenomenon, outline why it matters, and suggest some implications for British Baptists today.

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46 Rob Warner, 'The Cross and Racism', *Mainstream Newsletter*, 43 (January 1992), pp. 1–2.

47 Warner, 'The Cross and Racism', p. 1.

48 Warner, 'The Cross and Racism', p. 1. Thirty nationalities were represented in Herne Hill Baptist Church's morning congregation in 1991.

49 Rob Warner, *21st Century Church*, pp. 113–115. Warner's book is a call to action that, in a similar vein to Nigel Wright, advocates the merits of adhering to authentic Christian beliefs (in Warner's terms 'biblical' beliefs) and adapting attitudes, practices, and structures in the church to connect intelligibly with contemporary culture for the sake of mission.

50 One Baptist scholar that engaged more extensively with the reality of race in the 1990s is the church historian Brian Stanley. He examined race in Protestant missions during British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but, like the authors considered in this article, does not explain the category of 'race' and assumes the meaning of the term is self-evident to the reader. See Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), pp. 36, 97, 102, 119, 162–163, 167, 172, 182–183; and 'Culture and Christian Mission: A Perspective from History', *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, 242 (April 1993), 3–6.

Accounting for an Acknowledgement and an Absence

Theology, or talk about God, always occurs in a cultural context. Stephen Bevans made this claim in 1992 in a landmark publication *Models of Contextual Theology*.[51] He voiced an awareness that 'cultural contexts shape theology',[52] an awareness that had been growing since the 1970s, especially in liberation theology and mission studies.[53] Christian doctrine and systematic theology also now increasingly acknowledge the role of context in theologising.[54] Andrew Walls, a church historian active in mission studies, points out that the gospel is a 'prisoner and liberator of culture'.[55] What is it that imprisons and liberates the theological imagination — that is, the description and interpretation of God, society, church, and Christian discipleship — in Wright, Warner, and Tidball? All three authors, in varying degrees, recognise that the church is frequently 'conformed to culture' in ways that are at variance with the gospel. What elements constrain and free their theological imagination in relation to race and racism? Three factors stand out: blueprint ecclesiology, diseased social imagination, and evangelical identity.

Blueprint Ecclesiology

Wright, Warner, and Tidball exemplify the Baptist instinct to seek a vision of the church grounded in the New Testament, the church as close to God's intentions as possible, the church that Christian disciples at their best aspire to live out. They articulate or imply what Nicholas M. Healy calls 'blueprint ecclesiologies',[56] ideal theological models of the Christian community. A focus on the ideal church with negligible or no reference to the messy reality of its concrete existence has consequences:

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[51] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded edn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), pp. 3–15.

[52] Bevans, *Models*, pp. ix–xi.

[53] Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976); Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

[54] Uche Anizor, *How to Read Theology: Engaging Doctrine Critically and Charitably* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), pp. 25–56.

[55] Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), pp. 16–24.

[56] Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 25–51.

> The church's witness and its pastoral care are compromised when it fails adequately to acknowledge and respond to its sinfulness.[57]

Healy thinks that fixating on an ideal theological model of the church and simultaneously minimising attention to the empirical reality of the church, inclines theologians to accentuate notions of the Christian community at variance with the lived experience of the church. Healy proposes that 'ecclesiology [the study of the church] can aid the church's efforts by reflecting theologically upon its concrete identity'.[58] The Baptist authors featured in this article partially recognise aspects of 'concrete identity' in church and society. Wright acknowledges the existence of 'racism, sexism, materialism, and militarism'. Warner acknowledges the reality of racism and a culturally changed society. In Tidball, the problem of race and racism is tacitly acknowledged, but he moves immediately to advocate for Baptists to seek peace and reconciliation. There is no attempt to understand the causes of the present situation and what may be obstacles in the way to overcoming it. None of these authors describe or seek to make sense of race and racism in any depth. They skip over the 'ugly truth'.

The concrete or empirical church is not completely lost to view in Wright, Warner, and Tidball. It may be more accurate to say that their perspective on the concrete church is blurred and attention is directed to a limited set of features. There is a tendency to see churches conditioned by buildings, organisational structures, and formal ways of doing things devised in an earlier age. These features and reasons to change them for the sake of mission are attended to in some detail. Race and racism are acknowledged but not examined with any rigour. What might be 'colouring' their approach? Willie Jennings, an American black Baptist theologian offers a stark proposal for white theologians of all denominations in Western Christianity to reckon with.

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[57] Healy, *The Church*, p. 25.
[58] Healy, *The Church*, p. 25.

Diseased Social Imagination

Willie Jennings argues in *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*[59] that 'Christianity in the Western world lives and moves within a diseased social imagination',[60] a distorted mode of describing and interpreting human identity and organising social relations. 'Whiteness' is a critical element within this 'diseased social imagination'. By 'whiteness', Jennings means that white people in the West understand their identities and relations to others who are not white through the lens of colour. People that do not possess this arbitrary attribute cannot claim a white racial identity.[61] Those deemed white benefit from social advantages, assume their way of doing things is universally true, and do not realise that their racial identity has unrecognised outcomes for their lives. Whiteness is a social construct, a distorted but powerful perspective,[62] inimical to the gospel, which has developed and mutated over centuries:

> Slowly […] whiteness emerges, not simply as a marker of the European but as the rarely spoken but always understood organizing conceptual frame. And blackness appears as the fundamental tool of that organizing conceptuality. Black bodies are the ever-visible counterweight of a usually *invisible* white identity.[63]

This 'diseased social imagination' of the West is the context within which the 'Christian imagination' or way of describing and making sense of reality has developed. To understand the practice and operation of

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[59] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). I am persuaded that the substance of the argument Jennings makes is correct.

[60] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 6.

[61] The story of 'whiteness' in America is complex; it established boundaries between people groups but exhibited flexibility in response to immigration from Europe. See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). Also, Susan K. Brown and Frank D. Bean, 'Assimilation Models, Old and New: Explaining a Long Term Process', Migration Policy Institute (October, 2006) <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/assimilation-models-old-and-new-explaining-long-term-process> [accessed 21 January 2024]. Horsman shows how notions of an Anglo-Saxon race shaped American thinking. Brown and Bean explore how white people born in America, initially viewed Irish and Italian immigrants as inferior nationalities, depicting them in racial categories, but eventually came to see them as 'white'.

[62] We shall see that 'whiteness' and concepts such as 'race' and 'racism' are not simply cognitive or abstract accounts of reality.

[63] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 25.

theology or talk about God in Western Christianity, we must comprehend the context in which it has arisen:

> One must look at […] the soil in which the modern theological imagination grew and where it continues to find its deepest social nutrients.[64]

For Jennings, the 'diseased social imagination' he identifies must be acknowledged, because it skews description and interpretation of God, human beings, and relationships. Western Christians can no longer ignore it if they are to be true to the gospel and to bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ.[65] The theologising done by the Baptist thinkers showcased in this article predates these shifts in perspective in academic theology in the United Kingdom. There is no awareness of whiteness in their theologising, which helps to explain, in part, their priorities and limited recognition and engagement with race and racism. The distorted Christian imagination Jennings alludes to is multi-faceted. It inherits and promulgates the categories of race and racism. Race differentiates between people based on skin colour;[66] it simultaneously attaches an arbitrary value to a person according to their skin colour. Race structures relations between human beings from different people groups into a hierarchy of importance. Hence, race is not simply a descriptive term. It

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[64] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 7.

[65] For additional thinking on whiteness in America see Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020); James W. Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004). Anthony Reddie has explored similar themes in the UK. See Anthony G. Reddie, *Theologising Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique* (London: Routledge, 2019); *Deconstructing Whiteness, Empire and Mission*, ed. by Anthony G. Reddie and Carol Troupe (London: SCM Press, 2023).

[66] Skin colour is central to discourse about race in America. See Ibrahim X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (London: The Bodley Head, 2017). Antisemitism is not part of Kendi's account of racism in America. Kenan Malik, writing in contemporary Britain argues, 'The concept of a "racial type" as it developed through the nineteenth century was of a group of people linked by a set of fundamental characteristics and differing from other types by virtue of those attributes.' See Kenan Malik, *Not So Black and White: A History of Race from White Supremacy to Identity Politics* (London: Hurst, 2023), p. 3. His construal of race means that skin colour is not necessarily determinative to experience racism. Malik is not alone in a British context in theorising about race beyond the category of skin colour. Mike Cole, Emeritus Professor of Racism Studies at the University of East London, distinguishes between 'Colour-coded racism' (e.g., directed towards enslaved black Africans) and 'Non-colour coded racism' (e.g., anti-Irish racism and antisemitism.). See Mike Cole, *Racism and the Tory Party: From Disraeli to Johnson* (New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 7–14. This difference of approach cannot be resolved here.

does political and ideological work.[67] Racism is the oppression of one group of people by another group of people based on skin colour.[68]

Race is not merely an abstract theory or ideology, a set of ideas that serves the interests of a particular group of people, arrived at through a process of logical discourse. Race is inculcated and absorbed through complex processes of socialisation. It operates implicitly and explicitly, consciously and unconsciously. Race shapes decisions, informs actions, and fuels emotions. James McClendon's concept of a conviction, outlined in *Ethics* the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, helps account for the potency of race and its influence in shaping a 'diseased social imagination' in the West. McClendon distinguishes between opinions and convictions:

> Opinions are the stuff of debate and discussion […] Convictions on the other hand, are less readily expressed but more tenaciously held. It may take me a long time to discover my own convictions, but when I do, I have discovered […] myself. My convictions are the gutsy beliefs I live out — or in failing to live them out I betray myself.[69]

> A conviction is a persistent belief such that if X (a person or community) has a conviction, it will not be easily relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before.[70]

In *Doctrine*, volume two of McClendon's *Systematic Theology*, he expounds three inter-related aspects of a conviction.[71] First, a conviction is cognitive in nature; it describes and interprets how we see reality. It is a mental map of how we make sense of the world. Second, a conviction is volitional in nature; it informs our decision-making, our action and inaction. Third, it is affective in nature. The beliefs we hold to be most true, our persistent beliefs, are not held dispassionately. Our most persistent beliefs are 'self-involving'.[72] They exercise a powerful emotional appeal within us. A persistent belief may be exposed as

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[67] Drew G. I. Hart, *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2016), p. 49.
[68] In Cole's terms, this article deals specifically with 'Colour-coded racism'.
[69] James Wm McClendon Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 2nd edn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 22.
[70] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 22–23.
[71] James Wm McClendon Jr, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 29.
[72] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 29.

lacking coherence in relation to reality, but its affective dimension will mean that it is not easy or straightforward to abandon. Modifying or relinquishing a persistent belief can be costly and difficult for a person or a community.[73] Identifying our convictions, theological and non-theological, is vital to discern how and to what extent they correspond with the gospel and the way we live out Christian discipleship. If we cannot 'see' what is informing and limiting our theological imagination, we will not be able to modify or correct it in the light of the gospel. We are more likely to prioritise and favour some themes rather than others. It is probable we will skim over some aspects of our lived reality and invest time, energy, and resources on others, which is precisely the phenomenon being explored in this article.

British Evangelical Identity

The three authors in the spotlight of this article all identified as evangelicals and characterised Baptists as inherently evangelical.[74] Their acknowledgement of the fact of racism and the simultaneous absence of any in-depth engagement with race and racism illustrates a widespread trend in British evangelical thought in the period from 1970 to 1999. The mainstream of white British evangelicalism was slow, reluctant even, to engage with the idea of race and the reality of racism as matters of pressing concern.[75] These attitudes were indicative of a deeply engrained resistance among evangelicals across denominations to

[73] A change in convictions or persistent beliefs can be difficult, costly, and transformative. See Megan Phelps-Roper, *Unfollow: A Journey from Hatred to Hope, Leaving the Westboro Baptist Church* (London: riverrun, 2019); J. Michael Feazell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001); Joseph Tkach, *Transformed by Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1997).

[74] David Bebbington argues that, historically, four characteristics mark evangelical identity: conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 3. This account broadly applies to the evangelical thinkers featured in this paper.

[75] Racism in the history of American evangelicalism is troubling and problematic. See Randall Balmer, *Bad Faith: Race and the Rice of the Religious Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021); Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021). It is tempting in a British context to assume that the issue is more serious in America than here and so avoid addressing race and racism in our own backyard.

interact with social issues and the challenges they posed to church and society.[76]

A few evangelicals wrestled with race and racism in the 1970s and 1980s. The Evangelical Race Relations Group (ERRG) was founded by evangelical Christians working in multi-cultural areas in London and the Midlands. It organised conferences and published a quarterly journal. In the 1980s it was renamed Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice. ECRJ employed a series of workers to engage in training and enabling churches and organisations to address issues of racism.[77] In spite of these efforts, the mainstream of evangelicals continued to remain largely unengaged with race and racism. White evangelicals had little contact with independent black congregations, denominations, and leaders.[78] Yet, this fact is not the whole story. There were congregations in historic denominations, which included evangelicals, that experienced an influx of black Christians from the Caribbean, the Windrush generation, from 1948 onwards. Multi-ethnic Baptist congregations emerged in several cities.[79] Much of the impetus to recognise and face up to racism came from the grass roots of Baptist life, not from colleges, associations, or BUGB national structures.[80]

The tide began to turn in the mainstream of evangelical thought with the publication in 1984 of John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians*

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[76] A point made by John Stott, a prominent voice in British and world evangelicalism. Nigel Wright reflects some of these tensions in Nigel Wright and David Slater, *A Theology of Mission: AIM 2* (Didcot: BUGB, 1990).

[77] Greg Smith, 'How Can We Create a Multicultural Church?', Psephizo <https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/how-can-we-create-multicultural-church/> [accessed 22 November 2023].

[78] The West Indian Evangelical Alliance (WIEA), later African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance (ACEA), which served a black church constituency, affiliated to the mainly white Evangelical Alliance. The founder of the WIEA, Philip Mohabir, intentionally sought fellowship with white evangelicals and worked for mutual understanding, fellowship, and reconciliation. Mohabir first met Clive Calver, the then General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, at a conference in Amsterdam sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Organisation. See Philip Mohabir, *Building Bridges* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), pp. 192–208.

[79] Becoming a multi-ethnic congregation that faces up to race and racism is challenging but rewarding. See D. J. Wise, 'Developing a Genuinely Multi-Ethnic Local Church Congregation: An Autoethnographic Investigation into Greenford Baptist Church 1987–2014' (doctoral thesis, University of Roehampton, London, 2021).

[80] Randall, *The English Baptists*, p. 478.

Today.[81] Stott challenged hesitant evangelicals to get involved in social issues and offered thought on a range of topics, including a chapter on race, racism, and race relations under a title infused with hope, 'The Multi-Racial Dream'.[82] *Issues Facing Christians Today* was one of the first attempts by a prominent evangelical thinker and leader in Britain to interact with race and racism.[83] Stott opens the chapter by quoting the 'I have a dream' section of Martin Luther King Jr's speech at the March on Washington in August 1963. He asserts that, 'It is right for Christians to dream this dream.'[84] Stott omits reference to King's strong condemnation of the social conditions black Americans contend with in the first part of the speech.[85] He chooses to begin with King's vision of reconciliation between different peoples.[86] Stott then proceeds to survey three chapters in the annals of race: slavery in America, antisemitism[87] in Germany, and the 'British Record'. Stott's account of the latter is silent about British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and practice of slavery in the British Empire. He acknowledges the reality of 'racial pride'[88] and condescension exhibited in colonial rule. Stott traces the story of migration from Commonwealth countries to the United Kingdom following World War Two and the experience of migrants in a hostile society. He refutes various myths and flawed theories about race. The chapter concludes with a section on 'Biblical foundations for multi-racialism', which echoes King's dream. For Stott, the teaching of the Bible is unambiguous: 'The church must therefore exhibit its multi-racial, multi-national, and multi-cultural nature.'[89]

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[81] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshalls, 1984).
[82] Stott, *Issues*, pp. 194–211.
[83] For a more recent consideration of evangelicals and race see Jessamin Birdsall, 'Racial Diversity in British Evangelicalism: Frames, Barriers, and Practices' (doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 2021).
[84] Stott, *Issues*, p. 194.
[85] Washington, *A Testament*, pp. 217–220.
[86] This concluding part of the speech is the place where evangelicals and most white Christians like to begin. Starting at this point in the speech entails avoiding the harsh reality of racial injustice and moving swiftly to the aspirational vision of reconciliation. King held reality and hope together.
[87] Stott includes antisemitism in his discussion of race. No rationale is offered for his decision.
[88] Stott, *Issues*, p. 201.
[89] Stott, *Issues*, p. 209.

Stott is aspirational in what he writes. He reflects on history, ideas, and the Bible. The chapter is a distillation of thinking by someone who has read widely but does not reckon with the lived experience of black Christians in church and society. Attention moves quickly to biblical principles to guide the church. Stott advocates a blueprint ecclesiology. He envisages correct doctrine is the key to being the church: 'Only a true theology, the biblical revelation of God, can deliver us from racial pride and prejudice.'[90] The origins of race and racism are not probed. Stott's approach anticipates Wright, Warner, and Tidball's later works, as self-identified evangelicals. He is unaware of key factors shaping the way he does theology: the 'diseased social imagination' explicated by Willie Jennings, the 'blueprint ecclesiology' mode critiqued by Nicholas Healy, and an evangelical identity still unsure of how to engage with the lived experience of social issues and operating with 'selective historical amnesia'[91] about Britain's distant and more recent past in matters to do with race and racism. There is an absence of reflexivity, the scrutiny of how personal and social identity, lived experience, and assumptions shape one's outlook, with significant consequences for theology and action.

Baptists and Racism Beyond Mainstream in the 1990s

Local Initiatives

The theological musings of pastor-scholars closely associated with Mainstream is not the whole story of Baptists and racism in the 1990s. However, the limited scope and hesitancy to explore race and racism reflected in their output is indicative of the BUGB[92] landscape in the early 1990s. It was grass-roots initiatives in local churches and

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[90] Stott, *Issues*, p. 209.

[91] Robert Beckford used this term in a presentation on Sam Sharpe at the UK Baptist Assembly in Plymouth, Devon in 2000. For more on historical amnesia in the context of whiteness see Katharine Tyler, *Whiteness, Class and the Legacies of Empire: On Home Ground* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 214–219.

[92] BUGB serves as a shorthand term with a dual reference to (1) the national offices, staff based in Didcot, Oxfordshire, and Baptist Union Council, and (2) to the churches, associations, and colleges that together constitute the membership of the denomination. The context will normally make clear which sense is intended.

associations that sparked serious exploration and conversation about race and racism in Baptist Union circles rather than leading theologians or the national offices in Didcot. Progress Within (PW), which drew black and white members from three churches in Birmingham, met for the first time in 1991 at Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church.[93] Progress Within critiqued the dynamics of racial injustice within local churches, the West Midland Baptist Association, BUGB national structures, and British society. Key members of Progress Within included Pete Cutts, Deleyan Smith, and Joanne Gillings. James Ashdown,[94] a deacon at Battersea Chapel, South London,[95] became aware of the existence of Progress Within. His conversations with the Birmingham group resulted in a meeting at Battersea Chapel in March 1993 between Progress Within and interested Baptists from South-West London.

This gathering inspired the formation of Reach In, Reach Out (RIRO) in May 1993, which, in its early days, counted James Ashdown, Pat White, Julian Gotobed, Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, Gillian Small, Debbie Linton, Sue Marley, Janice Zvimba, and Devon Marston as members. Meetings alternated between Battersea Chapel, Brixton Baptist Church (Kenyon), and Raleigh Park Christian Centre, Brixton Hill (then under the care of Bonneville Baptist Church, Clapham).[96] RIRO produced a publication, *Reaching Out: Thoughts, Views, and Stories About Racism*,[97] with financial support from the London Baptist Association (LBA) and BUGB Social Action Office.[98] This booklet

[93] Joanne Gillings, 'Making Progress in Birmingham', *Baptist Times*, 4 September 1997, p. 8.

[94] James Ashdown worked for the Zebra Project, a Methodist racial justice initiative, and the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission in the late 1980s and early 1990s. See James Ashdown, The Storyman Website <https://www.storyman.org.uk/home.html>. He was a member at Clapham Baptist Church in the 1980s and Battersea Chapel in the 1990s. Among (white) Baptists in the 1980s and 1990s he possessed a unique range of experience and knowledge in relation to Black Majority Churches and racial justice issues.

[95] I was the minister at Battersea Chapel from 1991 to 2001.

[96] James Ashdown, Pat White, Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, and I advocated for racial justice more widely in the LBA and BUGB.

[97] James Ashdown, Pat White, Janice Zvimba, Julian Gotobed, Debbie Linton, Devon Marston, and Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, *Reaching Out: Thoughts, Views and Stories About Racism* (London: Reach In, Reach Out, 1995).

[98] The LBA took advice from Desmond Gordon and Frederick George as part of its decision-making process to approve funding to produce *Reaching Out*.

offered personal stories, interviews, poetry, analysis of race, ideas about combatting racism, and signposted resources. Local groups also emerged in Bristol, Derby, Nottingham, and Yorkshire.[99] As the decade wore on, national gatherings were convened with the help of the Social Action Office to enable local groups to share experiences and learn from one another.[100] A further important development in the 1990s was the formation of the Black and Asian Ministers' Forum at the instigation of Desmond Gordon, minister at Finchley Baptist Church, London, as a safe space for Black and Asian ministers to find fellowship and reflect upon their experiences. Several members would go on to exercise leadership in the LBA and BUGB, such as Desmond Gordon, Frederick George, Rupert Lazar, and Wale Hudson-Roberts.[101]

National Initiatives

BUGB published *Belonging: A Resource for the Christian Family* in 1994 as 'A Resource for the UN International Year of the Family', including a chapter on 'Multi-Cultural Community'.[102] The chapter presents historical and current perspectives on 'changing patterns in society' with reference to cultural diversity and race. This booklet acknowledges the existence of race and racism but does not explain these categories or examine the realities they refer to in any depth, much like the theological outputs of Wright, Tidball, and Warner. The chapter on 'Multi-Cultural Community' signals the availability of 'organisations that help churches and other bodies become more aware of their attitudes and discriminatory structures'.[103] The reader is informed that Baptist Union staff at Didcot have been on racism awareness courses provided by

[99] The mission minister of the Yorkshire Baptist Association, Revd Stan Woods, produced a report in the early 1990s based on a sabbatical research project. He made a series of recommendations, including 'that the Baptist Union set up a working group to look at the whole aspect of racial justice in the denomination'. Stan Woods, *Let Justice Flow* (unpublished sabbatical report, Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1994), p. 25.

[100] Revd Andy Bruce played a key role in facilitating these gatherings.

[101] Desmond Gordon was active in LBA and BUGB Councils. Frederick George became President of the LBA in 1993 (see *Capital Vision*, Autumn 1993, p. 1) and then went on to become President of BUGB for 1997–1998. Rupert Lazar became President of BUGB for 2016–2017. Hudson-Roberts would become the first BUGB Racial Justice Co-ordinator in 2002.

[102] BUGB, *Belonging: A Resource for the Christian Family* (Didcot: BUGB, 1994); the chapter can be found on pp. 99–108.

[103] BUGB, *Belonging*, p. 103.

MELRAW.[104] A spirit of hopeful realism characterises the text: 'In many respects race relations in Britain have improved over the years but racially motivated discrimination and violence remain major social problems.'[105]

Stephen Lawrence was murdered at a bus stop on a street in Eltham, South-East London, in April 1993. His experience of racially motivated violence was not unique. Black and Asian Baptists knew what it was like to meet 'racially motivated discrimination and violence' in the 1990s. Greenford Baptist Church, West London, reckoned with such an episode in 1997, when a racially motivated attack was directed at an Asian family in membership with the church.[106] In my own context in South-West London, a Nigerian woman who worshipped regularly at Battersea Chapel was assaulted in her own home, no more than a two-minute walk from the chapel building, by neighbours that took exception to a complaint about an uncontrolled dog intimidating her children. Her husband had to obtain a restraining order to protect the family. White Baptists living outside major cities rarely encountered such incidents. Ministers and churches in cities with multi-ethnic populations were far more likely to be confronted by racism and racially motivated violence. Activism for BUGB to recognise and act in the face of racial injustice came predominantly from Baptists in urban conurbations. Moreover, action for change reflected dissatisfaction with conditions in church and society among a generation of young adults aged 20–40.[107]

The limited attention afforded to racial justice matters in BUGB in the early 1990s can, in part, be explained by the absence (unlike other denominations) of a national officer with a racial justice brief and by limited interaction with ecumenical initiatives on racism and racial justice. Gradually, however, the Baptist landscape began to change. David Coffey and Keith Jones, the new denominational secretariate,

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104 BUGB, *Belonging*, p. 103. MELRAW is the acronym for the Methodist and Ecumenical Leadership Racism Awareness Workshops.

105 BUGB, *Belonging*, p. 99.

106 David Wise documents this episode, the difficult aftermath, the campaign to secure justice, and impact upon Greenford Baptist Church in Wise, *Developing a Genuinely Multi-Ethnic Local Church*, pp. 31–38. He gave evidence at the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry in 1998.

107 Most participants in Progress Within and Reach in, Reach Out were in the 20–40 age range.

convened a 'listening day' for the LBA in 1991 as part of a BUGB wide listening process. Frederick George spoke about racism and the need for BUGB to be proactive in working for racial justice. I also attended the LBA listening day and reiterated the importance of facing up to the challenge of racial justice.[108] The listening day process resulted in *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000*.[109] The plan did not refer to racial justice, but the National Mission Strategy which accompanied it acknowledges that

> less attention has been paid by Baptists to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of British society than it deserves. A number of mission initiatives […] have been taken and a number of healthily integrated churches exist, whose insights should be shared with others. Steps must be taken to listen and understand the grass roots, especially the young. The leadership that ethnic minorities are already giving calls us to reform ourselves, so that such leadership can take its place in our structures and benefit the wider union […] A strategy for the furthering of racial justice in our denomination needs to be devised.[110]

Ecumenical Encouragement

Some of these aspirations began to materialise as the decade progressed. In 1993, the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI) asked BUGB to appoint a Baptist representative to the Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ).[111] This role was filled by Pat White,[112] a member of Brixton Baptist Church and Reach In, Reach Out. Pat White served as a deputy moderator of the CCRJ[113] and convener of the Baptist Union Racial Justice Task Group (RJTG),[114] which was formed in 1995.

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[108] I encountered racism and its impact upon lives during my three years as youth worker and assistant to the minister at Brixton Baptist Church (Kenyon) while training for the Baptist ministry (1988–1991). Battersea Chapel, a multi-ethnic congregation, called me to be its minister in 1991.

[109] BUGB, *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000 Incorporating the National Mission Strategy* (Didcot: BUGB, 1993).

[110] BUGB, *A Ten Year Plan*, p. 19–20.

[111] The Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI), successor to the British Council of Churches (BCC), created the CCRJ to continue the work of the BCC's Community and Race Relations Unit (CRRU).

[112] Mark Rudall, 'When the River of Justice Fails', *Baptist Times*, 15 July 1993, p. 6. I made Douglas McBain, General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area of BUGB (i.e., the area covered by the LBA), aware of Pat White at a regional LBA meeting at Balham Baptist Church in the early 1990s.

[113] David Haslam, 'Miscarriage of Justice', letter, *Baptist Times*, 5 August 1993, p. 6.

[114] The RJTG subsequently became the Racial Justice Working Group (RJWG).

She was a key figure in Baptist and ecumenical circles working for racial justice through the 1990s and into the 2000s. A range of internal and external voices added an impetus to push racial justice up BUGB's agenda. Keith Jones, BUGB Deputy General Secretary, proposed the idea of developing a national initiative on racial justice. Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, BUGB Social Action Adviser,[115] was assigned to support the new racial justice brief.

The second half of the 1990s witnessed increased activity in the pursuit of racial justice across BUGB. The council committed to a programme of action in 1996–1997.[116] The Social Action Committee produced *How Do We Work for Racial Justice?,*[117] and with the RJTG promoted Racial Justice Sunday (launched as an annual event by CCRJ in 1995), supported a resolution on racial justice at the Baptist Union Council in 1996, helped with Frederick George's presidential theme 'Take the Risk' at the Baptist Assembly in 1997, and organised national gatherings for local groups to learn from one another and engage in training to empower them to work with local churches and organisations to progress racial justice.[118]

Baptist Union Council

The Baptist Union Council in the 1990s included a handful of minority ethnic members such as Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, Desmond Gordon, and Frederick George. George, from Sri Lanka, trained for Baptist Ministry at Spurgeon's College and entered a pastorate in London. He advocated racial justice in local association and national structures in the 1990s. George proposed a resolution committing BUGB to make racial justice a priority at the Baptist Union Council meeting in March 1996. The *Baptist Times* records that a decision was

115 Anne Wilkinson-Hayes was Social Justice Adviser for the Baptist Union between 1992 and 1997.

116 The programme prioritised four elements: awareness raising; training; organisational change; and monitoring.

117 This four-page information guide outlines seven steps to engage with racial justice and provides a list of resources.

118 This included such events as, for example, an exploratory workshop convened at Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, in March 1996.

reached following 'a lengthy presentation and debate on racial justice'.[119] Progress Within and Reach In, Reach Out contributed to the presentation.[120] The Council adopted a composite resolution:

- to encourage and affirm in our churches the contribution of different races and cultures;
- to recognise that racism is sinful and a denial of God's view of humanity;
- to acknowledge that there is racism in individuals and in our churches;
- to make a commitment to challenge this evil wherever it exists;
- to actively support the ongoing work of the Racial Justice Task Group through the Union's Social Action Committee;
- to endorse the creation of a programme of activities aimed at furthering these issues in 1996–1997.[121]

The *Baptist Times* reports, 'There was no shortage of speakers anxious to support the resolution, though some sounded a note of caution about the danger of using high-sounding phrases as a substitute for genuine self-examination and reform.'[122] I recall David Coffey, then BUGB General Secretary, coming over to those of us from Reach In, Reach Out after the close of the debate and the vote for the resolution, to declare, 'I think something significant happened today.' The *Baptist Times* summarised a more cautious assessment on the part of Frederick George in his contribution to the debate:

> He reminded members of the Council of the Manifesto of Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice adopted by the 1988 Baptist Assembly, which called for repentance over racial attitudes, an end to discrimination, and better racial understanding.
>
> Eight years on, he said, the situation was, if anything, worse. Clearly it was no use simply passing a resolution if there was no subsequent action. We must be seen to be doing something.[123]

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[119] 'Council Agrees To Make the Pursuit of Racial Justice a Priority', *Baptist Times,* 28 March 1996, p. 3.
[120] I attended as a member of Reach In, Reach Out and was part of the group's presentation to Council.
[121] Council Agrees To Make the Pursuit of Racial Justice a Priority', p.3.
[122] Council Agrees To Make the Pursuit of Racial Justice a Priority', p.3.
[123] Council Agrees To Make the Pursuit of Racial Justice a Priority', p.3.

The London Baptist Association

1996 also proved to be a significant year for racial justice in the LBA. The demographic profile of many churches in the LBA had changed, becoming multi-ethnic following the arrival of the Windrush Generation from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s,[124] and Asians and Africans from the 1970s to the 1990s. Black and Asian ministers in London began to press the LBA to come to terms with the demographic changes in the capital and appoint a Racial Justice Co-ordinator (RJC) as a resource for London Baptists to create genuine multi-ethnic/multi-cultural community in congregations and to challenge racism in church and society. The LBA Council agreed to create a RJC post in 1995. The General Purposes and Finance Committee (GP&F), a small committee that acted on behalf of the Council in between the quarterly council meetings, was tasked with implementing the decision. Frederick George and Desmond Gordon were central to advocating and developing the job specification for this role.[125] However, despite advertising and interviewing for the post, no suitable person had been identified by spring 1996. Failure to make a 'suitable' appointment was cited by the GP&F at the LBA Council meeting in March 1996 as a reason to pause the search and reconsider the post.[126] Frederick George and Desmond Gordon interpreted this recommendation as an attempt to discontinue efforts to create a Racial Justice Co-ordinator. It compounded a perceived resistance to the creation of the post within the GP&F from the outset. George openly challenged the proposal issuing from the GP&F at the Council meeting. He urged the Council to reaffirm its commitment to the original decision and persevere with appointment of a Racial Justice Co-ordinator.

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124 For example, major influxes of migrants from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s transformed the demographic profile of many London Baptist churches: Balham, Battersea Chapel, Brixton (Kenyon), Clapham, Vernon (King's Cross), and Willesden Green to name a few.

125 Frederick George tabled a 'Draft Proposal for a Joint-Funded Racial Justice Co-ordinator' at the GP&F on 5 April 1995. I hold an original copy of this document.

126 One factor that contributed, in the minds of some on the GP&F, to reconsidering the viability of the RJC post was the difficulty encountered in fully funding it. The financial obstacles to funding the role of the RJC were ultimately overcome.

I was attending my first LBA Council meeting by virtue of my new role as a Regional Minister for the South-West Region of the LBA.[127] The atmosphere within the meeting was highly charged. To my surprise, I made the second major contribution to the debate by supporting George in his call to Council to reaffirm its commitment to proceed with the decision to appoint a Racial Justice Co-ordinator. The Council had to be persuaded to reassert its will over the GP&F. Our arguments prevailed, and the Council voted decisively to instruct the GP&F to persevere with the project.[128] The post was advertised on two further occasions and one round of interviews was held, but no appointment made. A Futures Group was formed to consider staffing requirements for the LBA, including the role of Racial Justice Co-ordinator, in anticipation of Douglas McBain's impending retirement as General Superintendent and the planned relocation of the LBA offices from Mile End to Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in 1998. The Futures Group recommended to the GP&F that relevant individuals be asked to meet with representatives from GP&F on 4 June 1997 to discuss possible ways forward. I was among those invited to attend this meeting, which laid the foundation for the eventual appointment of a Racial Justice Co-ordinator. The post would eventually be filled in 1998 by Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed.[129]

External Encouragement from Baptists Overseas

An external encouragement placed on BUGB to take racism seriously, although unknown to those working for racial justice from the grass roots up, came from the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU). The JBU executive sent a resolution in June 1997 to BUGB and BMS addressing racial and economic injustices in the UK. The resolution also spoke of the historic legacy of slavery and colonialism that still blighted the lives of migrants to the UK in the present. It appealed to Baptists in the UK to

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[127] The terms 'regional/region' would be replaced by the term 'district' when 'Regional Minister' was preferred to 'General-Superintendent' with the creation of the new Regional Associations. I was a Regional Minister from 1996 to 2000.

[128] The outcome was not purely the consequence of cognitive assent to compelling arguments. Anger and passion played prominent roles in the public debate with far-reaching consequences for the subsequent implementation and operation of the RJC post.

[129] I did not participate in the candidate selection, interview, or appointment process.

> call upon the rest of the church community in the United Kingdom to provide leadership to the rest of the country by making a public declaration of repentance of the atrocities of chattel slavery, repentance of the acts committed by her foreparents in the name of development and progress; repentance of the acts of exploitation, economic and racial injustice.[130]

British Baptist leaders sought clarification about the reasons behind the presentation of the resolution.[131] The JBU executive took time to consider its response. Revd Trevor Edwards, JBU General Secretary, replied on behalf of the executive in May 1998:

> 1. The fact that racism is still a real issue in the world no less the United Kingdom. Concerns have been expressed by persons of colour including Caribbean migrants residing in the United Kingdom, who have testified of their experience of racial discrimination which is an ongoing reality.
>
> 2. The growing number of displaced marginalised blacks and other minorities in the United Kingdom is still a concern to us and we believe ought to challenge the mission of the church.
>
> 3. The fact that it is four times as hard for a black university graduate as opposed to a white university graduate to receive a job interview is cause for concern.
>
> 4. Disproportionate number of blacks in prison and mental institutions in the United Kingdom cannot be ignored.[132]

Trevor Edwards intimated that he was asked by 'a leader in the BU […] to withdraw the resolution'.[133] The conversation between the JBU and BUGB on racial justice would resume in the 2000s. A further external encouragement to BUGB to take racism seriously occurred on the cusp of the new millennium.

The Baptist World Alliance convened an International Summit on Baptists Against Racism and Ethnic Conflict at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, in January 1999.[134] A group from Britain

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130 Cited in Glenroy Lalor, 'Concretizing an Apology: Signposts on the Journey — A Perspective from JBU Sources' (unpublished lecture delivered at Baptist House, Didcot, Tuesday 8 May 2012), pp. 8–9.

131 There was a backstory of correspondence in the 1970s between JBU and BUGB about the experience of Caribbean migrants to the UK and subsequent lull in conversation during the 1980s. See Lalor, 'Concretizing an Apology', pp. 3–8.

132 Cited in Lalor, 'Concretizing an Apology', pp. 9–10.

133 Lalor, 'Concretizing an Apology', p. 10.

134 Lalor, 'Concretizing an Apology', p. 10.

attended this international gathering of Baptists: Chris Andre-Watson, Pat White, David Ellis, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, and Frederick George. The summit called Baptists to commit to a decade for the promotion of racial justice and adopted the 'Atlanta Covenant: a call to Baptist Churches to oppose racism and ethnic conflict and to actively work to establish a united witness for Christ and His Kingdom'.[135] Denton Lotz, General Secretary of the BWA, in the second paragraph of the introduction of *Baptists Against Racism*, the official record of the summit, recalls, 'British participants and Americans of African descent shared the pain of continued prejudice in their own countries.'[136] The *Baptist Times* feature on the Atlanta Summit concludes,

> He [Frederick George] described the summit as 'long on talk and somewhat short on action', noting: 'One African-American pastor was heard to remark, "The floor of hell is covered with Baptist resolutions against racism!"' He added: 'I came away with the sad and sobering recognition that racism and segregation are alive and well today.
>
> 'As a member of the British Baptist delegation, it was difficult to avoid the truth that we have a huge task ahead of us. I hope that all Baptist Christians will covenant to work in the first decade of the new millennium to eradicate racism. We must work to keep the dream alive.'[137]

Perspectives and Power

The 1990s was a decade when white people in local associations and BUGB national structures were required to rethink their assumptions and perspectives about Black and Asian people, and the distribution of power in Baptist structures. The struggle to establish the RJC post in the LBA vividly illustrates how a concentration of power needed to be challenged and overcome to effect change. The LBA Council had to be persuaded to impose its will on the GP&F. The outcome and the manner of its achievement did not result in the excision or diminishing of resistance, but rather in resistance retreating further into the shadows and subterranean currents of the workings of

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[135] *Baptists Against Racism: Proceedings of the International Summit on Baptists Against Racism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. by Denton Lotz (McLean, VA: The Baptist World Alliance, 1999), pp. 170–177.
[136] Lotz, *Baptists Against Racism*, p. 7.
[137] '"Decade Against Racism" Call', *Baptist Times*, 21 January 1999, pp. 1 and 4 (p. 4).

the LBA.[138] A resolution passed in an Association Council meeting (or Baptist Union Council or Assembly) does not inevitably translate into widespread understanding and joyful implementation. Some, on occasion a majority, of those that gather in deliberation to pass a resolution may experience a 'lightbulb moment',[139] an epiphany, a breakthrough in understanding, a moment of insight and conviction, a sense of solidarity with others, and a coalescence of moral purpose. But 'lightbulb moments' are rare. They are transient and prone to fade. 'Lightbulb moments' extend no further than the walls of the room in which people gather to deliberate and decide. It is impossible to convey to persons that are not present exactly what the moment felt like, or the compelling and self-evident nature of the argument presented to justify change. 'Lightbulb moments' can be profound, but they are inherently limited in scope and effect. Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, the first LBA Racial Justice Co-ordinator, reflected on the difficulties ranged against progressing racial justice within the LBA constituency in her first annual report:

> One of the main stumbling blocks to encouraging folk to tackle the issues of racial justice and reconciliation is the entrenched stereotype of what or who a racist is. We cannot relate to the members of the BNP or the murderers of Stephen Lawrence but are comfortable with the idea of racism as 'unwitting'. This can't be acceptable. It does not reveal the whole picture or the reality of the situation. It is saddening because racism is more subtle and more institutionalised than the popular stereotype and it has hindered spiritual growth, understanding and progression on all sides.[140]

The pursuit of racial justice in BUGB in both denominational structures and across the constituency in the 1990s illustrates how disconnects exist between those that campaign for action on racial justice (individuals and groups), deliberative forums (councils or assemblies) where resolutions are passed to state theological positions,

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[138] For example, according to the Method of Operation of the RJC post, the GP&F was supposed to provide a budget for the RJC to work within. This did not occur initially and, effectively, hindered the operation of the role. The matter was subsequently resolved, but only by the RJC raising it directly with the GP&F. See Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, *Racial Justice Co-ordinator's Report 2000* (London: LBA, 2000), p. 3.

[139] Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed uses the phrase 'lightbulb moment/s' to describe a moment of insight or a breakthrough in understanding of self, others, or God.

[140] Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, *Racial Justice Co-ordinator's Report 1998–1999* (London: LBA, 1999), p. 3.

agree policy, and commit to action, and the members of the denomination whom campaigners and deliberative forums seek to influence. A plurality of positions on race, racism, and racial justice existed within the Baptist Union in the 1990s. Consequently, change in the pursuit of racial justice was persistently contested. Conflict occurred. Robin Gill, describing Britain in 1988, recognises the existence of racism, but insists, 'the prevailing ethos is anti-racist, there are laws which attempt to suppress racism, and overtly racist political parties gain little electoral support'.[141] The backdrop of a growing anti-racist ethos in British society exercised some constraints upon behaviour in public contexts. Ecumenical endeavours challenged racism in the churches and society.[142] Proclaiming overtly racist words and performing overtly racist actions became harder, but such things never completely disappeared. External constraints upon human behaviour do not automatically mean a corresponding change in internal beliefs and attitudes. Prejudice, bigotry, apprehension, and suspicion towards others due to skin colour persist in varying degrees in subtle and not so subtle ways. People that publicly confess a belief in racial equality in principle can deny it in practice intentionally and unintentionally. The evidence marshalled in this account about Baptists in the 1990s suggests that Gill underestimated how racist mindsets and dispositions continued to saturate society and church into the 1990s and beyond. He did not allow for the 'diseased social imagination' that Willie Jennings named in 2010.[143]

Baptists in the 1990s struggled to live into the fullness of the new humanity in Jesus Christ that they professed to believe in. At best the new humanity in Jesus Christ was realised only partially. Gill wryly points out that 'churches […] have a tendency to romanticize features of their life [like resolutions on racial justice] and to ignore the realities of the finite and sometimes sinful communities which really constitute them'.[144] Baptists required, but did not develop, more realistic and

141 Robin Gill, *Beyond Decline: A Challenge for the Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1988), p. 53.
142 David Haslam tells the story of the ecumenical response to racism in the last decades of the twentieth century up until 1992. Baptists do not figure in his account. See David Haslam, *Race for the Millennium: A Challenge to Church and Society* (London: Church House, 1996).
143 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p. 6.
144 Gill, *Beyond Decline*, p. 8.

nuanced accounts of the sociological complexity of their life together. Namely, that a plurality of perspectives on racial justice existed within BUGB with consequences for the operation of power dynamics in local churches, associations, and the denomination.[145] Furthermore, Baptists lacked a satisfactory account of sin, personal and corporate. There was very limited exploration of the nature and operation of sin in Baptist structures. Jenny Leith, in her analysis of how Christians are formed as disciples of Christ, is surely correct that 'it is impossible to account for the nature of the church without an account of the pervasive presence of sin in its life'.[146] Ultimately, failure to engage in sociological analysis of the plurality of perspectives on racial justice and theological analysis of sin limited Baptist self-understanding and action in the 1990s.

What is All the Fuss About? Why Does any of the Foregoing Matter?

This article has attempted to show in relation to racism that entanglement among Baptists in ways of thinking and doing contrary to the gospel is deeper and subtler than, perhaps, even Wright appreciated. White Western Christians, including British Baptists, are too often conformed to the world more than we are committed to Christ in terms of how we conceive our identities and relations to others. The danger of remaining unaware and unbothered by the deep realities of race and racism is that we produce flawed readings of Christian doctrine and deficient social analysis and social engagement. Consequently, Christian discipleship and the witness of the church are impaired. Wright is surely correct that doctrine and cultural engagement matter. The question is how true and adequate our theological imagination and social analyses are. A refusal to face up to the empirical reality of the church and the diseased social imagination of the Western world will serve only to reinforce blindness to the humanity of those who are different to us (especially if we are white). It will foster complacency in relation to

[145] Gill explicates the consequences of plurality within churches in *Beyond Decline*.

[146] Jenny Leith, *Political Formation: Being Formed by the Spirit in Church and World* (London: SCM Press, 2023), p. 87.

attitudes and social structures that oppress the vulnerable and strip people of their humanity.

The substance of this article was first presented in 2018, a year that marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, fifty years since Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated, and seventy years since the ship The Empire Windrush docked in London. The recent debacle surrounding the unjust treatment and deportation of black British citizens of the Windrush Generation[147] illustrates only too vividly that social regression is possible when people are blind, complacent, and complicit. Race and racism constantly assume new forms and hide in plain sight to oppress and dehumanise. Nigel Wright challenged Baptists to change in 1991, to be true to ourselves for the sake of renewal in Baptist life and witness. Baptists pursued structural reforms at the turn of the millennium in the name of mission.[148] The challenge to generate a 'positive Christian response' to racism remains a work in progress.

The landscape of race and racism among Baptists has changed in some respects since Wright published *Challenge to Change*.[149] Prominent developments include the BUGB Apology for Slavery in 2007,[150] the Journey Process of research, recommendations, and implementation that followed in the wake of the Apology,[151] the Sam Sharpe Lecture (now ten years old),[152] and the Visions of Colour Anti-Racism Course for Ministerial Formation.[153] Towards the end of 2023, The Centre for Baptist Studies, Regent's Park College, Oxford, published *Voicing New Questions for Baptist Identity*, a collection of essays that explores Baptist life

147 Amelia Gentleman, *The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment* (London: Guardian Faber, 2019).

148 Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination*.

149 See *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Reddie et al.; and Hudson-Roberts in *Race for Justice*, pp. 46–60.

150 See BUGB, 'Faith and Society Files: The Apology for Slavery', Baptists Together <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/366545/The_Apology.aspx> [accessed 30 November 2023].

151 See Reddie et al, *Journeying to Justice*, pp. 94–109.

152 See 'Events: The Sam Sharpe Project', Baptists Together <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/379661/Events.aspx> [accessed 30 November 2023]; and *The Sam Sharpe Lectures: History, Rebellion and Reform*, ed. by E. P. Louis and Rosemarie Davidson (London: SCM Press, 2023).

153 'Visions of Colour', Baptists Together <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/379637/Visions_of_Colour.aspx> [accessed 30 November 2023].

and witness in relation to race, class, gender, and sexuality.[154] In 2024, Tim Judson will deliver the Whitley Lecture 'Dark Weeping and Light Sleeping: Whiteness as a Christian Doctrine of Deformation'. 'Whiteness' is beginning to be taken seriously, in some quarters, as a factor that has significantly shaped the Baptist theological imagination historically and is still at work today.

The theologising of the 1990s is indicative of a moment in time, a cultural milieu informed by blueprint ecclesiology, diseased social imagination, and evangelical identity. Three decades separate *A Challenge to Change* and 'Dark Weeping and Light Sleeping'. The journey to face up to whiteness, race, and racism has been slow and frequently interrupted. Reluctance to look at the empirical, messy reality of the church persists. Far reaching transformation in persistent beliefs, the ones that matter most, which we act upon and feel passionately about, is unsettling and difficult. The spectre of race and racism in church and society has not disappeared. How much have British Baptists changed in matters of race and racism? It is difficult to say with certainty. A question still lingers in the wake of the slow progress from the 1990s to the 2020s. Are we afraid to bear the cost of change because of what we may find and what we might need to lose?

154 *Voicing New Questions for Baptist Identity*, ed. by Eleasah P. Louis and Andy Goodliff, Centre for Baptist Studies in Oxford Congregational Resources, 2 (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2023).

Towards a Theology of Compassion: Lessons from Relief Efforts for Those Affected by the War in Ukraine

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Abstract
The war in Ukraine ignited a significant response financially for relief efforts in and around Ukraine. The motivation behind the donations for the Ukraine Relief Fund established by the TCM International Institute serve as the specific case study for the findings outlined in this article. Utilising Oliver Davies' ontological framework of compassion, the article explores some of the hidden complexities of financial stewardship in the modern world. It also considers the key factors of compassion outlined in Davies' conceptual framework in engagement with the research results. This study provides considerations for readers as they pursue a more meaningful theology of compassion when compelled to respond and participate financially to relief efforts during times of international crisis.

Keywords
Compassion; Ukraine; practical theology; financial giving

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked the beginning of what the world would soon recognise as the largest humanitarian crisis of displaced people since World War Two.[1] This conflict sparked a massive response, financially, physically, and spiritually, to support the relief efforts in Ukraine and the surrounding countries. According to a survey conducted by the United States's largest grant-making organisation Fidelity Charitable, one out of every four Americans who were aware of this crisis contributed financially either

[1] UNHCR, 'Ukraine-Fastest Growing Refugee Crisis in Europe Since WWII', *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2022 <https://www.unhcr.org/hk/en/73141-ukraine-fastest-growing-refugee-crisis-in-europe-since-wwii.html> [accessed 25 January 2024].

to a relief organisation, directly to a Ukrainian family, or a Ukrainian business or project in support of Ukraine.[2]

TCM International Institute (TCM)[3] is one such organisation that received a significant number of financial contributions in March and April of 2022 for the relief efforts in and around Ukraine. TCM is a Christian graduate-level theological training institution providing degrees in practical theology and organisational leadership. TCM has a long history of working in Eastern Europe, first as a benevolent ministry providing Bibles, clothing, and medicine, before transitioning to an educational institution in the early 1990s. Individuals from a variety of evangelical denominations and independent churches have become TCM students and/or financial supporters of the ministry over the years. Because of TCM's history in Eastern Europe and the number of students, graduates, and representatives in Ukraine, it is not surprising that many of these supporters from the West looked to TCM as a trusted 'door' through which to allocate financial gifts for relief efforts.

Even though TCM's current mission is focused on education, the number of supporters of the ministry who desired to help with the relief efforts led TCM to establish the *Ukraine Relief Fund*. Money received designated to this fund would not be utilised for TCM's educational activities but would flow *through* the organisation to be implemented directly to relief efforts among TCM's constituencies working in and around Ukraine. TCM's Spring Report included an article written by David Wright, TCM's Vice President of Ministry Services, detailing the purpose and impact of this fund. These relief efforts included, but were not limited to, providing food and medicine, transportation, financial assistance to churches and pastors coordinating their own relief activities, and providing what the organisation called

[2] Engine Group, an independent research firm, conducted a research study on behalf of Fidelity Charitable concerning responses to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion. 1006 adults in the United States were surveyed on 9 March 2022. Fidelity Charitable posted the findings at 'How Americans Are Responding to the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis', *Fidelity Charitable*, 2022 <https://www.fidelitycharitable.org/insights/how-americans-are-responding-to-ukraine-humanitarian-crisis.html> [accessed 22 January 2024].

[3] TCM is based in Indianapolis, USA and utilises a variety of distance learning methods in over 20 countries around the world. See <www.tcmi.edu>.

'safe nights' for Ukrainians in transit to safer locations outside of the warzone.[4]

In a private interview with David Wright about the establishment of this project, Mr. Wright explained that when TCM began communicating this opportunity to its support base (primarily in the United States), the financial response was overwhelming and led to the establishment of TCM's largest benevolent fund in the history of the organisation. Ironically, TCM expended minimal effort to raise funds for this need. Only a few newsletters and emails describing the purpose and potential impact of the fund were sent to TCM's mailing list during this short window of time.[5] According to Wright, TCM's communications *had* to be focused on Ukraine for a better part of two months since that was what everyone was asking about. Wright simply labelled TCM's response a 'faithful organic result to a historic tragedy'.[6] What motivated these donors to give toward this effort and why did they choose to give through TCM's Ukraine Relief Fund and not through another organisation or person? What are the various complexities of benevolent giving in the modern age that one should consider? And what can other churches, individuals, and non-profit organisations learn about financial benevolent giving in the process?

On a journey to answer these questions, all 800-plus donors who contributed to the TCM Ukraine Relief Fund received an online survey focused on the motivation for contributing to the relief effort.[7] These survey respondents consisted of churches and individuals from a variety of locations across the United States and Europe. The first portion of this ten-question survey inquired about the donors' relationship to TCM

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[4] David Wright, 'Joyful in Hope, Patient in Affliction, Faithful in Prayer', *The TCM Report*, no. 2 (2022) <https://www.tcmi.org/tcm-report> (p.3).

[5] According to TCM's Director of Operations, TCM only published seven communication pieces that focused specifically on TCM's relief efforts for the war in Ukraine.

[6] The private interview with David Wright was conducted on 11 January 2024, at the TCM home office in Indianapolis, Indiana. Notes were taken from the interview in the author's personal notebook and kept for the writing process.

[7] The survey consisted of ten questions and was administered electronically using Google Forms through a link in an email to each donor. The survey was conducted in January 2024 and the data was stored on a password protected storage drive until the completion of the research and publication of this article.

and how connected they are to other relief efforts in Ukraine. Then the remainder of the survey allowed the respondents to explain the motivation and reasoning behind their financial contribution. The response rate for the online survey was 14 percent, allowing for averages and themes to be created from the responses. The respondents had the opportunity to indicate their willingness for follow-up questions to be asked, which allowed the methodology of this research to then extend to telephone interviews when more detailed information was desired. These interviews allowed the researcher to press further into the theological foundations motivating the donors' decisions to give.[8]

The works of Oliver Davies on the topic of the theology of compassion became a key dialogue partner for this task. His work, most notably found in his foundational book, *The Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition*, established a starting framework from which to consider the data from the survey.[9] In addition to Davies, several other voices from other parts of the globe were included to attempt to uncover any hidden cultural nuances to what was already a cross-cultural act of financial benevolence.

When considering the distance between the majority of donors to the Ukraine Relief Fund and the in-person relief work in Eastern Europe, the focus of much theological consideration may fall more easily on the compassionate acts of pastors and relief workers 'on the ground'. This article places focus on the potentially overshadowed act of compassion of the donors who sacrificed (at least to some degree) through the giving of finances to support such benevolent work. The results of the survey and interviews with these donors were triangulated with Davies' ontological framework of compassion. The purpose of this article is not to arrive at definitive answers of how to measure the metaphysical impact of such acts of compassion. Rather, the purpose is two-fold: to uncover some of the hidden complexities of financial

[8] These telephone interviews were also conducted in January 2024. They were not recorded, but notes were taken in the researcher's personal notebook in order to adequately quote and refer back to specific remarks from each individual or church leader interviewed. Names are coded in this article for the privacy of the respondents. Notes from these interviews will be referenced as 'Interview Results, January 2024'.

[9] Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

stewardship in the modern world, and to explore the application of Davies' theology to the specific act of financial giving as it relates to the act of compassion.

Oliver Davies' Theological Framework of Compassion

Before Oliver Davies embarked on the task of defining his theology of compassion, he found it necessary to establish a 'new way of considering ontology'.[10] He concluded that the act of compassion in and of itself allows for a more fulfilled definition of ontology first seen through the God of the Israelites and later manifested through Jesus Christ. He sought a renewed concept of ontology, not by restoring it to its purest form, but by proposing a new narrative that is hospitable to the *other*.[11]

Davies utilises several key biblical texts to make the case for the importance of his metaphysical overtones toward the concept of compassion. First, he explores the self-identification of God in Exodus when God speaks to Moses at the burning bush and states 'I am who [I] am'.[12] In this scene, God 'chose to locate his people within the moral order' founded in the narrative context of exile and liberation and sets the stage for humans to participate in a similar essence of being through compassion.[13]

Davies continued to position the act of compassion against the definition of ontology by explaining that one cannot truly live out one's God-given identity if he or she does not interact with the *other* and feel the pain of others.[14] Then, what distinguishes compassion from simply empathy is the progression from sharing in one another's pain and moving to prayerful action. In other words, a person becomes more of a person when their suffering moves them to action. Therefore, 'If

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[10] See the opening chapter and entire section dedicated to reworking ontology with the emphasis of *Kenosis* — a self-emptying referred to in Phil 2:6–11— in Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, pp. 1–45.

[11] C. C. Pecknold, 'Review of *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition,* by O. Davies', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 54, no. 1 (2003), 445–448 (p. 445).

[12] Exodus 3:14.

[13] Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 199.

[14] Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 20.

intersubjectivity is the interweaving of self and other, then its most intensive form is compassion.'[15]

Paul Fiddes utilised a similar framework when identifying one's participation in the triune God. In his book, *Participating in God*, he sought to establish a balance between person and personage, and independence and dependence.[16] He challenged the notion of subsistent relations and challenged his readers to consider that there is no 'person at the end of the relations' of the Trinity but that the 'persons' *are* the relations. This idea connects Fiddes's relational participation with ontology.[17] Similar to the way Fiddes's description of this relational 'dance' of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit provides new ways of speaking about the essence of the Trinity, Davies too claims that 'an analysis of the intentionality of compassion *gives access* to the very structure of consciousness itself, and thus provides a resource for articulating a new language of being'.[18]

Davies portrays an omnipotent God who is also compassionate. Theologians have struggled to rectify these seemingly divergent characteristics of God with the immutability of God.[19] It did not take long for Davies to introduce a Christological perspective into the discussion and illustrate how sending Jesus into the world formed the climax of God's compassion and rectified this challenge. Davies unpacks the theology of *kenosis* from Philippians 2:5–11 as a concept that climaxed in the complete outpouring of Jesus's sacrificial atonement accomplished on the cross.[20]

The New Testament is filled with examples of Jesus's compassion. From his miracles extended to the lame, the lost, and the helpless, to the sacrifice on the hill of Golgotha, Jesus manifested compassion through word and deed. Davies demonstrates that the sending of Jesus is the prime example of how the love of God is so

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15 Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. xix.
16 Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 28.
17 Fiddes, *Participating in God*, p. 34.
18 Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 20. Emphasis mine.
19 For example, reference the discussion in John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), p. 429.
20 Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 248.

'other-centred' that Jesus meets even the worst of sinners and provides a way for them to enter perfect communion with himself.[21] Jesus perfectly embodied the emotional empathy required for the first part of Davies' construction of compassion *and* he executed the needed action as required for the second part, as humanity fully received the outpouring of God's divine love.[22]

Oliver Davies' language of compassion is also connected to Paul Fiddes' theology of the Trinity through the similar language of participation. Comparable to the way Fiddes describes the ontology of God through self-giving relationship, Davies communicates the coherence of self and other in God, not simply as a metaphor or illustration but as a reality in which one participates.[23] For, by the Spirit, God's human creatures participate in the Trinitarian dance of divine communication through unity with Jesus. As Jesus said in his prayer for all believers, 'that all of them [believers] may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'[24]

Just as Jesus encouraged and modelled compassion, Christian leaders have the ability and platform to model and shepherd their followers or congregants to this type of participation through benevolent, financial compassion when times of crisis arise on the other side of the globe. The following analysis of the research results will consider how this type of compassion correlates with the ontological nuances of Davies' theological framework.

Research Results

The first key finding that surfaced from the survey displayed that the majority of individuals gave to the TCM Ukraine Relief Fund because of an *emotional sense of compassion* toward the Ukrainians who were

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[21] See, as examples, Rom 5:1–2; 2 Cor 5:21; and 1 John 1:3.

[22] See the section on 'Redemptive-Historical Development of Compassion' as laid out in Mike Biggs, 'A Biblical Theology of Compassion' (master's paper, Union School of Theology, Bridgend Wales, 2019), p. 22.

[23] Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 168.

[24] John 16:21.

displaced by the war.[25] Responses such as 'I imagined myself fleeing the country'; 'I had empathy for people whose lives were suddenly upended through no fault of their own'; and even, 'We lived during World War Two and saw what happens to the people when dictators become rulers', all indicated their emotional and compassionate response.[26]

The survey indicated that having a personal connection to someone in Ukraine or having another connection in some way was not a strong correlation with the reasons why respondents chose to give financially. Only 24 percent of donors had a personal connection to someone affected by the war. Several of these respondents recounted a trip they had taken with TCM where they met Ukrainian Christians studying for ministry. Others had visited Ukraine on their own or had supported another cause in Ukraine in the past.[27] What did change based on the respondents' connection, however, was the dollar amounts given. Those who had a personal connection gave 38 percent more, on average, compared to those who had no personal connection.[28] Not surprisingly, the frequency of the gifts given by those with a personal connection to Ukraine was also higher.

When questioned further about the motivation behind their financial gifts, the majority of respondents spoke in terms of having a sense of '*moral obligation*' or '*Christian duty*'. Answers given included, 'People *must* be helped in this war'; and 'I'm blessed to live where there is no fighting and to have resources'.[29] One church leader seemingly struggled to find the words to answer the question so simply stated, 'It's just what Christians do.'[30]

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[25] Some responses indicated a sense of guilt connected to their emotional response, such as this respondent's answer: 'I owned a classic car that I didn't need to get by in my family's everyday life. And I considered the basic human needs of families in Ukraine displaced by the conflict. I was not comfortable having that car when I knew others could benefit much more from its value' (Survey results, January 2024).

[26] Survey results, January 2024.

[27] Survey results, January 2024.

[28] Those with a personal connection gave 1.63 gifts on average, while those who did not on average gave 1.49 gifts.

[29] Survey results, January 2024.

[30] Interview results, January 2024.

The survey also asked about the specific reason why the donors gave financial contributions to TCM rather than to other organisations or groups who were aiding with relief efforts in and around Ukraine. The respondents' answers led to the third key finding from the survey: individuals financially gave to the TCM Ukraine Relief Fund as a rule because of their *relational trust* with the organisation. Respondents displayed evidence of this by stating such things as, 'We have seen how TCM has used its resources in the past and trust it to use our gifts wisely.'[31] Some identified their personal connection with TCM and even named specific individuals on the staff whom they trusted to utilise the funds effectively. Others indicated their indirect trust by stating that they trusted their pastor, and their pastor recommended that they give to TCM. For 53 percent of these individuals, TCM would be the only organisation they supported for Ukraine relief work during this time. Out of the remaining 47 percent, 11 percent gave to their church in support of Ukraine and 36 percent financially supported other organisations for similar causes in addition to their gift(s) to TCM's Ukraine Relief Fund.

The following sections consider these findings against the backdrop of Oliver Davies' theological framework of compassion. The hope is for readers to then utilise this exploration to expand their considerations of how to steward their own financial donations effectively through the complex layers of benevolence towards a meaningful theology of compassion and help others do the same.

Navigating the Layered Influences of Compassion

The first finding showed that the majority of those who contributed financially to the Ukraine Relief Fund were compelled to give by an emotional sense of compassion. The emotional language found in the responses resembled the language Davies uses when establishing an empathetic posture toward a need. This is worthy of note because Davies connected emotional empathy directly to the next stage of compassion — action.[32] Because the physical distance between most of

[31] Survey results, January 2024.
[32] Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. xix.

these donors and the actual events taking place in Europe kept them from observing the need in-person, what were the influences creating this empathy? Furthermore, was the empathy influenced by other less-visible forces such as fear or emotional manipulation, and if so, does that create an inauthentic empathy?

To begin navigating these layers of influence, this section will consider Jesus's teaching and example of compassion, focusing in on financial giving when possible. After all, Davies' theological model considers Jesus as the climax of God's compassion and many of the survey respondents even indicated Christ as a motivator behind their financial gifts. One survey respondent explicitly stated, 'We are followers of Christ, and he has urged us to be HIM in this world. One of the ways we do that is to give of our resources.'[33]

We begin with Luke 4:18–19, commonly understood to be Jesus's self-declared purpose of ministry, where, in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus reads an ostensibly compassionate passage from the scroll of Isaiah:

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.[34]

The significance of Jesus connecting himself to the prophecy in Isaiah 61 is obvious enough due to the mention of the anointing of the Spirit. The passage in Isaiah also carries overtones of the Year of Jubilee. Jubilee was perhaps the most radical law of compassion in the Torah. The concept resisted forms of economic oppression by commanding the Israelites to forgive all debts and return ancestral lands to the rightful owners every fifty years.[35]

Whether the Israelites actually practised the Year of Jubilee or not, the story of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth communicated that Jesus's mission on earth was founded on a biblical theology of compassion stretching as far back as the Law of Moses and was now

[33] Survey results, January 2024.
[34] Luke 4:18–19.
[35] Lev 25:8–55.

being 'fulfilled in their hearing'.[36] Furthermore, Jesus's teaching directed his listeners to consider that the new covenant Jesus was ushering in was redefining what everyone knew to be compassion. The well-known antitheses found in the Sermon on the Mount ('You have heard that it was said…but I tell you…') provides examples of Jesus challenging the preconceived understandings of compassion in the Law. Advocating what at first glance may seem an absurd gesture that if someone asks you to go one mile, go two miles instead,[37] illustrated that Jesus taught a way of compassionate living that pushed the boundaries of self-sacrifice. This alternative way of living accentuated Davies' focus on kenosis and the self-emptying nature of Christ, further placing Jesus as the climax of God's compassion for mankind.

The purpose of Jesus's ministry, as indicated in this passage in Luke 4, set a precedent for Jesus's compassion for those around him. Yet, Jesus's followers also witnessed the limits to Jesus's earthly compassion. For indeed, not everyone who encountered Jesus was healed of their maladies. Jesus, restrained by his humanity, was forced to align his miraculous acts of compassion with his limited physical strength *and* consider them alongside his purpose of being sent by the Father. Jim Harris reflected on this balance by stating that

> Jesus, it appears, walked a fine line between doing sufficient signs to make his point, but not so many miracles as to have people follow him for the wrong reason. Had he been more generous with his miracles, surely fewer people would have abandoned him (after his ascension Jesus seemed to remain with only 120 close followers; Acts 1:15 and 2:1). Had he fed more people — he might have had more consistent followers and he might not have got crucified.[38]

So, with this balance and limitations in mind, who received the miraculous acts of compassion and why? This article does not answer this question. It does, however, recognise the impact of exposure. In almost every case in the New Testament, the people Jesus healed came to him. The people Jesus fed were already around him. Stated conversely, Jesus seemingly did not go out looking for people to show compassion

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[36] Luke 4:21.

[37] Matt 5:41.

[38] Jim Harries, 'Intercultural Generosity in Christian Perspective: The "West" and Africa', *Transformation*, 32, no. 4 (2015), 269–280 (p. 272).

towards. Rather, as in the example at the beginning of Matthew 8, the lepers and the sick came to him.[39] Jesus lived out a *reactionary* model of benevolence structured by (and limited to) his physical vicinity.

One of the questions in the survey inquired about similar influences of exposure and vicinity. The question indirectly acknowledged that the donor could have made a different choice and contributed to relief efforts closer to home. Taking Jesus's model of compassion literally may lead one to a more focused outpouring of time, money, or prayers to the needs in one's immediate vicinity. Yet, these donors chose to give to the Ukraine Relief Fund — a need halfway across the world.

One obvious variable that applies to this situation is the technological advancements deeply integrated into the everyday life of those who live in the twenty-first century. These advancements have essentially demolished such physical boundaries of exposure. A tragedy can occur on the other side of the globe, and if a person with the right tools communicates this tragedy, it can be viewed within seconds to anyone with access to the internet. Yet, most would probably agree that seeing something on the television is not the same as seeing it in person. Communication technology can extend across many boundaries (and the more advanced the tool, often the more boundaries it can cross) but it does not extend across them all. This article does not have the capacity to list all the various influences such as emotional manipulation, selective messaging, and other forms of skewing the message. But it does consider the cause and effect that if boundaries of exposure no longer exist in contemporary western societies (for all practical purposes, anyway), then the opportunities for compassionate financial giving become almost limitless. For individuals considering trends of giving in western societies, this leads to a new series of complex layers of influence on the compassion that Davies argues is key in connecting us to a renewed ontology more deeply connected to the image of God.

The data collected from the survey and the interviews also revealed several other complex layers of influence for readers to consider. First, the responses from the data collection illustrated that the

[39] Matt 8:2.

need in and around Ukraine (even though it was thousands of miles away from the majority of the donors) was so large and so overt that it was *as if* it were happening right in front of them.

Church Leader 1 (names coded for privacy purposes) admitted that the enormous attention that his congregants placed on the war in Ukraine in early 2022 caused him and his staff to pause and deeply consider the role of the church in this situation.[40] Similar to the way TCM leadership shifted the focus on communication to this topic because that is what people were concerned about, the respondent communicated that more than anything he has witnessed before, seemingly everyone just wanted to talk about the war in Ukraine for several weeks consecutively. 'How can I help?' was the most common question they received as a church. He and the other leaders at the church concluded that due to the sheer volume of the questions and concerns, the topic needed to be addressed from the stage and not just in the hallways of the church. Another church leader respondent said, 'The need just seemed so big that it couldn't be ignored.'[41]

It also became clear that because of the distance in geography, culture, and eventually time, more subtle layers of exposure surfaced that seemed to influence financial giving. For example, exposure to certain political ideologies seemed to influence an individual's concern over the need. One church leader indicated that it seemed as if the majority of those who were most concerned about the conflict were those who grew up during the Cold War and were accustomed to viewing Russia as an oppressor, or were simply more aware of that part of the world.[42] It should be noted that a myriad of other factors could have influenced these individuals' and churches' financial gifts to the Ukraine Relief Fund, such as the impact of the internal pressures of guilt and moral obligation, for example.[43]

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[40] Interview results, January 2024.

[41] Survey results, January 2024.

[42] Interview results, January 2024.

[43] In contrast to those survey respondents who indicated that their motivation stemmed from a sense of moral obligation, there were other respondents who gave answers solely based on their Spirit-led convictions. Answers like, 'through the prompting of the Holy Spirit', and 'I was compelled by the love of Christ', indicate motivations antithetical to obligation and guilt. Survey results, January 2023.

Psychologists such as Yongjiao Yang have written extensively on the psychological and social dynamics that influence philanthropic motivation for charitable giving, especially in highly shame-based cultures.[44] This article does not claim to even scratch the surface of the social and psychological influences of generosity and compassion, but only to recognise that they exist and undoubtedly affect the data. Yang's point still supports the fact that the influences are complex and multi-layered.

Even considering how these layers of exposure influence compassionate benevolent giving, one is undoubtedly still left to make choices of what to support, what not to support, and the level of contribution. Circling back to the example of Jesus, there were probably a considerable number of hungry and hurting people around him that he simply did not feed and did not heal. Considering the selectiveness of Jesus's miraculous signs and wonders leads one to pause and consider why. After all, the Bible never indicates that Jesus went on a fundraising trip to Rome, or anywhere else for that matter. The limitation of Christ's humanity should also be considered when confronting the reality of each person's own limited funds, knowledge, and energy for utilising the available finances for acts of compassionate benevolence.

It has been argued that the complex layers of exposure and other influences complicate the process of arriving *at* compassion. But the question of whether or not these influences affect the *purpose* or the *impact* of compassion as it relates to Davies' framework of the essence of being is yet to be answered. Using an extreme hypothetical example to emphasise the point, if the layers of influence in a communication of a given need were so corrupt and manipulative that the proposed need did not even exist and was just a façade, would a financial gift (or any other act of compassion) bring that donor into the communion and participation in God that Davies and Fiddes illustrate? After all, both empathy and action, the two key aspects of Davies' equation for kenotic

[44] Yongjiao Yang, 'Modernization and the Shifting Bases of Philanthropy? An Empirical Study on Motivations of Individual Giving Based on CLDS', *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 34, no. 6 (2023), 1146–1159 (p. 1156).

compassion, are there even if the financial gift did not arrive to aid the perceived need.

Regardless of where these questions lead, clearly the survey respondents in this study viewed their act of financial giving as an act of compassion and a way to fulfil God's mission in the world.[45] In addition, the church leaders interviewed identified the process as a tool in the transformational journey of discipleship that continually shapes us in the image of Christ.[46] Behind this confidence in these two statements, the consistent appearance of *trust* and *relationship* emerged from the survey. The last section of this article will deal with these two factors and include how Davies incorporated the principle of sacrifice as an additional key indicator within the act of compassion.

Trust, Relationship, and Sacrifice

This article focuses on how the specific stewardship of *money* relates to benevolent compassion. But it also recognises that the concept of stewardship certainly stretches far beyond these monetary examples. Regardless of the type of resource, the act of Christian giving (monetarily or otherwise) recognises God's ownership of everything in life.[47] Even through his parables, Jesus seemed to have indicated that emotional compassion needed to be balanced with practical and rational decisions.[48] Keeping this balance will remain a continual consideration for Christians seeking to emulate Christ. While one's rational (as opposed to emotional) financial stewardship can lead to strategic advances for the Gospel when given to the right people at the right time, Jesus also seemed to model the importance of immediate acts of compassion that did not afford the convenience of time. After all, Jesus never suggested that one only give to the *responsible* poor.[49]

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45 Survey results, January 2023.
46 Interview results, January 2024.
47 *Essential of Christian Practice,* ed. By Steve Burris (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1992), p. 126.
48 John Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), p. 339.
49 Klyne Snodgrass, 'Jesus and Money — No Place to Hide and No Easy Answers', *Word and World*, 30, no. 2 (2010), 135–143, (p. 142).

The second key finding from the survey indicated the important roles of *relationship* and *trust* and how they participate in the equation of committing to a financial gift for a benevolent cause. As already illustrated in the section above on research results, the respondents' answers were more unified in their answer to the question why they gave specifically to TCM and trusted TCM to distribute the funds for relief efforts. Continuing the theme of Jesus as the climax and appropriate model for these considerations, it is evident that Jesus spoke frequently about money and modelled a balance of immediate emotional compassion and rational thought and strategy.

Some Christ-followers have taken Jesus's model of financial poverty in the most literal sense and have sold everything and devoted themselves to a life of material poverty. Others, such as theologian Klyne Snodgrass, have concluded that Jesus's ostensibly harsh teachings towards finances are *confrontational hyperbole* not uncommon for a prophet to utilise for instruction and critique. Snodgrass asked the questions, 'If possessions are sold and given to the poor, are the poor under the same command to give them away? Is the command only the initial call to discipleship? Does divestiture only increase the number of the poor?'[50] Granted, the word 'poor' can carry religious connotations in addition to economic ones.[51] These enigmatic topics remain important issues for Christ-followers to consider. Indeed, these literal examples are not unlike those of Jesus's disciples who left everything to follow him.[52] Yet evidence in Acts and in Paul's letters indicates that the early church, in general, did not apply Jesus's words literally. This leaves the simple question, 'How do I honour God with the finances I have?'

So far, these considerations have only been applied at the individual level. What role does the institutional church play in these forms of financial giving? The research conducted for this article indicated that a significant number of church leaders felt that they played some role, since 10 percent of the gifts given to TCM (and a

[50] Snodgrass, 'Jesus and Money', p. 143.
[51] Snodgrass, 'Jesus and Money', p. 138.
[52] Examples found in Matt 4:18; Mark 1:16–20; and Luke 5:1–11.

larger percentage of the dollar amount) came from churches rather than individuals.

Several church leaders were contacted for this survey based on prior knowledge of their indirect involvement and not because their names appeared in the list of financial donors to the Ukraine Relief Fund. These church leaders indicated that they intentionally encouraged their congregants to give directly to organisations with whom they had a relationship and that they trusted; not because the church did not want to be involved, but because it was important to teach their members to give responsibly to benevolent causes without relying on the institutional aspects of the church.[53]

Another church leader used the mission of his church to influence the answer to this question. The mission of this church is centred around the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, which make up two 'arms' of the church's benevolent giving. Both arms influence the actual intake and distribution of financial gifts and steer the congregants into a lifestyle of giving outside of the church.[54] Within this 'two-armed' approach, the church utilises strategic principles and rational planning to steward finances to advance the Great Commission, while also activating the more immediate and flexible form of financial stewardship pointed toward the Great Commandment when opportunities of compassion arise in their more immediate vicinity. Furthermore, the church had integrated programmes filled with teaching and activities for the purpose of shepherding the congregants into imitating the love of Jesus holistically to those around them.

Considering these scenarios within Davies' framework of compassion, facilitation of the act of compassion by a 'gatekeeper' (in this case the churches) adds another layer of complexity. As the gap in relationship between giver and receiver widens with each mediator involved in the transaction, the potential of diminishing the experience of empathy and sacrifice increases. Yet, the responses from this survey illustrate how the power of trust and relationship can overcome this distance.

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[53] Interview results, January 2024.
[54] Interview results, January 2024.

One last factor will be considered that impacts the potential correlation of financial, benevolent giving with Davies' framework. Davies reflects on the idea of sacrifice and returns to the theological concept of *kenosis* as it relates to a renewed ontology. Theologians have connected the fact that compassion is always costly to someone.[55] Even when King David was given supplies for his altar gift to the Lord as instructed by the prophet Gad, David retorted with, 'No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.'[56] The Old Testament examples of animal sacrifices as sin coverings ultimately pointed to Jesus's sacrificial atonement. Considering this outpouring of Jesus's love, not only in the self-relating dance of the Trinity but in the love for other humans, confirms the already argued position that Jesus exemplified the climax of God's compassionate self-giving compassion.

Numerous popular writers have referenced the concept of sacrifice as a way in which God measures generosity.[57] Examples such as the Widows Mite and the Good Samaritan constitute two illustrations of this argument.[58] The concept of sacrifice is related to the topic of this article in a different manner. The argument Davies unfolds displays that the self, as it relates to his renewed ontology, undergoes a transformation through embracing its own kenotic nature by affirming the other through acts of sacrifice.[59] It is a progressive movement from 'existence' to 'being'.

In the specific cases of financial giving to the Ukraine Relief Fund, it was the trust and relationship these individuals and churches maintained in TCM that acted as a conduit for the donors' acts of compassion in response to need. As important as trust and relationship and the presence of a mediator may be for navigating the complex layers of exposure that surround issues of compassionate giving as outlined in the previous section, they can distract from the kenotic power of self-

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55 S. G. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1977), p. 48.
56 2 Sam 24:24.
57 See, for example, Chip Ingram, *The Genius of Generosity* (Alpharetta, GA: Generous Church, 2011), p. 71.
58 See Luke 21:1–4 and Luke 10:29–37 respectively.
59 Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 45.

giving that establishes the renewed sense of being and participation in the triune relationship of God.

Conclusion

Examining this specific case study of a group of Christians from the West giving to TCM's Ukraine Relief Fund revealed intricacies of benevolent giving as it relates to Christian acts of compassion. This article takes the key findings from this case study and repositions them within Oliver Davies' metaphysical framework, revealing how they relate to his renewed narrative of ontology.

The technologies of the twenty-first century have caused the boundaries of exposure to become more fluid and ambiguous. This creates difficult situations when balancing emotional response with rational strategy regarding financial giving. The results of the study have shown that the donors view their contributions as acts of compassion and utilise the trust and relationship they have with organisations like TCM to facilitate such gifts and to function as a 'bridge' to connect their finances to relief work in times of crisis.

Unfortunately, the tragic situation resulting from the war in Ukraine will not likely be the last emergency that Christians in the West will encounter, either personally or through more distant media connections. Even though financial giving could be easily overlooked as a practical act of compassion, the act of responding to those 'around' oneself through any compassionate act becomes a spiritual discipline. This discipline can contribute to the continual pursuit of Christlikeness and hold metaphysical significance through the self-giving sacrifice of the donor.

The aspect of sacrifice as outlined by Davies pointed toward the biblical paradox of how one can find life only through losing it. Church leaders and congregants alike, reconciled by God's compassion, will share in the more developing communicative harmony modelled by the Trinity, and most notably observed through the climax of God's compassion in Jesus Christ. Financial acts of stewardship and benevolent giving will continue to be an avenue for participating in the

life of God through acts of compassion. As church leaders and congregants alike navigate the complex layers of exposure to and influences on such financial giving in a modern world, the sacrificial acts of benevolent financial giving will undoubtedly contribute to ontological moorings of living as the image-bearers of God, modelling Christ's radical kenotic compassion.

Engaging with the Margins: Patterns of Transformation in the Baptist Ministry to the Bulgarian Roma

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Abstract
The Baptist evangelical mission among the Bulgarian Roma traces its roots to the beginning of the twentieth century. Waves of persecution, discrimination, and a hate-speech narrative have continuously placed the Roma community at the fringes of society. Despite ineffectual state efforts and strategies, many churches manage to make a difference in the lives of the Roma in their surrounding communities. The church adopts a holistic approach — meeting spiritual needs, together with physical and social needs. This article provides an overview of the development of Baptist mission to the Roma people, its transformative outcomes, and its impact on both church life and the surrounding community.

Keywords
Baptist mission; Bulgaria; Roma

Introduction

The Roma[1] community in Bulgaria has existed at the margins of society for a long time. Throughout a history of discrimination and neglect, and in the midst of rather ineffective integration policies, the efforts of the Baptist church stand out — in their approach, as well as in their effectiveness. For over a century now, the Baptist church in Bulgaria has intentionally engaged with the marginalised Roma in its community, addressing and meeting both social and spiritual needs.

This article traces the history of engaging with the margins in the ministry to the Bulgarian Roma. The basis for the historical overview of the study is the archive of the *Baptist Herald* — a periodical published

[1] It is important to note that while some of the sources cited use the word 'gipsy/gypsy', this article will adhere to the use of the term 'Roma' to indicate Romani people due to the negative connotations of the word 'gipsy'.

by the North American German Baptist Society, currently known as the North American Baptist Conference.[2] A book and an article by ethnographer Magdalena Slavkova will supplement this, providing an extensive study of the history and impact of Evangelicalism on the Bulgarian Roma. The origins, character, and significance of the ministry will be outlined. The time scope of this survey is limited to the years between 1905 and 1989; 1905 is considered the start of the Roma ministry and 1989 marks the end of the relationship with the North American German Baptist Society due to the strict political regime in Bulgaria at the time.

In considering the contemporary legacy of Baptist ministry among the Roma, a literacy project championed by the First Baptist Church in Sofia, Bulgaria will be brought into focus. Although no formal publications exist that can aid in this, several newsletters written by foreign missionaries are consulted in tracing the history and impact of the project.[3] The development of the project is followed from its start in 2002 up to the present day, focusing on the character of the ministry, as well as its social impact.

In conclusion, patterns of transformation, evident throughout the church's engagement with the margins in these specific instances, are identified.

The Roma Community in Bulgaria

It is rather difficult to estimate the size of the Roma ethnic group as part of Bulgaria's population. While official statistics place it around 4.9 percent as of 2011,[4] many speculate that the Roma population may be

[2] North American Baptist Conference, 'About Us' <https://nabconference.org/us> [accessed 13 November 2023].

[3] I would like to extend my gratitude to Terry and Tom Myers, whose newsletters about their missionary work alongside the Baptist church in Sofia, Bulgaria, provided invaluable information for the purposes of this study.

[4] Republic of Bulgaria National Statistical Institute, *2011 Population Census* (Sofia: Republic of Bulgaria National Statistical Institute, 2011) <https://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final_en.pdf> [accessed 23 October 2023].

anywhere between 4.9 percent and 20.9 percent.[5] Due to widespread prejudice and racism, many Roma people self-identify as Bulgarians, Turks, or Romanians, or choose to refrain from indicating their ethnic background altogether.[6]

It is most commonly agreed that the first waves of Roma immigrants arrived in the Balkans from Asia Minor in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This was followed by several other migration waves, with groups arriving from the territory of Romania and Austria in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[7] It is for this reason that the Roma people in Bulgaria are divided into different groups, with different dialects, traditions, and sub-groups.

The history of the Roma people in Europe, and specifically in the Balkans, is a turbulent one. Centuries of enslavement, continued discrimination, and racism culminated in the persecution and massacres of World War Two.[8] Their primarily nomadic and semi-settled lifestyle was interrupted in 1958 by the Communist regime's campaign of forced assimilation, 'restricting traditional Roma religious and cultural customs and practices while compelling the Roma population to abandon its transient lifestyle and settle either in collective agricultural farms in the countryside or in drab, overcrowded housing projects in the cities'.[9] This was followed by several name-changing campaigns and bans on the public use of the Romani language in an attempt to dissolve the Roma into the larger Bulgarian community. These events demonstrate the position of the Roma people as the most disadvantaged, maligned, and discriminated against ethnic minority in Bulgaria, seen as almost

[5] Yuliya Shyrokonis, 'EU citizenship, But No Shoes: the Roma of Bulgaria', *Open Democracy*, 20 January 2020 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/eu-citizenship-no-shoes-roma-bulgaria> [accessed 23 October 2023].

[6] Council of Europe, *Thematic Report of The Group of Experts on Roma Health Mediators* (Strasbourg: CAHROM, 2016) <http://coe-romed.org/sites/default/files/articles/files/CAHROM%20%282016%297%20EN%20Thematic%20report%20on%20Roma%20health%20mediators.pdf> [accessed 23 October 2023] (p. 6).

[7] Council of Europe, *Thematic Report*, p. 6.

[8] Shyrokonis, 'EU citizenship, But No Shoes'.

[9] Rossen Vassilev, 'The Roma of Bulgaria: A Pariah Minority', *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 3 (2014), 40–51 (p. 43).

subhuman and pushed to the fringes of society in a socio-economic and cultural sense.[10]

Currently, the majority of Roma people in Bulgaria live in segregated communities and neighbourhoods with poor living conditions, often without access to clean water or electricity. Along with extreme poverty and unemployment, many Roma lack access to proper education or are forced to leave the school system in order to work or beg in the streets. The widespread racism and prejudice prevent them from receiving proper medical attention, and children are often put in institutions for intellectually and developmentally disabled students due to their 'challenging' background.[11] As a result, many resort to crime as a way of survival, while others fall victim to human trafficking.

Early Baptist Ministry Among the Roma

Baptist mission among the Bulgarian Roma traces its roots to the beginning of the twentieth century. Several sources will be considered in outlining its history.

History of the Baptist Mission Among the Bulgarian Roma (1905–1989)

The earliest evidence of evangelical mission among the Bulgarian Roma is found in the accounts of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Baptist World Alliance that took place in London in 1920.[12] At this meeting, the work among the Bulgarian Roma is assigned to the German Baptist Missionary Society in North America.

However, the first recorded story of Roma converts is not the result of outside influence. As this story has been turned into somewhat of a legend and has been retold over and over again, elements of it differ from version to version. Yet, the core of it remains unchanged: in 1905 a Roma worker at a farm in the village of Golintsi (in the north-west of Bulgaria) steals a Bible, attracted by its gilded edges.[13] Bringing it to a

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[10] Vassilev, 'The Roma of Bulgaria', p. 43.
[11] Shyrokonis, 'EU citizenship, But No Shoes'.
[12] 'Our Gypsies in Bulgaria', *The Baptist Herald*, 1 February 1935, p. 48.
[13] Magdalena Slavkova, *Tsiganite evangelisti v Bulgaria* [Evangelical Gypsies in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Paradigma, 2007), p. 78.

friend who could read a little, the two start to read it and gradually come to recognise themselves as sinners and Jesus as their Saviour. One of these first converts is Peter Puntcheff, who later becomes a colporteur (a travelling bookseller) and the first Bulgarian Roma evangelist.[14] A Bible study group forms around the two men, with Puntcheff reading the texts and people discussing their meaning. In 1924, Puntcheff became the first ordained Roma minister and was supported by the German Missionary Society.[15] He died in the autumn of 1924 due to an illness. His wife, 'once a thief and a beggar', continued to live a life as a 'missionary and benefactress'. One of the German society's missionaries recalls receiving help from her when he was ill and starving.[16]

At the time of Puntcheff's death, the Roma Baptist community in Golintsi had over forty members. The Roma gathering was connected to the nearby Bulgarian church in Lom and to the German-American missionaries, both providing support for its ministries and growth.[17] Soon, the Christian Roma community found itself in need of a building in which to hold its meetings. This was sponsored by the German Missionary Society, which went on to support Bulgarian, Roma, and foreign missionaries throughout the following decades. In 1930, the first Roma church building in the world opened doors in Golintsi.[18] This happened with the strong involvement of the local Roma community. Brickmakers by trade, they actively participated in making the bricks for the construction of the church building.[19] Meanwhile, Roma groups had started gathering in different parts of the country. In the early 1930s, the first Roma hymn book was published — one of the very few books published in the Roma language.[20] In 1938 a building was purchased in the town of Lom for the needs of the Roma ministry.[21] It was used by the two missionary deaconesses of the German society as their living

[14] Carl Fuellbrandt, 'How a Stolen New Testament Saved the Gypsies', *The Baptist Herald*, 15 March 1926, p. 7.
[15] Frida Telkamp, 'What's Happening', *The Baptist Herald*, 1 February 1924, p. 2.
[16] Fuellbrandt, 'How a Stolen New Testament Saved the Gypsies', p. 7.
[17] Fuellbrandt, 'How a Stolen New Testament Saved the Gypsies'.
[18] 'The Only Gipsy Church in the World', *The Baptist Herald*, 1 September 1930, p. 7.
[19] 'The Only Gipsy Church in the World'.
[20] August F. Runtz, 'The First Gypsy Hymn Book', *The Baptist Herald*, 1 March 1933, p. 15.
[21] 'A Gypsy Missionary Center: The Story of God's Wondrous Guidance in Our Danubian Enterprise', *The Baptist Herald*, 1 April 1938, p. 126.

space. Children's classes, Bible study groups, and medical help were soon offered at the centre.[22] With the beginning of World War Two, the connection between the German society and the Baptist mission among the Bulgarian Roma was interrupted.

As a German ally, Bulgaria introduced restrictive laws against the Roma. 'They were denied access to the central parts of Sofia, forbidden to use public transportation and were given smaller food rations than the rest of the population.' Some were forcibly converted to Christianity, and Bulgarian-Roma marriages were outlawed in 1942.[23] It is difficult to establish the full scope of the fate of the Bulgarian Roma throughout the Second World War. The lack of clarity on the matter is partly due to the post-war politics regarding the Roma, with the Bulgarian socialist government denying altogether 'the existence of Roma while it simultaneously implemented assimilationist policies'.[24]

The Communist regime which followed the war completely broke Bulgaria's ties to any Western partners. Nevertheless, the Roma churches survived. While the government restricted religious gatherings, they continued meeting in private under the pretext that it was a family gathering or a special celebration.[25] The fall of the Communist regime was followed by a strong wave of evangelical influence, especially among the marginalised and socially ostracised groups and individuals.[26] Through educational and charitable initiatives, the evangelical mission reached many areas where access was denied to other institutions. Furthermore, the building of prayer houses and churches completely changed the layout and the lifestyle of the Roma ghettos.[27]

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22 Martin L. Leuschner, 'Adventures in Our Gypsy Mission Field', *The Baptist Herald*, 15 November 1938, pp. 424–425.

23 Council of Europe, 'Factsheet on the Roma Genocide in Bulgaria' <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide/bulgaria> [accessed 29 February 2024].

24 Carol Silverman, 'Persecution and Politicization: Roma (Gypsies) of Eastern Europe', Culturalsurvival.org, 2010 <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/persecution-and-politicization-roma-gypsies-eastern-europe> [accessed 29 February 2024].

25 Slavkova, *Tsiganite evangelisti v Bulgaria*, p. 91.

26 Slavkova, *Tsiganite evangelisti v Bulgaria*, p. 96.

27 Slavkova, *Tsiganite evangelisti v Bulgaria*, p. 97.

The Character of the Early Work among the Roma (1905–1989)

Throughout the *Baptist Herald's* articles on the work among the Roma, the Roma are portrayed as outcasts, despised, and neglected by society, 'looked down upon as the scum of the earth, […] despised and hated by the entire world'.[28] They are 'considered by all the world as a worthless and hopeless people'.[29] They live in huts in segregated communities with poor living conditions in almost every town or city. Their clothes are torn and dirty, many of the children run around naked or wrapped in rags.[30] The name 'Gypsy' is often synonymous with 'thief' and 'beggar' and the Roma often make ends meet by engaging in begging, stealing, and fortune-telling.[31] An article among the records of World War Two states that the Roma were then treated as the 'most despised and inferior of all races', 'the poorest of all mankind', struggling to find employment due to the fact that they were not full-blooded Bulgarians.[32] In the face of discrimination and persecution, the Roma often responded with hate and 'frightening fury'.[33]

The Baptist work among the Roma was driven by God's love and the example of Jesus's ministry. Just as the people on the edge of society had access to salvation and complete restoration through Jesus, so the Bulgarian Roma entered into a new community.[34] The words of John 3:16 guided the mission and also shone like a ray of hope for the marginalised and cast-out Roma — though hated by the world, they were loved by God.[35] Through the mission, new communities were formed, often gathering and inviting others for table fellowship, sharing even the little they had. The missionaries among the Roma were often challenged to leave behind the prejudice of the surrounding society and share in the hospitality of the outsiders they ministered to. The

[28] Leuschner, 'Adventures in Our Gypsy Mission Field', p. 424.
[29] Emma Herrmann, 'On a Bicycle to a Gypsy Baptismal Service', *The Baptist Herald*, 1 November 1937, p. 325.
[30] C. E. Petrick, 'Our Gypsy Mission in Bulgaria', *The Baptist Herald*, August 1923, p. 12.
[31] 'Our Gypsies in Bulgaria'.
[32] Georgi Stefanoff, 'The Gypsies Need a New Hymnal', *The Baptist Herald*, 15 January 1941, p. 27.
[33] Carl Fuellbrandt, 'Remember the Gypsies in Prayer', *The Baptist Herald*, 12 July 1956, p. 10.
[34] 'Our Gypsies in Bulgaria'.
[35] Fuellbrandt, 'Remember the Gypsies in Prayer'.

evangelistic focus of the mission was matched by a concern for the Roma's general wellbeing.

Throughout the twentieth century, the evangelical mission offered educational classes to both adults and children, teaching them on moral matters, as well as on things concerning their everyday life, such as maintaining good hygiene and establishing better living standards. Foreign, Bulgarian, and Roma missionaries visited the people in the community, praying for the sick and often providing for their immediate physical needs — bringing food, wood, repairing and building huts. Medical care was also offered. The missionaries working among the Roma fulfilled the roles of 'nurses, story-tellers, hygienic teachers, doctors, cooks, wash-women and ambassadors of Jesus Christ'.[36] Many utilised their professional skills and gifts in response to the needs of the community. Some Roma brickmakers aided the building of the church.[37] A Roma pastor built huts for the people of the community.[38] Other missionaries helped clean the huts and provided clothes to those who needed them.[39]

Magdalena Slavkova also highlights the multifaceted approach of the evangelical mission across evangelical denominations to the Bulgarian Roma. It was — and still is — driven by a concern for spiritual, cultural, social, and educational development.[40] The early evangelical missionary work ranged from worship services, prayer meetings, and Bible studies, to organising schools, different classes and workshops, and offering help to orphans and to the elderly.[41] Most women were taught handiwork, knitting, and homemaking skills. Men often attended courses in German, and some were sent abroad to study theology and become pastors and missionaries.[42]

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36 'Our Danubian Missionaries', *The Baptist Herald*, 15 November 1937, p. 352.
37 'The Only Gipsy Church in the World'.
38 Stefanoff, 'The Gypsies Need a New Hymnal'.
39 Leuschner, 'Adventures in Our Gypsy Mission Field'.
40 Magdalena Slavkova, 'Personalizing the Romani Evangelical Faith', in *Languages of Resistance: Ian Hancock's Contribution to Romani Studies*, ed. by H. Kyuchukov and W. New (München: Lincom, 2017), 318–325 (p. 319).
41 Slavkova, *Tsiganite evangelisti v Bulgaria*, p. 86.
42 Slavkova, 'Personalizing the Romani Evangelical Faith', p. 319.

Significance of the Early Work Among the Roma (1905–1989)

The impact of the evangelical Baptist mission in Bulgaria on the lives of the Roma people is recognised. The church is an important institution for the Roma evangelical community. A special space exists around each prayer house or church building within a Roma ghetto, where stricter moral rules are kept, according to the church's teaching and values.[43] At the beginning of the twentieth century, one of Bulgaria's national poets even said that Protestantism played a 'notably civilising role', with Protestants looking and behaving like citizens among 'peasants'.[44] It is important to note the effect that this work had on the Roma community, especially evident in the new converts. Stories of converted murderers, drunks, and violent men who upon receiving Christ started behaving in a different way bear evidence to this. A significant witness to the impact of the evangelical mission among the Roma was the transformed life of those members of the community who then became ministers themselves.

Contemporary Mission Among the Roma

As of 2024, the Roma church in Golintsi (now a neighbourhood of the town of Lom) is still active. Multiple evangelical Roma churches have been established across Bulgaria. In looking at the continuing story, this section will focus on the work of a Baptist church in the capital of Bulgaria, its engagement with the surrounding Roma community, as well as the overall impact of the evangelical engagement with the Roma as recognised by the secular society. Due to the lack of published resources by the church about its social work and ministry, the main sources that inform this part of the study are several newsletters written by foreign missionaries who have worked alongside the church for the past years. In addition to that, a couple of articles and news reports provide information on the observations of wider society regarding the impact of the church's work among the Roma.

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[43] Slavkova, *Tsiganite evangelisti v Bulgaria*, p. 109.

[44] Paul L. Mishkoff, 'Bulgaria Today: A Rare Opportunity', *The Baptist Herald*, 15 December 1932, p. 15.

Ministry among the Roma in Sofia (2002–2024)

First Baptist Church in Sofia, Bulgaria, was established in 1888.[45] From the beginning, it was very involved in the life of its immediate community, living out its concern for the community's social and spiritual wellbeing through various outreach initiatives. With a Roma ghetto situated in close proximity to it, the church has run different projects throughout its history, responding to the immediate needs around it, offering social help, medical care, classes, and school help for the children.[46]

The church's current ongoing programme among the Roma began in 2002 as an after-school homework help class.[47] Within the first few meetings, it became clear that the most prominent need was not for homework help. As hardly any of the dozen children who showed up attended school at the time, it became apparent that the programme should seek to develop their literacy and mathematical skills and encourage them to go to school.[48] Therefore, the classes' primary focus became the building of literacy skills in children and youth aged 5–21 years old. In addition to that, each meeting includes a snack time, when the hungry children can receive a nutritious light meal, and a Bible story and craft time. As most of the participants live in the nearby ghetto with no access to running water, many choose to take a shower and launder their clothes at the church. The programme fits into a wider vision for human trafficking prevention. The goal is to equip young girls, children, and teenagers at risk by providing hygiene and literacy classes, by supporting their education, and assisting them in acquiring job skills and finding decent employment.[49] The beneficiaries of the programme are not just children. Often, parents also attend and seek help in continuing their own education, passing tests to gain school diplomas and so

45 SEBC, 'About us' <https://www.sebc.bg/about-us> [accessed 13 November 2023].
46 Slavkova, *Tsiganite evangelisti v Bulgaria*, pp. 95–102.
47 Terry Myers, 'What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?', *Bulletin from Bulgaria: News from Tom and Terry Myers: International Ministries Missionaries to Bulgaria*, February 2016, unpublished.
48 Terry Myers, 'Literacy Program of Sofia Baptist Church', *Serving with International Ministries in Bulgaria*, unpublished newsletter.
49 Myers, 'Literacy Program of Sofia Baptist Church'.

forth.[50] As of 2024, the programme continues to welcome both children and parents, and has seen significant growth in the percentage of children who attend — and stay in — school.

The literacy programme runs annually for the duration of the school year. As it has developed through the years, more children and volunteers have become involved. An elementary school teacher, responsible for the church's Sunday school programme, joined the literacy project soon after its start, bringing her expertise and teaching skills.[51] Another volunteer, educated in the field of social work, assists as a counsellor. Coming from dysfunctional homes, the majority of the children lack any role models for healthy relationships and are in need of support in processing the issues they face and in finding sound, Christian advice.[52] Other volunteers help with the preparation of food for the children, finding them clean clothes, doing laundry, allowing them to take a shower, and offering regular lice shampoo treatments. American missionaries and volunteers help with English language lessons. Church workers and ministry leaders teach the children songs, lead music classes, and help prepare the children for the church's Christmas and Easter celebrations where the literacy group participates in various sketches and plays alongside the children from the Sunday school. Each volunteer participates according to their talents and skills, teaching the children literacy and mathematics, together with practical life skills.

Social Impact of the Mission among the Roma (2002–2024)

Throughout the course of the programme, it has been possible to track the progress in the lives of individual participants as well as the overall impact on the surrounding community. Several reports tell the story of a girl, V, who had been coming to the church ever since she could walk on her own.[53] Together with her friends, she would often come to the

[50] Terry Myers, 'Rejoice with Us', *Bulletin from Bulgaria: News from Tom and Terry Myers: International Ministries Missionaries to Bulgaria*, April 2016, unpublished.
[51] Terry Myers, 'Back to School', *News from Tom and Terry Myers: International Ministries Missionaries to Bulgaria*, October 2010, unpublished.
[52] Myers, 'Back to School'.
[53] James Caldwell, 'Literacy Classes = Lives Changed', *Bulgarian Partners*, 12 April 2009 <http://www.bulgarianpartners.org/news/literacy-classes-lives-changed> [accessed 13 November 2023].

church to get water and would carry the bottles back home. These visits soon grew longer, and the girls started attending Bible studies and teaching. Although V never went to school, she learned basic literacy skills through the church's programme.[54] She would attend the Sunday worship service regularly and got baptised as a teenager. Despite her family's attempts to marry her off early (as young as the age of twelve, as was the custom), she managed to avoid being sold into marriage for several years. A resilient young woman, she has been trying to maintain higher standards of living, even with the lack of education and parental support.[55] Now, having children of her own, she has brought them to be dedicated and blessed in the church.

The impact of the mission is evident in the life of another girl, K, and her children.[56] As a young girl herself, K did not enjoy going to school, as she suffered discrimination and bullying from both teachers and children. She did, however, attend the church's literacy classes, where she acquired basic skills and although she never finished her formal education, she was able to find a job to support herself. K had her first child in her early teenage years, and since both her and her husband were at work after school hours, her son, R, joined the literacy programme together with his little sister. In second grade, R won a 'Best in Class' award for his reading in his state school. His mother was — and is — an inspiration to the children in the literacy programme, some of whom do not attend school.

Several articles have been published by non-Christian media, recognising the impact of the evangelical mission among the Roma communities in Bulgaria. Though they do not differentiate between different denominations and instead speak of the Protestant church in general, the published material includes the Baptist evangelical mission among the others discussed. One article describes the church as pivotal

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54 Terry Myers tells the story in an unpublished newsletter, *Bulletin from Bulgaria: News from Tom and Terry Myers: International Ministries Missionaries to Bulgaria*, September 2016.

55 Caldwell, 'Literacy Classes = Lives Changed'.

56 Bulgarian Partners, 'Achievements to Be Proud of', *Bulgarian Partners*, 22 March 2016 <http://www.bulgarianpartners.org/news/achievements-to-be-proud-of> [accessed 13 November 2023].

to life in the Roma neighbourhoods in the town of Vidin.[57] Several of the churches were started by people who attended the first Roma church near Lom and are still active. Many non-believers hold their Christian neighbours in high regard. The believers have decent jobs and do not complain in the face of hardship, so others respect them and seek their counsel. During the services, the Bible message is accompanied by practical advice such as, 'though you are poor, God has not abandoned you', 'do not spend more money than you have', 'it is good to feed the poor, yet do not support their laziness'.[58]

Another article describes the changes that faith brings about in the life of the Roma.[59] A contrast is drawn between the 'helplessness' of the state on the one hand and the evangelical churches on the other hand, which manage to change the life of many Bulgarian Roma. According to the article, it is in the churches that the state's integration strategies are truly fulfilled, offering education, teaching life skills, advocating against child marriages, and providing support in finding employment. The main reason for the success of the church in its work among the Roma is found in its agenda. It does not approach the Roma with integration in mind, but rather with a mission to change people's lives through Christ's love. The results are evident in the everyday behaviour of the Roma — improving their hygiene habits, becoming more responsible, drinking and stealing less, encouraging their children to stay in school. Another achievement of the church is that of bringing people together despite their differences — amidst nationalistic hate speech and spread of negative stereotypes, ethnic Bulgarians and Roma are witnesses to the destruction of the dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14). They coexist and sit side by side in the church.

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[57] Tatyana Vaxberg, 'V Tsarkvata na Romite' [In the Church of the Roma], *Deutsche Welle*, 11 April 2015 <https://p.dw.com/p/1F6H0> [accessed 13 November 2023].

[58] Vaxberg, 'V Tsarkvata na Romite'.

[59] Emiliya Milcheva, 'Kak Vyarata Promenya Zhivota na Balgarskite Romi' [How Faith Changes the Lives of the Bulgarian Roma], *Deutsche Welle*, 10 January 2019 <https://p.dw.com/p/3BIvO> [accessed 13 November 2023].

Conclusion

The Roma's history of living in the Balkans is long and turbulent. Facing waves of persecution and discrimination, the Bulgarian Roma people are often treated with suspicion, as subhuman and untrustworthy. This furthers the issues of segregation, lack of education, unemployment, and low economic and social status, often leading to heightened levels of criminal activity, drug abuse, and human trafficking, amongst others. This also means that a vicious circle is created with uneducated, criminally active parents, raising children who do not learn the values of education and are sent to beg or work in the streets at an early age. As the children grow up, some are sold into marriage in their early teenage years, and they start families of their own, replicating the same values and destructive practices.[60] While the state's efforts for integration seem ineffectual,[61] many churches manage to make a difference in the lives of the Roma in their surrounding community.

The Baptist evangelical mission among the Roma began at the dawn of the twentieth century. Through its early history, the mission witnessed great transformation in the lives of the converts, as well as in the general wellbeing of the wider Roma community. Throughout, the church adopted a holistic approach: meeting the spiritual needs of the Roma, together with their physical and social needs. Often, the evangelical focus seemed to remain in the background as missionaries focused on bettering the levels of education, health, and hygiene in the Roma ghetto. Yet, through showing the love of Christ as the motivation of all their initiatives, Christian workers brought the values of God's kingdom into the lives of those they served.

The same patterns of interaction continue to be evident in the church's contemporary engagement with the Roma. Throughout the century of ministering to the needs of the community, the church has brought about countless instances of positive transformation. Reports from the century-long mission bear witness to the change that faith

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[60] Minority Rights Group, 'Roma in Bulgaria', last updated 2018 <https://minorityrights.org/communities/roma-2/> [accessed 29 February 2024].

[61] Integro Association, 'Why Does Roma Integration Fail in Bulgaria?', Ergo Network, 2017 <https://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Why-does-Roma-integration-fail-in-Bulgaria_2017.pdf> [accessed 10 April 2024].

brings in the life of a convert, the new values being adopted and lived out by the individual and the community around them. The importance of good education is emphasised throughout, and its benefits have become evident through the lives of generations of Roma.

The evangelical mission among the Roma is consistently built around the following patterns of transformative engagement:

- approaching the outsiders of society, recognising their value, restoring their humanity and dignity
- responding to their immediate needs with love and acceptance
- providing opportunities for them to find purpose and a place of re-entry into society
- creating new communities of fellowship, acceptance, and hospitality
- bringing healing in a bio-medical sense, as well as in a social and spiritual sense
- advocating for righteousness and justice and working to prevent injustices such as criminal involvement, child marriages, and human trafficking
- creating an environment where God's love can be known and experienced and the Holy Spirit can bring spiritual transformation into each individual's life.

The transformative effect of the Baptist evangelical ministry among the Bulgarian Roma is consistently evident on several levels. Spiritually, it is evident in the transformed individual lives of converts. Physically and socially, it is apparent in the quality-of-life improvements within the Roma community in terms of health, education, and social engagement. This transformation is also recognised by members of the general public and highlighted in its effectiveness against the backdrop of the state's efforts for integration.

The Challenge of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Lessons from the Sierra Leone Civil War

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Abstract
The civil war in Sierra Leone was one of the most vicious conflicts in Africa's recent history. Baptists and other religious communities worked together to end the conflict between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Today, Nigeria has similar challenges and there is a need for close cooperation between religious communities to mediate peace between the government and Boko Haram. Faith-based peacebuilding aims at a just peace and reconciliation through non-violent means, and this study compares faith-based peace building in Sierra Leone during the 1990s with the Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria today and considers the lessons to be learnt. The article discusses how the efforts of faith-based peace building actors in Nigeria may support both the peace process and the peaceful coexistence of religious communities, arguing that within this there is an urgent need to discuss poverty and social marginalisation, build stronger relationships between governments and local communities, and open direct dialogue with Boko Haram.

Keywords
Muslim-Christian relations; Sierra Leone; Nigeria; faith-based peace building

Introduction

In the present article, I am following the concept of faith-based peace building that has become commonly used to describe religiously motivated non-violent diplomacy in the world's trouble spots. The importance of religious actors has been observed in conflicts throughout the world and in Africa in particular. In this study, I shall analyse faith-based peace building during the conflict in Sierra Leone in the 1990s and with respect to Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria today.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is engaged in an armed battle with the Islamic militant group Boko Haram. Nigeria is the richest and largest economy in Africa. However, the country faces many challenges, with over half the population living in absolute poverty, especially in the north and north-eastern states of Nigeria. The Boko Haram insurgency has also spread to the neighbouring countries of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon and has caused a humanitarian emergency around Lake Chad.[1]

Nevertheless, there are already local examples of grassroots levels of interfaith peace building in Nigeria, where Muslim and Christian leaders are working together with traditional rulers. One example is the Adamawa Peace Initiative in the north-eastern state of Adawana. The vision for the initiative is to positively engage the youth and recognise that religion is an instrument for peace. Peace builders identify vulnerable youth in the area and, as the crisis continues, help refugees and educate local young people in development programmes.[2]

During the war in Sierra Leone, Muslim and Christian leaders worked together, condemned atrocities, and asked the rebels to lay down their arms, declaring that the violence was against God's creation. The local Baptist community was also active in peace building. The General Secretary of the Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone (BCSL), Moses B. Khanu, and the Reverend Alimammy Koroma were key people in this and committed themselves to non-violent conflict transformation together with other Christian and Muslim leaders. Reverend Khanu was chosen to act as co-chairman of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) and was also the president of the Council of Churches of Sierra Leone (CCSL). Reverend Koroma was General Secretary of the CCSL and also acted as General Secretary

[1] Virginia Comolli, *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency* (London: C. Hurst, 2015), pp. 2, 86–89.

[2] Margee Ensign, 'We are Obsessed with Peace': A Story of Peace Building in Northeastern Nigeria', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 20, no. 2 (2016), 168–175.

of IRCSL. The organisation had good contacts with both the government and the rebels, but it was politically neutral.[3]

During the war in Sierra Leone, local Baptist churches were active and supported the non-violent peace building. This was an exceptional development. Baptists share some common historical roots with the peace churches such as the Quakers and Mennonites, but they often have different views on peace and war. Baptists usually follow the just war doctrine, supporting the right of governments to go to war and use violence when it is to protect the lives of people.[4] Today, there is a growing interest in new understandings of war and peace. Glen Stassen was an academic from a Southern Baptist background and he argued in his book *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* that Christians are disciples of Christ and supposed to follow just peace making instead of just war. Stassen's argument for a just peace theory is that Christians have a biblical commitment to peace and a focus on practical steps, taking action in terms of political engagement uniting people of different faiths.[5] In 2013, the World Council of Churches (WCC) issued the 'Statement on the Way of Just Peace' to challenge violence and warfare and stated that the Christian obligation is to work for just peace using non-violent peace building methods.[6]

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[3] Jari Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian Leaders Working Together: Building Reconciliation in the Sierra Leone Conflict', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 8, no. 9 (2015), 78–96 (pp. 82–85); Peter Penfold, 'Faith in Resolving Sierra Leone's Bloody Conflict', *The Round Table*, 94, no. 382 (2005), 549–557 (pp. 550–553).

[4] Baptist Peace Fellowship, 'Baptist Views On War And Peace', report originally published 1969 and added to by members of the BPF Committee in 2008 <http://www.baptist-peace.org.uk/pdfs/Baptist%20Views%20on%20War%20and%20Peace.pdf> [accessed May 2023]; R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation,* Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 144; Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian leaders working together', pp. 83, 89–90.

[5] Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992).

[6] World Council of Churches, 'Statement on the Way of Just Peace' <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-the-way-of-just-peace> [accessed June 2023]. The statement was adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly as part of the Report of the Public Issues Committee. Point 2 of the statement includes the following comment: 'To build peace in our communities, we must break the culture of silence about violence in the home, parish and society. Where religious groups are divided along with society, we must join with other faiths to teach and advocate for tolerance, non-violence and mutual respect, as Christian and Muslim leaders are doing in Nigeria with ecumenical support.'

Theoretical Background

Faith-based Conflict Transformation

Today, many Christian organisations are working on a global level for peace building. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) changed its strategy at the beginning of the 1980s and started to support international reconciliation efforts and the sending of peace builders. John Paul Lederach began to develop a model of non-violent conflict transformation while working in Nicaragua in the late 1980s. Lederach mediated the conflict between the Sandinista government and the Miskito indigenous people. Lederach noticed that the traditional models of conflict transformation were inadequate, and he wanted to develop a new model of peace building where warring groups would meet and find peace and reconciliation.[7]

For decades, researchers had followed the Norwegian father of peace research Johan Galtung's theory of violence and conflicts. According to Galtung, there are different forms of violence: direct personal violence and structural indirect violence. The direct violence in the conflict is visible and obvious, but there is a much larger, unseen, and less apparent structural violence. Galtung's main argument in his peace and war research is the distinction between 'negative peace' and 'positive peace'. Negative peace means the absence of violence, but positive peace means the absence of structural violence and building a social system that serves the needs of the whole population with constructive conflict resolution.[8]

Hugh Miall challenged the concept of peace in Galtung's theory as too limited and too abstract.[9] According to Heikki Patomäki and Ole Wæver, the weakness of Galtung's theory of structural violence was the definition of violence as a synonym for social injustice that made

[7] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp. 146–147.
[8] Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research*, 6, no. 3 (1969), 167–191 (pp. 183–185).
[9] Hugh Miall, *Emergent Conflict and Peaceful Change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 11.

the theory utopistic.[10] However, Galtung's theory of structural violence remains an important view of and approach to understanding the unseen elements of conflict. In contrast, John Paul Lederach's scholarship of conflict transformation is the understanding that conflict is not static and peace is a process that continues as the relationships between people and the structures of society develop.[11]

According to Lederach, conflicts are resolved by means of top-level, middle-level, and grassroots level interventions with an active role played by civil society organisations. In the reconciliation process, local peace mediators build networks from the grass-roots level up to the highest level of political decision-making in society. In the peace process, the top-level political and military actors negotiate ceasefires and peace accords. The mid-level actors, such as religious leaders, use their position to foster peace education. The grass-roots level leaders have connection to the masses as they work locally in towns and villages.[12] The role of peace builders is to support the three-level conflict transformation.

John Paul Lederach's theory of conflict transformation has strongly influenced the practice of using local peace building actors instead of international external interventions. The local mediators use methods that are based on their own experiences living in the midst of the conflict and their knowledge of the dynamics and context of the conflict. The peace mediator's role is neutral, building trust on both sides of a conflict. The conflict transformation process is relationship-centred, a non-violent peace building through dialogue and reconciliation. The key element is the development of friendly and respectful relationship with the enemy and restoration of broken relationships. When the warring parties sign the peace treaty, a

[10] Heikki Patomäki and Ole Wæver, 'Introducing Peaceful Changes', in *Peaceful Changes in World Politics*, TAPRI Research, Report no. 71, ed. by Heikki Patomäki (Tampere: TAPRI, 1995), pp. 3–27 (pp. 8–10).

[11] John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 78–79, 163–167. Thania Paffenholz, 'International Peacebuilding Goes Local: Analysing Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory and Its Ambivalent Encounter With 20 Years of Practice', *Peacebuilding*, 2, no. 1 (2014), 1–17 (pp. 4–5).

[12] Paffenholz, 'International Peacebuilding Goes Local', pp. 5–7.

restorative justice is needed for the people affected by the conflict and for integrating the perpetrators of violence back into society.[13] Lederach's scholarship follows Edward Azar's study of long conflicts and their transformation and Adam Curle's findings on how relationships transform from violent to peaceful in situations such as the Biafran war in Nigeria, for example. Lederach has also used the theories of Herbert Kellman and Ronald Fisher concerning building relationships in the midst of conflict, as well as Paulo Freire's research of oppression and exclusion.[14]

Brian Cox and Daniel Philpott define faith-based diplomacy as track two diplomacy practised 'by non-state actors, officials of non-governmental organisations, religious leaders, and private citizens'.[15] *The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (1992) edited by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson was a landmark book in the research of faith-based peace building and politics. The research opened a new avenue for religions and faith-based actors to take a role in conflict resolution. The examples of the history of faith-based peace building acted as a reminder that there is a forgotten element of quiet religious diplomacy in world conflict zones.[16] Johnston also follows Mennonite and Quaker nonviolent conflict management methods in his books.[17] Johnston edited a later book, *Faith-based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (2003), that describes the efforts of faith-based diplomacy and conflict resolution after the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 in America. Johnston argues that there has been a tendency to ignore the religious dimension in global politics.[18]

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13 Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, pp. 84–86, 98–99. Paffenholz, 'International Peacebuilding Goes Local', p. 1.

14 Paffenholz, 'International Peacebuilding Goes Local', pp. 4–5.

15 Brian Cox and Daniel Philpott, 'Faith-based Diplomacy: An Ancient Idea Newly Emergent', *Brandywine Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 1, no. 2 (2003), 31–40 (p. 3).

16 *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, ed. by Douglas M. Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

17 Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, p. 304.

18 *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, ed. by Doulas M. Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

Religion and Conflicts

Samuel P. Huntington was right in his prediction that international conflicts would have a religious dimension after the Cold War. However, looking at the conflicts in Africa, researchers often fall into a trap following Huntington's simplified *The Clash of Civilizations* argument of inevitable collision between Islam and the West.[19] This is echoed in Robert D. Kaplan's article 'The Coming Anarchy' where, in analysing the fragility of West African countries, his description of a new barbarism is based on similar Western stereotypes and neo-colonialist hegemonic narratives that look at Africa as a lost continent.[20]

According to Scott Thomas, the growing globalisation has changed the nature of conflicts after the Cold War to internal wars, and the superpowers' influence on world politics is now weaker than before.[21] The African states of Angola, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Uganda have faced conflicts and civil wars during the recent decades, but the ethnic or religious divisions were not the root cause of the wars. The conflicts in contemporary Africa are more linked with social and economic changes.[22] Religious terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Boko Haram in Nigeria share similar features in their recruitment that are typical in African conflicts. Most of the young men come from poor neighbourhoods where unemployment and low levels of education are common.[23]

Religion is an important component to keep people together. Through religions, people build their social identity and become part of a larger community. Jolle Demmers argues that political players and leaders often use religious language to motivate people towards their

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[19] Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72, no. 3 (1993), 22–49 (pp. 22, 26).
[20] Robert Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy', *Atlantic Monthly*, 273, no. 2, (1994), 44–77 (p.74).
[21] Thomas, Scott, 'Diplomacy and Religion', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, ed. by R. A. Denemark (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 1097–1103.
[22] Jeffrey Haynes, 'Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 47 (2009), 52–75.
[23] Darlington Mutanda, 'What Makes Terrorism Tick in Africa? Evidence from Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram', *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 21, no. 1 (2017), 20–40 (pp. 21–23).

own political purposes.[24] Looking at the conflict in Nigeria, there is a religious dimension in the Boko Haram insurgency. The significance of religion in the context of contemporary international politics is unavoidable. There is often a religious component in conflicts, exacerbated as the media often actively follows religious extremists, legitimising their violence in the name of God.[25] However, a study of armed conflicts in 130 developing countries during the period 1990 to 2010 suggests that religious factors fuel armed conflict when conflicts overlap religious and other identities and grievances. Extremist religious leaders justify and legitimise the use of violence using religious language.[26]

In the academic discussion after the 9/11 terror attacks in New York, Islam has often been portrayed as a source of extremism and violence.[27] However, interreligious peace building is growing today and in particular the number of Muslim background peace brokers helping to resolve conflicts is increasing. The importance of faith-based peace building in Islamic societies has been obvious in African conflicts. Religious actors may bring a spiritual dimension to peace building and create a sense of commitment to their peace work that may help in conflict resolution.[28]

I shall now turn to the comparison of the faith-based conflict transformation process in Sierra Leone in the 1990s with the Boko Haram conflict in Nigeria today. The pre-war period and civil war in Sierra Leone bears parallels and similarities with the case of Nigeria. This article thus explores the following questions: What are the lessons

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[24] Jolle Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 20–22.

[25] John Azumah, 'Boko Haram in Retrospect', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 26, no. 1 (2014), 33–52 (pp. 33–34).

[26] Matthias Basedaus, Birte Pfeiffer, and Johannes Vüllers, 'Bad Religion? Religion, Collective Action, and the Onset of Armed Conflict in Developing Countries', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 60, no. 2 (2014), 226–255.

[27] Andrew R. Murphy, 'Introduction', in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, ed. by Andrew R. Murphy (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 1–4.

[28] Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Muslim Peace-Building Actors in Africa and the Balkan Context: Challenges and Needs', *Peace and Change*, 33, no. 4 (2008), 549–581 (pp. 549–552).

learned from the Sierra Leone conflict transformation process in 1990s for the Nigerian Boko Haram insurgency? How may Baptists and other religious communities support just peace and non-violent peace building efforts in Nigeria?

The Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Nigeria is a religious country where Islam and Christianity are part of people's identity. There has been a long ethno-religious conflict in the middle belt of Nigeria between Muslim herders and Christian farmers, and the conflict has spread to other areas following migration. Nigeria has been rated one of the poorest countries in the world with almost half of the population living in extreme poverty. The grievances of the people often find expression in conflict due to societal-level violence. The root-cause and interpretation of Boko Haram's evolution in Nigeria and its later violent activities can be traced to unemployment and hopelessness among the youth, as well as to worsening standards of living.[29]

During the British rule, Islamic law was a legal code applied in northern Nigeria until independence. The colonial indirect rule supported the conservative Islamic rulers, and the fragility of Nigeria is traced to the colonial time that created a divided Nigerian state with ethnic and religious distrust. The Borno state in northern Nigeria is a Muslim-dominated area and historically a part of the medieval Kanuri Empire of Borno. Today it is one of the poorest areas in Nigeria. Maiduguri is the capital and the largest city of the Borno State.[30]

Muhammed Yusuf was a cleric and radical reformist and the founder of Boko Haram. He started as a youth leader and preached in Maiduguri Mosque, but soon the local Islamic leaders opposed him because of his teaching. Then Yusuf founded his own school in 2002

[29] Comolli, *Boko Haram*, pp. 2–3, 64–65, 130.

[30] Muhammad Dan Suleiman, 'What Makes Islamist Movements Different? A Study of Liberia's NPFL and Nigeria's Boko Haram in West Africa', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32, no. 1 (2017), 1–19 (pp. 4–5).

and continued with a more radical Salafist interpretation of the Quran.[31] His message gave his followers the nickname 'Boko Haram', meaning Western education is forbidden. The Boko Haram was inspired further by the global jihadists who wanted to have Sharia laws introduced in Nigeria. In the beginning, the movement was more peaceful compared to later developments, and their grievance concerned political change in the country. Yusuf built a new mosque and followed the example of the religious renewal of Uthman Dan Fodio, a reformer of the early 1800s, and his jihadi legacy.[32]

The new Ibn Taymiyyah Masjid Mosque was the centre of community mobilisation. Boko Haram followers supported new small business ventures and helped young men when they struggled with unemployment. The community programmes resulted in motorbike taxis and support to new members who wanted to get married and start family life. The members of Boko Haram came from poor areas of Maiduguri. Soon, the federal government started to follow their anti-state rhetoric. However, the challenge was not just to the state or to the social situation, there were also assassinations of religious leaders who opposed Boko Haram.[33]

Early on, Muhammad Alli, a leading member of the Maiduguri youth group under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuf, called 2002 a *hijra* and left the town with a small faction of the youth and started a separatist community with strict Islamic principles. In December 2003, Muhammad Alli's group, known also by the name 'the Nigerian Taliban', was in confrontation with police security forces and came under siege. The siege ended in January 2004 with shootings, and most of the members along with their leader Alli were killed.[34]

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31 Mike Smith, *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria's Unholy War* (London: Tauris, 2015), p. 39.

32 Jo Voll, 'Boko Haram: Religion and Violence in the 21st Century', *Religions*, 6, no. 4 (2015), 1182–1202 (pp. 1189–1192).

33 Hilary Matfess, 'Boko Haram: History and Context', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: African History* (2017) <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.119> [accessed June 2023].

34 Azumah, 'Boko Haram in Retrospect', p. 40.

The turning point in the tension and clashes between the federal government and Boko Haram occurred in July 2009. A group of Boko Haram followers were travelling to a funeral when the police stopped them. The police security forces started to beat group members, and when they tried to run away the police started shooting at their backs. In revenge, Boko Haram attacked police stations and fighting broke out in which the police killed between 700 and 1000 Boko Haram members. Because of the uprising, the army raided Maiduguri Ibn Taymiyyah Masjid Mosque and Muhammed Yusuf was later arrested by soldiers. After interrogation, the police shot and killed Yusuf.[35] The killing of the Boko Haram leader sparked controversy and accusations of the extra-judicial killing of Yusuf by the state of Nigeria.[36]

Boko Haram never disappeared but went underground, and a year later, in 2010, the new Boko Haram leader Abubarak Shekau declared jihad and started launching terrorist attacks in the northern states of Nigeria. Boko Haram rapidly changed from proselyting and preaching community and from conducting illegal activities into a violent terrorist organisation.[37] Abubakar Shekau pledged loyalty to international terrorist organisations like Al Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the Islamic States in Iraq and Somalia (ISIS). Shekau also developed a hatred against the United States of America and Christians: '[W]e know what is happening in this world, it is a jihad war against Christians and Christianity.'[38] Boko Haram claims that their violence is a response to a long history of the persecution of Muslims in Nigeria. The sect sees that Western-style democracy, education, and alliances with non-Muslims are dominating in Nigeria. The leaders of Boko Haram use a religious rhetoric of victimhood in order to justify their violence against other Muslims, Christians, and the government of Nigeria.[39]

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35 Matfess, 'Boko Haram: History and Context'.
36 Comolli, *Boko Haram*, pp. 55, 116.
37 Matfess, 'Boko Haram: History and Context'.
38 Azumah, 'Boko Haram in Retrospect', p. 41.
39 Alex Thurston, 'The Disease Is Unbelief: Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview', The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper, no. 22 (January, 2016), pp. 1–33 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-disease-is-unbelief-boko-harams-religious-and-political-worldview/> [accessed May 2023] (pp. 5–6).

The Nigerian government response led to the establishment of the Joint Task Force Operation Restore Order (JTF ORO) in 2011. Nigeria has the best equipped and funded military forces in West Africa, with 80 000 active troops plus 82 000 paramilitaries. The government declared a state of emergence on 31 December 2011 for six months. The reason for the emergency was multiple attacks carried out by Boko Haram during the Christmas period of 2011. After the emergency period, attacks against government buildings and churches intensified. Nigerian Christians were dissatisfied with government efforts to help churches and victims and censured the lack of clear condemnation on the part of Muslim leaders of the violent acts of Boko Haram. Also, Muslim leaders were suspicious of the government and President Goodluck Jonathan because most of victims were Muslims and they believed that President Jonathan was influenced by the Christian leaders.[40]

Peace Talks

The Nigerian government attempted to open talks with Boko Haram, but negotiations proved fruitless. The former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo met with Boko Haram leader Babakura Fuggu, the brother-in-law of Mohammed Yusuf, first in 2011 and then in 2012. The issue at the centre of the negotiations was the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf. Babakura Fuggu was also in danger because he was ready to meet the former leader of Nigeria. There was discussion of conditions for a ceasefire and amnesty for Boko Haram members, along with talk of employment opportunities in the future. Boko Haram demanded payment of compensation to the family of Mohammed Yusuf. In 2012, the day following his meeting with former President Obasanjo, Babakura Fuggu was shot and killed by a Boko Haram member.[41]

The highest authority of Islam in Nigeria, the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar III, introduced an amnesty programme for Boko Haram, but it was rejected by President Goodluck Jonathan.

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[40] Comolli, *Boko Haram*, pp. 109–113.
[41] Comolli, *Boko Haram*, pp. 115–116.

However, a committee to evaluate the feasibility of pardoning militants was founded. Other world leaders encouraged the Nigerian government to discuss and meet the enemy Boko Haram. Unfortunately, discussions and plans of offering an amnesty to Boko Haram failed when their leader Abubakar Shekau stated that they had done nothing wrong, and it was the government that needed an amnesty due to the atrocities against Muslims.[42]

Darlington Mutanda argues that the influence of Boko Haram in Nigeria is basically a result of poor governance. The marginalisation of north-east Nigeria has caused insurgency, which has spread into neighbouring countries, and there is still an urgent need for peace negotiations.[43] As noted already, the aim of this article is to examine how faith-based peace building might offer a way forward in Nigeria by drawing a comparison with what happened in the civil war in the West African country of Sierra Leone in the 1990s and identifying what lessons might be learnt. The next section thus describes the conflict in Sierra Leone and the process that emerged from it.

The Civil War in Sierra Leone

The civil war in Sierra Leone lasted for eleven years and has been described as one of the dirtiest and most violent wars in Africa.[44] It began in March 1991 when the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked the area of Sierra Leone bordering Liberia together with the Liberian rebel army. The RUF leader Foday Sankoh and Liberian guerrilla leader Charles Taylor had formed a coalition and began to take control of the diamond mines in the Kono district of Sierra Leone. The RUF rebels found some popularity in the beginning, but after a series of atrocities they quickly lost the support in the eyes of the people.[45] The casualties of war amounted to about 70 000 lost lives

[42] Comolli, *Boko Haram*, pp. 117–118.
[43] Mutanda, 'What Makes Terrorism Tick in Africa?', p. 28.
[44] David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), pp. 219–240.
[45] Penfold, 'Faith in Resolving Sierra Leone's Bloody Conflict', pp. 550–553.

and 2.6 million displaced people in a country that has a population of 6 million.[46]

The RUF originated in the 1980s as a protest movement but later continued with violence that systematically targeted civilians. The RUF was formed when a group of teachers and students began to protest against President Joseph Saidu Momoh because of reduced salaries and a state of economic emergency. The beginning of the rebel movement was a reflection of the failure of the Sierra Leone state to provide education and welfare to a generation of young people. Later, Foday Sankoh, a former army corporal, took the leadership of the RUF group.[47]

In Sierra Leone, the war was fuelled by a socio-economic conflict and grievances; however, the roots of the conflict are deeper in the history of Sierra Leone. The civil war in the 1990s was the culmination of marginalisation processes in the countryside. The former colonial administration, opportunities for formal education, and the discovery of rich diamond mines started to change the society. The result of the social change was a large migration of young men from rural areas to the capital Freetown for education and to the diamond mines for a better life and income. The poor rural areas continued their life as before: extended families and young people living under the authority and control of elders.[48]

During the war, the RUF advanced into rural areas and its recruitment strategy was the killing of parents and family members in order to force children and young people to destroy their family ties. The old family hierarchy was replaced by the rebel army and its fluid order. The new social hierarchy made it easier to force abducted children and youth to participate in murder, rape, and torture.[49] The RUF shaped

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[46] Mary Kaldor and James Vincent, *Evaluation of UNDP Assistance to Conflict-Affected Countries: Case Study Sierra Leone* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2006), pp. 5–6.
[47] Alimammy Koroma, 'The Power of Organization', in *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion and Conflict Resolution*, ed. by David Little (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 278–301 (pp. 283–284).
[48] Catherine Bolten, 'We Have Been Sensitized: Ex-Combatants, Marginalization, and Youth in Postwar Sierra Leone', *American Anthropologist*, 14, no. 3 (2012), 496–508 (pp. 498–499).
[49] Bolten, 'We Have Been Sensitized', pp. 498–499.

a culture of violence and a new closed world of combatants with a strict command structure based on fear. A sign of the fragility of the country was the absence of an organised army. The underpaid soldiers in the Sierra Leonean army had the epithet 'sobels', soldiers by day and rebels by night, and there were government soldiers and rebels mining diamonds side by side in Kono.[50]

The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL)

During the war, the World Conference for Religion and Peace (WCRP) decided to help Muslims and Christians in Sierra Leone. The WCRP encouraged religious leaders to come together and form an organisation for dialogue and peace building in order to encourage every level of society to pursue conflict transformation and reconciliation.[51] In Sierra Leone, there was already strong resistance to the war as a number of civil society organisations were actively working for peace. Muslim and Christian delegates came together on April 1997 and decided to form the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL). The founding members were prominent leaders of Islamic and Christian organisations. The representatives of African Traditional Religion (ATR) were initially ignored and excluded from IRCSL. However, ATR leaders joined the reconciliation process after the civil war.[52]

Sheikh Conteh, the chief Imam of Freetown, described the meaning of good cooperation between the faiths thus:

> There has been a marriage between the followers of these two main denominations [sic] in our country, Muslims and Christians. Before the rebel war […] [from] the beginning of the history of this country Muslims and Christians have been living together, loving each other, interacting, exchanging ideas, and they have seen themselves not as Muslims or Christians but as people of the same Creator and people worshipping the same Creator and people recognize the talents of the respective members of denominations.[53]

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50 Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, The International African Institute (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), pp. 7, 28.

51 Penfold, 'Faith in Resolving Sierra Leones's Bloody Conflict', p. 551.

52 Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian Leaders Working Together', pp. 82–84.

53 Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian Leaders Working Together', p. 84. Interview of Imam Sheikh Conteh in Freetown 2013.

In May 1997, one month after the formation of the IRCSL, the government of Sierra Leone was overthrown in a military coup. The military junta, named the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), took power in the capital Freetown and invited the RUF rebel movement to join them. The international community refused to recognise the AFRC. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had a meeting together with the United Kingdom and the United Nations Security Council and they decided to remove the AFRC junta from power. After this decision in February 1998, the West African army under the command of Nigerian troops arrived in Freetown and forced the junta to leave the capital city. Democracy was restored and President Kabbah's government returned to power. However, there was worse to come, because the RUF army was still in power outside of Freetown in the rural areas and was strongly supported by Liberian leader Charles Taylor.[54]

In December 1998, rebels showed their strength and, with the assistance of Liberia, attacked Freetown, killing people and abducting children. The IRCSL appealed to both parties in the conflict and spoke against violence and revenge. After the catastrophe in Freetown, the United Nation's special envoy, Francis Okello, asked Muslim and Christian leaders for help in starting the dialogue and negotiation process between Sierra Leone's President Kabbah and RUF leader Sankoh. The IRCSL actively spoke against war, and, moreover, the religious communities provided humanitarian assistance to the rebels.[55]

The leader of the Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone, Reverend Moses Khanu, remembered meeting with the RUF leader:

> We tried to find means and ways how to talk to Foday Sankoh, the rebel leader. So, we had access to him when he was caught; he was arrested in Nigeria and brought to Sierra Leone as a prisoner. He was to stand trial. He stood trial and he was condemned to die. He had pyjamas with a big [letter] C. We went in there and we discussed with him about […] his men to stop the war. We had this discussion a couple of times. And finally he agreed to

[54] Penfold, 'Faith in Resolving Sierra Leones's Bloody Conflict', pp. 551–552.
[55] Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian Leaders Working Together', p. 86.

> have a voluntary ceasefire. He called for it and called the men to cease fire. Nobody forced [him] during that time. So, we continued meeting with him. He agreed for him and the government to meet and talk peace.[56]

The Peace Process

The IRCSL delegation met with Sankoh in prison and he was given permission to use the radio to contact his field commander. The RUF field commander responded and released fifty-four abducted children. Sankoh was released from prison and he was ready to sit at the negotiating table. The IRCSL travelled to the neighbouring country of Liberia to meet with President Charles Taylor, whose presence was necessary in the peace process because he was the biggest supporter of Sierra Leone's rebels. The IRCSL was a neutral peace broker and had direct contacts to both the government and President Kabbah and the rebel leaders, which helped in setting up dialogue between the two parties.[57]

The RUF invited the IRCSL to participate an informal meeting before the negotiations. The West African countries were present at the negotiation table with the United States and the United Kingdom. During the negotiations in Lomé, the IRCSL, WCRP, and Norwegian Church AID acted as informal mediators and, in remaining neutral facilitators, convinced the parties to stay at the negotiating table. The Muslim and Christian members of the IRCSL supported peace and forgiveness, and when there were problems in negotiations they encouraged negotiators to continue their meeting with prayers. Finally, only five months after the rebel attack on Freetown in December 1998, the Lomé Peace Accord was signed in May 1999.[58]

Before the peace talks, President Kabbah and Foday Sankoh had agreed to a ceasefire. The Lomé Peace Accord opened a new avenue for the people of Sierra Leone, and the agreement signed between rebel movements and the government led to a new power-sharing unity government in which the RUF leader Foday Sankoh became the

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[56] Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian Leaders Working Together', p. 87. Interview of Revd Moses B. Khanu in Freetown 2013.
[57] Koroma, 'The Power of Organization', pp. 291–293.
[58] Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian Leaders Working Together', p. 88.

country's vice-president and cabinet minister for mineral resources. The treaty provided an opportunity for the rebel army to be transformed into a political party and a blanket amnesty was granted for rebel soldiers. However, the peace in Sierra Leone was fragile and the ceasefire was sometimes violated by the RUF troops. In May 2000, RUF members guarding the house of Foday Sankoh opened fire on demonstrators, killing many civilians, and the incident led to the arrest of Foday Sankoh. The imprisonment of the former rebel leader facilitated the completion of the disarmament and demobilisation process in Sierra Leone.[59]

The Lóme peace agreement also called for the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to deal with the brutalities committed during the war. The decision followed to start the process of truth-telling for communal reconciliation. Over nine thousand written statements were collected from victims and ex-combatants, and fourteen victim hearings were convened. Restorative justice touched the rural communities when Christian, Muslim, and African Traditional Religion representatives organised over seventy reconciliation ceremonies in villages. Religious rituals may offer new ways of building reconciliation using local cultural resources.[60] Religious words such as peace, violence, and reconciliation have emotional and religious meanings. The words have also political and social importance when they touch people's fears. Asking for forgiveness and forgiving are powerful in the process of reconciliation.[61]

Conclusions

The peace process in Sierra Leone was a strong example of the role of the religious communities and actors. Peace mediators were neutral, building trust on both sides of the conflict. When the warring parties signed the peace treaty, a restorative justice was needed for the people

[59] Penfold, 'Faith in Resolving Sierra Leones's Bloody Conflict', pp. 554–555; Portaankorva, 'Muslim and Christian Leaders Working Together', p. 88.
[60] Hilary Anne Hurd, 'The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone as Peace Facilitator in Post 1991 Sierra Leone', *Peace and Change*, 41, no. 4 (2016), 425–451 (pp. 430–440).
[61] Maria Ericson, *Search for a Shared Moral Landscape: An Exploration Based Upon a Study of Northern Ireland and South Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 24–25.

affected by the conflict and to integrate perpetrators of violence back into society.[62] Muslim and Christian leaders have often avoided dialogue and close cooperation because they have been afraid of compromising their own convictions. In the contemporary conflicts in West Africa, there is a need for a deeper interreligious peace building and conflict transformation efforts.[63] In the African context, it is important that the Islamic framework and cultural context is a part of the peace building curriculum together with Christian and African Traditional Religion.[64] The lessons from the faith-based peace building in Sierra Leone are not easily transferable to the Boko Haram insurgency context. However, there are certain principles that can be applied in practice.

Boko Haram have continued their attacks against churches and Christians in Nigeria. In 2021, the Baptist Convention of Nigeria asked the federal government of Nigeria to prosecute all surrendered Boko Haram terrorists. Baptist leaders urged the government to deal decisively with kidnappers and to compensate all the families of kidnapped children and other victims.[65] In critiquing Boko Haram, the Baptist Convention leaders should also be ready to question the Nigerian government's excessive use of force and ask all parties to refrain from violence. Following the example of the peace process in Sierra Leone, the role of peace builders is to be trusted peace brokers with good relations to all parties involved in the conflict. It is impossible for the Baptist community to mediate peace without neutrality towards both sides of the conflict.

Looking at the situation in Nigeria, one can conclude that there is a need for direct peace talks between the government and the Boko Haram. According to Lederach, negotiations with terrorists provide possibilities for a constructive change. Terrorism can be seen as a

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62 Koroma, 'The Power of Organization', pp. 291–293.

63 Jari Portaankorva, Uskontodiplomatia ja konfliktinratkaisu: Muslimit ja kristityt sovinnon rakentajina (doctoral dissertation, Helsinki University, 2018), pp. 45, 64.

64 Abu-Nimer and Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Muslim Peace-Building Actors in Africa and the Balkan Context', pp. 553–573.

65 'Prosecute Surrendered Boko Haram Terrorists, Baptist Church tells FG', *This Day*, 20 August 2020 <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/08/20/prosecute-surrendered-boko-haram-terrorists-baptist-church-tells-fg/> [accessed July 2023].

position of people using violent means in order to achieve a social change in a society and overcome powerlessness.[66] People living in Nigeria's Borno state are alienated, and Boko Haram has used this political and religious vacuum in their propaganda. There is an urgency to discuss the root-causes of conflict and build stronger and more meaningful relationships between the government and local communities in Nigeria. In the conflicts of Liberia and Sierra Leone and the anti-state rebellion of Boko Haram there are similar denominators, such as social marginalisation of the youth, poverty, and a fragile state. Muslim extremist groups and rebel movements in West Africa are not different in their basic pattern of resistance and rebellion against their governments.[67]

Baptist Churches in Nigeria have been working together with other Christian communities in helping people forcefully displaced in the areas in north-eastern Nigeria affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. Baptists are re-integrating migrated and displaced people into the society and transforming their lives.[68] A recent study on how pastors in the Nigerian Baptist Convention are using social media shows the interest for new ways of peace building at the grassroots level. There is a need for a dialogue that helps to resolve conflicts at the local level and promote peaceful coexistence of religious communities.[69] Also, the role of Muslim leaders in Nigeria, especially Islamic clerics, is to challenge Boko Haram's teaching and interpretation of the Quran. A just peace approach challenges churches and mosques alike to support non-violence and restorative justice in the midst of war and to work closely together with other faiths.

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[66] John Paul Lederach, 'Conflict Transformation', *Beyond Intractability*, ed. by Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, 2003 <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/transformation> [last accessed 18 May 2024] (p. 54).

[67] Suleiman, 'What Makes Islamist Movements Different?', pp. 1, 12–14.

[68] Adebayo Afolaranmi, 'Faith-Based Interventions in the Reintegration of Displaced Boko Haram victims into the Society', *African Journal of Political Sciences*, 9, no. 2 (2020), 297–314 (pp. 306–310).

[69] Adebayo Ola Afolaranmi and Akeem Adekunle Amodu, 'Peaceful Coexistence, Social Media, and the Nigerian Baptist Pastors: Challenges and Possible Ways Out', *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)*, 8, no. 6 (2022), 117–127 (p. 117).

Book Reviews

Lee B. Spitzer, *Sympathy, Solidarity, and Silence: Three European Baptist Responses to the Holocaust* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2022), 231 pages. ISBN: 9780817018351.

Reviewed by Brian Talbot

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The Holocaust was one of the most horrifying events of the twentieth century. From the safe vantage point of a later generation, it is easy to assume that professing Christians and other people of good character would find such behaviour totally unacceptable. However, the record of history is much more mixed, with varied responses to these events in different countries. Dr Spitzer, through careful use of primary sources from the era, has set out to analyse the responses of Baptists in the United States and Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. His first book, *Baptists, Jews and the Holocaust: The Hand of Sincere Friendship*, covered the responses of Baptists in America. This second volume looks at the pattern of responses from Christian communities in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.

Part one of the book covers responses from the United Kingdom in relation to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland and the Baptist Union of Scotland. Led by their General Secretary, M. E. Aubrey, a clear steer came from the BUGBI to deplore the increasing antisemitic campaigns of the German government from 1933. Members of churches were urged to create 'Friends of Israel' committees and to do what they could to assist the Jewish people. Initial enthusiastic support from members of the churches included protests against antisemitism, welcoming Jewish refugees into their homes and even in one case welcoming a Jewish follower of Jesus as an interim pastor in 1942. Scottish Baptists displayed similar concern for the plight of the Jewish people. However, the author notes that these British Baptist Unions, like other Baptist Unions in Europe, appeared a little too eager

to restore tiers of fellowship with German and Italian Baptists, and insufficiently willing to provide practical aid for the Jewish survivors of the concentration camps.

Part two covers the response of French Baptists to the plight of the Jewish people. Thousands of Jewish people fled from Germany to France in the 1930s. French Baptists demonstrated solidarity with the Jews by organising what practical assistance they could provide to support them in these difficult years, in partnership with the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ), despite their government's reluctance to play its part in this humanitarian crisis. The dedicated support of French Baptists continued even after the Nazi occupation of their country. They demonstrated significant and sustained courage in maintaining this ministry in the face of a hostile regime between 1942 and 1944. By contrast, in part three, the silence of German Baptists concerning the plight of the Jews needed an explanation. With the rare exceptions of individuals who took Jews into their homes and the notable courage of Arnold Koster, pastor of Vienna Baptist Church, who preached and campaigned against the Nazis, far too many Baptist leaders and church members were complicit with the regime during these dreadful years. Unfortunately, in the post-war years, the desire to restore friendly relations with Baptist Unions that had been broken by the second war, was not accompanied by an equal desire to hold German Baptist leaders accountable for their support for Nazism and failure to support the Jewish people.

This is an excellent scholarly account of Baptist responses to the Holocaust. It is also very readable and the author demonstrates a clear moral vision throughout. In view of the alarming rise in the number of reported antisemitic incidents in recent years in the United Kingdom, the problem of antisemitism is just as clearly a major contemporary issue today. I would strongly urge all readers of *JEBS* to read this important book.

Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), *Loving the Planet: Interfaith Essays on Ecology, Love, and Theology* (Oxford: Firedint Publishing, 2022), 229 pages. ISBN: 9781999940744.

Reviewed by Alistair Cuthbert

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Loving the Planet is the second edited volume to emerge from the 'Study of Love in Religion' project which started in 2012 and is based at Regent's Park College, Oxford under the tutelage of Paul S. Fiddes. This specific set of multi-faith essays on 'eco-love-theology' came from an online conference held in 2021 entitled 'Loving the Planet'. Following on from the edited essays of the first volume, *Love as Common Ground* (Lexington Books, 2021), the essays in this second volume continue the overall DNA and aim of the project: namely, to unearth a place of common ground where followers of the three Abrahamic faiths can explore and identify areas of convergence and divergence with regard to loving planet earth at this imminent time of ecological crisis.

The edited volume comprises eight essays: four authored by Christian scholars, two by Islamic writers, and two by Jewish theologians. The essays are as constructive as they are reiterative and investigative. The opening chapter by DeMoor compares the intersubjectivity of nature with that of human life and posits some new theological ideas such as 'interbeing', 'lovescapes', and 'edge-spaces'. These ideas overlap with Fiddes' previous work on 'inscapes' as well as the Celtic Christian concept of 'thin-places' where the imminent and transcendent meet. These concepts naturally align with the intersubjectivity of the webs of communal relationships which point towards a greater interconnection between humanity and nature. Differently, the other two essays by Christian thinkers, Drummond and Marcar, aim to re-capture past sage advice and

wisdom from the likes of St Cuthbert and Thomas Traherne and rework it in order to re-sacralise planet earth and establish human goodwill and action towards planet earth as an act of divine worship which will bring us closer to God.

Meanwhile, the chapters by Jewish thinkers are constructive but from a polemical and corrective angle, since both Raphael and Rothenberg acknowledge that there is no command to love the planet in Jewish literature and so, historically, the emphasis upon transcendence has maintained the boundary between God, humanity, and planet earth. Similarly, Islamic scholars Zekrgoo, Tajer, and Moqbel construct eco-love-theology by reimagining past Islamic poetry and moral economics within a new understanding of nature as an expression of divine love, thereby producing different ways to think of God and nature as more imminent and inter-related.

The final chapter is Fiddes' summary of the previous seven essays, in which themes are synthesised and then used constructively to create elements of an eco-love-theology, which address some of the pressing ecological issues currently facing the earth and humankind. As expected, Fiddes does a stellar job in eliciting certain themes from the other essays, interlacing them with some of the common theological ideas from his own academic *oeuvre*, and presenting a helpful eco-theology for the current zeitgeist. Overall, his account contains a greater sense of imminence due to an increased panentheistic presence of God, and so loving God equates more with loving planet earth, since it is *actually* in God.

For those invested in ecumenical dialogue about urgent moral issues that currently face the human race, this edited volume is a welcome contribution to be engaged with. For some, however, the fine line between panentheism and pantheism could be viewed as too blurred in the attempt by the authors to equate loving nature and planet earth with loving God.

Ian Randall, *Mission Not Impossible: Baptist Missionaries' Experiences and Reflections* (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society and BMS World Mission, 2023), 188 pages. ISBN: 9780903166492.

Reviewed by Arthur Brown

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This book is a project of the Baptist Historical Society, the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College, Oxford, and BMS World Mission. Ian Randall expertly draws together the memories and experiences of seventy former BMS mission workers. Randall connected with respondents who served with BMS in diverse contexts from the early 1950s onwards. Using prescribed questions, respondents were asked to reflect on their journey into world mission and the insights they gained from their time with BMS.

The book follows a helpful progression that relates to the lived experience of those respondents. After an introduction, the author carefully weaves anecdotal responses into a very readable narrative, bringing his own valuable insights along the way.

Respondents were asked, among other things, about how and when they experienced a call to mission and significant influences on that call; what was helpful or missing from the training they received; how decisions on where they would serve were made and how they felt about this; challenges faced on arrival in their new contexts; areas of work they were involved in and significant experiences and achievements; how they were changed as a result of their experiences; the legacy of BMS and wider mission activity; how they view world Christianity today and the differences compared to their time overseas.

This important contribution to mission history and thinking is not simply a reflection on former things. It is also far from an idealised or romantic notion of global mission activity. Faithful women and men are honest about the difficulties they faced. They, with the help of Randall, bring important insights and questions that warrant further thought for contemporary mission leaders, both within global and UK mission settings. Themes and insights are highlighted which are of significant relevance for the European church in the twenty-first

century. These include those relating to hospitality and welcome; the place of the local church in global mission; the outlook on the world with regard to injustice; a focus on materialism; and the realities of white privilege and power in mission. These are all important issues for the church to engage with, and such valuable insights can be drawn not only from the global church but from those who have served it interculturally.

This is an inspiring read. Great things were achieved by God, who used ordinary people who were willing to attempt great things for God. However, it is also true that things did not always work out in the ways people may have hoped for. This is the reality of mission and ministry. And yet, it is the faithfulness that shines through, both of God and of those seeking to follow God's calling on their lives. Former BMS General Director, mission worker, and respondent David Kerrigan rightly concludes, 'The role of BMS World Mission has always been changing, as it needs to in order to play its part — a changing part — in an ever-changing world.' This book will be a valuable resource for those in mission leadership within and beyond BMS as we continue to listen, learn, and develop our approach to global and local mission.

Ashley Cocksworth, Rachel Starr, and Stephen Burns (eds), with Nicola Slee, *From the Shores of Silence: Conversations in Feminist Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2023), 236 pages. ISBN: 9780334060963.

Reviewed by Lina Toth

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A few years ago (see *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 22, no.1), I had the pleasure of reviewing Nicola Slee's book, *Fragments for Fractured Times* (London: SCM, 2020). This time, it is a review of a volume written in honour of this poet-theologian, by as diverse a group of former students, colleagues, and friends as are Slee's literary and theological interests. Many of the authors, as expected, are based in academia, but some are clergy, creative writers, or leaders in different Christian

institutions or initiatives. Their contributions are roughly divided into four parts, or 'four waves pulled by the energetic rhythms of Nicola Slee's own writing' (p. 11). Each of these parts opens up with one of Slee's own poems.

The titles of the first two parts are self-explanatory: 'Poetry' and 'Faith and Feminism'. The third is entitled 'The Praying Body' and explores aspects of practising one's Christian faith and spirituality, informed by Slee's feminist practical theology. The last part, 'Moving Theology', is the least defined, and consists of only two chapters which, although rich in what they have to offer individually, do not seem to share a common thread — at least not one I could trace.

Almost as an echo to Slee's *Fragments for Fractured Times*, *From the Shores of Silence* displays fragments, tensions, and fault lines between different approaches to and expressions of faith, in and between its thirteen chapters. Some of this is no doubt due to the nature of the festschrift genre, but it also seems to be an intentional reflection of Slee's own ways of crossing disciplinary and literary boundaries. What comes across very clearly in this choir of different voices is the importance of relationships — not only as an integral way of doing creative and theological work, but also as a testimony to Slee's own work of connecting people and inviting them into collaborative projects and processes. One such network — the Research Symposium of the Faith Lives of Women and Girls — was born out of one of Slee's most influential works, *Women's Faith Development* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), providing space and connection to a generation of theologians in an emerging field.

Given Slee's feminist commitments, unsurprisingly the collection includes some difficult-to-stomach reflections on violence against women and girls in Scripture, and the violence that is still perpetrated against them today. Women's lived experience is explored in the contributors' attention to the 'ordinary' aspects of life, including the significance — and the potential — of their bodily realities. Other themes come to the surface, too, such as worship and prayer, leadership, and race. As such, this book would be of interest to those following

Slee's work, those interested in practical theology and/or feminist theology, but also those drawn to the poetic and spiritual languages of faith.

Dennis C. Bustin and Barry H. Howson, *Zealous for the Lord: The Life and Thought of Seventeenth Century Baptist Hanserd Knollys* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 121 pages. ISBN: 9781532636288.

Reviewed by Brian Talbot

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Zealous for the Lord: The Life and Thought of Seventeenth Century Baptist Hanserd Knollys is a short, popular biography of a key seventeenth-century English Baptist pastor, written by two well-known Baptist historians who have written substantial earlier works on Knollys. Barry Howson wrote *"Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions": The Question of Orthodoxy regarding the Theology of Hansard Knollys (c 1599–1691)* in 2001 and Dennis Bustin penned *Paradox and Perseverance: Hanserd Knollys, Particular Baptist Pioneer in Seventeenth-Century England* (2006). In view of the rising cost of academic publications, this shorter study was produced for a more general audience, rather than for scholars specialising in seventeenth-century church history.

The authors were convinced of the importance of promoting early Baptist history, and in particular the life and work of this influential Baptist minister. The book is divided into eight short chapters covering Knollys' early years; the civil war and Christian liberty; the Commonwealth years that included controversies with Quakers; 'Persecution, Ministry and Writing'; then two chapters covering his views on 'Christian Life, Church and Ministry' and 'Knollys and His Eschatology'. The final chapter contains lessons we can learn from his life and ministry.

This book is warmly welcomed as an introductory study on the life of an influential seventeenth-century Baptist minister. At the start of the book is a helpful timeline of Knollys' extremely long life, giving the key dates of the most important events that took place. The book also

contains helpful footnotes that direct attention to other primary and secondary works for readers who wish to engage in further studies of Knollys' life and work or of Baptist history more generally in this time period.

Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven (ed.), *Baptists in Early North America* Vol VII: *1st Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2021), 472 pages. ISBN: 9780881467864.

Reviewed by Lon Graham

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Work in the archives lies at the heart of historical research. Finding the material, combing through the dry and dusty papers, transcribing the sometimes-near-illegible writing… this is a rite of passage for all burgeoning historians. The major limitation of this way of things is readily apparent: it is open only to those who have the ability, financial and otherwise, to journey to and spend time in the archives. Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven has brought archival research closer to all in making material relating to the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia available for a wider audience. The Baptist church in Philadelphia occupies an outsized role in the history of the Baptists in the United States, and the time-period covered in the work was vitally important for both the growing denomination and country.

Church records are the stuff of congregational life. Sermons may give insight into a church's history 'from above', from the point of view of a singular church leader, but records of congregational meetings give a much closer look into church life 'from below', where the people, ostensibly the centre of gravity for a Baptist church, have a voice. However, even that has limitations, which are seen in the records of the Philadelphia Baptist church. For example, the major theological issue raised during the period covered by the book (Calvinism vs universalism) is covered by the victors in that debate (the Calvinists), a group that, at one time, was the minority. The voice of the universalist contingent is largely silent.

Despite these limitations, church records are, in many ways, decidedly Baptist, as they give insight into the discernment processes of the congregation. They show the issues that faced the church, the personalities involved, and how the people moved forward in what often proved to be difficult times. The issues that faced the Baptist church in Philadelphia are largely unsurprising: financial problems and difficulties in finding and keeping a suitable pastor — two issues that were by no means mutually exclusive.

Van Broekhoven offers both summaries of the archival material as well as the very words of the record books. When the words of the records themselves are presented, Van Broekhoven has largely preserved them as they were written. This means the inclusion of abbreviations, archaic spellings found in the original, and even marked-out words. While those unfamiliar with the spectrum of eighteenth-century English spelling conventions may find this hard to read at first, it puts the reader as close as possible to the archives themselves. Van Broekhoven also offers helpful explanatory notes. For example, a 'John Blackwell' is mentioned as a possibility for supplying the pulpit, and she notes that 'John' was 'written in later in pencil and in a different hand'. These are valuable additions, again putting the reader as close as possible to the archives themselves.

Van Broekhoven has done all those interested in Baptist and American history a favour in publishing these church records. Her work is highly recommended.

Corneliu Constantineanu and Peter Penner (eds), *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2022), 1676 pages. ISBN: 9781783688227.

Reviewed by Toivo Pilli

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This is a contextually informed, easy-to-read-and-apply commentary of the whole Bible. One may doubt if one-volume commentaries can say much about the biblical text. This volume does. It offers fresh insights,

especially because the editors and authors have made a conscious effort to interpret the books of the Bible from a geographically specific angle. They are using knowledge, images, and experience from their own Eastern and Central European framework, at the same time being informed by wider biblical scholarship. This is not the only volume of its kind. Langham Publishing has carried out other similar projects. Recently published are the *Africa Bible Commentary* in English and French, the *Slavic Bible Commentary* in Russian, and the *Arab Bible Commentary* in Arabic, to mention only a few titles.

As the interpretative context covers many former Communist countries, the comparisons and experiences emerging from the Communist past, illustrating interpretations of biblical texts on Christian life and calling, occur more than once on the pages of this volume. Perhaps it will take another couple of decades before the changes that occurred after the collapse of this political system will find their way convincingly into similar volumes. Post-Communist changes and what these actually mean need to settle more deeply into the cultural soil. However, the work done at this time is scholarly and offers fresh avenues into the understanding of Scriptures.

Certainly, there are other commentaries that set their goal to be strictly academic. These often assume biblical scholars to be their audience. This commentary is different: it is written by scholars to practitioners — pastors, students, preachers, and Bible study group leaders. It is a helpful tool also in Bible schools which do not pursue only scholarly details but are committed to help lay leaders in their ministry. This, no doubt, does not exclude academic credibility! As a person who preaches regularly, I have turned to this volume more than once. I have always found it helpful, a tool that opens my mind to inspiring explanations or offers helpful suggestions to probe more deeply into the meaning of the passage.

This book is an important tool for church workers and students in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, I am convinced that its relevance is wider. I recommend my Western colleagues to consult this commentary in order to better understand the tradition from which it has emerged. For a long time, theologians and ministers in Central and Eastern Europe, many of them under totalitarian Communist regimes,

relied on Western sources in their preparation for preaching. Now, the Central and Eastern European Protestant scholars are contributing their interpretative work to their colleagues who live in other contexts, theologically and culturally. Biblical scholarship, tinted by the regional traditions and emphases in church life, is vigorous in Post-Communist Europe, and it has much to offer to the wider world, not only regionally, but also globally. This volume is proof of this.

James S. Currie, *The Church Beyond the Wall: Life and Ministry in the Former East Germany* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 91 pages. ISBN:9781532652219.

Reviewed by Ksenija Magda

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This study by the American pastor, James S. Currie, is a spin-off from his doctoral thesis 'Christianity and Marxism: A Historical Perspective on the Role of Ideology in the Thought of Hanfried Müller', defended in 1997 at Rice University, Houston, Texas. Currie wanted 'to demonstrate the importance of one's starting point in articulating the gospel' (p. viii) by juxtaposing two Protestant theologians in East Germany (GDR): Hanfried Müller, professor at the Humbold University in (East) Berlin, and the university pastor from Halle, Johannes Hamel. Both were influenced by Barth and Bonhoeffer but made different decisions about living as Christians in the GDR. This was because Müller's 'starting point' was Marxism, and Hamel's was the Bible, finds Currie.

The booklet is divided into five chapters. The first three are about German historical background, the East German leaders, and the theology of Barth and Bonhoeffer. The last two evaluate Müller and Hamel respectively.

Currie could have linked the occasion for this book to the thirtieth anniversary of the 1989 revolution. Reading the book with this

kind of expectation has, however, been disappointing. I read it as a biblical scholar who engages German historical criticism; as someone who lived in West Germany during the 1970s and who worked in Yugoslavian communism in the 1980s. I also read it as a seminary student whose American missiology teacher was deported from Yugoslavia as a US military spy.

Currie's book is inadequate in the face of the severe deconstruction of all segments of German life, thought, and society after World War Two. Refuting 'Christian socialism' portrayed by an alleged sold-out soul such as Müller's is not convincing. Currie notices that GDR communism happened on fully Protestant soil but fails to elaborate how that matters to GDR post-war history. There is also little talk about the complexity of 'Protestantism' in Germany in the early twentieth century. Currie does not notice that Hamel's Halle was both obliged to liberal historical criticism (with Schleiermacher, Salamo, and Semmler) and to the so-called 'Halle' pietism by August Hermann Franke. Both emphasised the Bible, but in different ways.

So, Currie's conclusion comes mostly from bias. In his doctoral thesis he insisted on the necessity of a critical approach to *all* socio-political systems. Here, he clearly favours capitalism and judges Müller for his voluntary exodus to GDR in 1952. Hamel's approach is termed 'biblical' because he engages the Bible in public speech. Currie does not distinguish between the different audiences. Müller converses with secular academia and Müller's language does not always align neatly with 'Western' conventions. Hamel lectures pietist students. Müller must develop a new language to engage Marxist academia. Hamel can retell Bible stories in a traditional way.

This book opens the door slightly but enough to make the reader curious. Then all these questions about history and the Bible, and about living in the world as a Christian, stomp out with new force. Is there more to Müller's unusual life decisions than a 'Western' theological mindset can box in its moulds?

Jameson E. Ross, *Bonhoeffer as Biblical Interpreter: Reading Scripture in 1930s Germany* (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 202 pages. ISBN: 9780567702241.

Reviewed by Scott Kohler

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In *Bonhoeffer as Biblical Interpreter*, Jameson Ross (Lecturer in NT and Early Church History at Trinity College Queensland) offers a helpful analysis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's engagement with the Bible. He focuses especially on the 1930s, a pivotal decade that saw Bonhoeffer as an academic lecturer in Berlin, a pastor in London, and a leader in the Confessing Church in Germany, famously directing the seminary at Finkenwalde from 1935 to 1937. At each of these posts, the Bible occupied a place of prominence in Bonhoeffer's work. Ross argues that throughout these years Bonhoeffer was a true 'interpreter' of the Bible. He seeks to demonstrate not only Bonhoeffer's sensitivity and sophistication in reading the Bible, but also an underlying continuity in his approach, beginning with his student years in the mid-1920s.

We are presented with close readings of three pairs of texts: two selections from the Berlin lectures on Genesis 1–3 that were published as *Creation and Fall*; two sermons from his London pastorate; and two passages from his classic *Discipleship*. These three sets of close readings are illuminated by two theoretical works by Bonhoeffer. A 1925 student paper contrasting 'Historical and Pneumatological Interpretation of Scripture' serves as an introductory chapter to all the readings, whilst a 1935 Finkenwalde lecture on 'Contemporizing New Testament Texts' functions as an 'Interlude' chapter between the London sermons and the passages from *Discipleship*.

The volume has a very tidy structure, which makes it a good introduction to Bonhoeffer's use of the Bible. Ross gives each chapter a biographical introduction as well, a welcome feature in a book that could seem only of interest to specialists. And the close readings themselves offer a good and plausible account of Bonhoeffer's concerns. All of this makes it possible to recommend *Bonhoeffer as Biblical Interpreter* to any who are interested in Bonhoeffer's approach to the Bible.

Ross's contention that the 1925 student paper is seminal for Bonhoeffer's later work is less satisfying. Bonhoeffer himself seems to have noticed a significant change in his approach to the Bible in the mid-1930s. The 1935 lecture can be read more as a fresh new beginning than an elaboration of long-cherished themes.

In line with other recent Bonhoeffer interpreters, Ross also seeks to distinguish Bonhoeffer's theology of the word from evangelical approaches to the Bible *as* the Word of God. I am not so sure that Bonhoeffer is concerned to guard against an inappropriate 'confidence' (p. 126) in our use of the Bible; he seems rather to assume that the Bible, prayerfully approached, will unfailingly yield a Word from God. Bonhoeffer occasionally sounds amusingly, refreshingly, like a fundamentalist, albeit a post-liberal one who is sensitive to the layers of meaning in the text.

Even if Ross's arguments do not fully convince, his analysis is a welcome invitation to engage Bonhoeffer as an interpreter of Scripture, and the journey through a key decade is a trip worth taking.

Joseph C. L. Sawatzky, *Toward an Anabaptist-Pentecostal Vision: Exploring Ecclesial Identities in North American Mennonite Mission with Pentecostal-Type Churches in Southern Africa* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023), 258 pages. ISBN: 9781666739114.

Reviewed by Ian Randall

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The publishers of this volume introduce it with the question: 'What does Pentecostalism, the fastest-growing Christian expression worldwide, have to do with Anabaptism?' and note that Anabaptism's Mennonite adherents have sometimes been called 'the quiet in the land'. However, the contrast brought out in this volume does not have to do with 'quietness' and 'noise'. It is more subtle: Joseph Sawatzky brings into juxtaposition what he terms the 'horizontal emphases' of Mennonite identity, as articulated in classical form in Harold Bender's *The Anabaptist*

Vision, and the 'vertical dimension', as evidenced in African Initiated and Pentecostal-type churches in southern Africa.

Sawatzky draws on his own experience and commitments, which have included serving in South Africa from 2006 to 2014 in Bethany Bible School, with a programme geared towards African Initiated Churches (AICs) in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. He is now part of the Mission Network with the Anabaptist-Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, USA, helping to develop the seminary's Global Anabaptist Education initiative.

In looking at the work of a cross-cultural missionary, Sawatzky argues — following Ed and Irene Weaver, North American Mennonite missionaries — for a 'give and receive' model, also described as 'learner-teacher'. This is crucial for the way he frames the book. The book seeks to explore, through on-the-ground research, often incorporating testimonies, what Mennonites in the West can learn from Pentecostal-type churches in the Global South. At the same time, the research shows that there is an awareness in South Africa of what Mennonites can bring, especially in the area of social ethics.

The book is both focused and wide-ranging. It combines biblical material with empirical evidence and with missiological discussion. Major themes are covered, such as Mennonite insights into commitments to following Jesus, community, and the way of peace, and how churches denoted as AICs think of the Spirit, worship, and leadership. Throughout, Sawatzky seeks to gain an understanding of the views of leaders and members of AICs and other Pentecostal-type churches, and the approach of Mennonite missionaries.

While there are clear areas of AIC-Mennonite divergence in priorities across the range of issues considered, Sawatzky sees possibilities for convergence. He refers to the contribution of James McClendon Jr's 'baptist vision' in showing how vertical and horizontal can belong together. The final two chapters are on 'biblical foundations' and 'theological pillars' for an Anabaptist-Pentecostal vision.

With the growth of the churches of the Global South, including Anabaptist churches, this kind of study is of vital importance. Much of what is written about Anabaptism is still focused on experiences in Europe and North America. The 2012 publication, *Winds of the Spirit: A Profile of Anabaptist Churches in the Global South*, by Conrad Kanagy, Tilahun Beyene, and Richard Showalter, was ground-breaking in this respect, and it is surprising that Sawatzky does not cite it. However, what Sawatzky does is to make a powerful case for integration, with Mennonite 'horizontal' discipleship and Pentecostal 'vertical' spirituality coming together to point to what Sawatzky describes in his conclusion as 'a robust and authentic witness to Jesus Christ, the One in whom the divine and human worlds fully meet in the power of the Spirit'.

Alexei Bodrov and Stephen M. Garret (eds), *Theology and the Political: Theo-political Reflections on Contemporary Politics in Ecumenical Conversation* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 291 pages. ISBN: 9789004431744.

Reviewed by Tommaso Manzon

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The relationship between theology and politics is always going to be a hot, engaging, and virtually inexhaustible topic. *Theology and the Political* seeks to make a contribution to this discussion.

This is an edited volume whose composition has been supervised by Dr Alexei Bodrov, founder and rector of St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute in Moscow and a researcher at the VU Amsterdam, and by Prof. Dr Stephen M. Garrett, who previously taught at Vilnius Academy of Arts and now works as Curriculum Vice-President for Global Scholars. All the essays gathered in this volume, except for two, were originally presented at a conference hosted in Belgrade in 2015 by St Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute and the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization of Novi Sad. The book is divided into three sections bearing the titles 'Theo-political Retrieval for Contemporary Political Practice'; 'Theo-political Structural Analysis of

Secularity and Post-secularity'; 'Theo-political Engagement from Specific Christian Tradition'. The key to all contributions is the motif of political action as missional witness and therefore as a fundamental expression of the church's mandate to preach the gospel.

This volume's main point of strength lies in presenting a plurality of voices, methods, and perspectives, as well as a wide array of subjects. In this respect, it should be noted that this work is the product of the shared effort of scholars from different Christian backgrounds (Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic) and seeks to provide a multi-faceted perspective on issues connected to the intersection between the theological and the political. Moreover, a second point of strength lies in the interconnection proposed by virtually all the essays between 'high theory' and the ideas of big names such as Barth, Bonhoeffer, Berger, Segundo, and Moltmann (himself a contributor). Local insights are bound to specific political events and/or tradition-specific theo-political discussions (such as the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the concept of human rights or the responses of Canada's Protestant churches to the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). This approach keeps all the contributions practical, accessible, and yet thought-provoking also for those who do not belong to the specific context being treated.

The downsides of the book are the relatively small amounts of biblical exegesis involved, as well as comparatively little focus on the person of Jesus. Logically, this can be explained through the nature of the contributions which do not belong to the field of biblical studies and/or that of Christology. However, the volume would have benefited from a more integrated approach. Finally, sometimes there is a perceived lack of problematisation of the categories of modern politics. Especially with some contributions, the issue seems to be more that of fitting the proclamation of the gospel within the structures and ideas of secular liberalism, rather than that of proclaiming the gospel to the *polis*.

Jehu J. Hanciles (ed.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, Vol. IV: *The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 449 pages. ISBN: 9780199684045.

Mark P. Hutchinson (ed.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, Vol. V: *The Twentieth Century: Themes and Variations in a Global Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 449 pages. ISBN: 9780198702252.

Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 823 pages. ISBN: 9780199646920.

Reviewed by Henk Bakker

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The five-volume Oxford series on the history of Protestant dissenting traditions, with general editors Timothy Larson and Mark Noll, is a unique series, because in focusing on dissenting movements and traditions, in particular on religious migrations 'out of England', it clearly surpasses the traditional outlook of church history writing. The volumes follow these ecclesial historical developments, as they emerged from the English state church, distanced themselves from established religious doctrines and practices, and (oftentimes haphazardly) found new ground elsewhere, in other parts of the world. The series examines how these new traditions spread, organised themselves, and took on characteristic patterns of independent thinking, believing, and assembling. Every theological library should have this series on its shelves.

Volume IV, edited by Jehu Hanciles, presents eighteen highly specialised contributions of experts representing a wide variety of regional and local church histories, and covering somehow the geographical, viz. global, settings of the series. As such, its five parts consist of African, Asian and Middle Eastern, American and European, Latin American, and Pacific origins, each article opening with an introduction setting out to map the twentieth-century state of affairs, thereby also focusing on historical, social, economic, ecumenical, and

colonial issues. As a result, the volume, with explanatory notes and a select bibliography, certainly qualifies for a standard academic reference book.

In part three of the volume, Toivo Pilli and Ian Randall join efforts in expounding and explaining the complex history of 'free church traditions in twentieth-century Europe'. The article offers a critical appraisal of the free church tradition in Europe, as it discusses 'evangelistic witness', 'church and state', 'theology and spirituality', 'issues of identity', and 'social and global involvements'. Pilli and Randall observe that the story of European Free Churches, despite many weaknesses, nevertheless is 'a story of transformation and change', and is far from being a story of 'resignation and decline' (p. 289).

Challenging and revealing is the contribution of Sylvia Collins-Mayo, titled 'Dissent by Default: "Believing Without Belonging" in Twenty-First Century England' (chapter 13). Collins-Mayo convincingly diagnoses that the face of religion in England is changing dramatically, as institutional adherence is decreasing, as it is characterised by 'benign indifference', and since Christian engagement with the church becomes more and more nominal, patterned by the denominator 'believing without belonging' (p. 310). Moreover, very rewarding and distinct are the contributions by Laura Rominger Porter, 'Dissent as Mainline'; Bill Leonard, 'Southern Baptists and Evangelical Dissent'; David Daniels, 'The Twentieth-Century Black Church: A Dissenting Tradition in a Global Context'; Cecil Robeck, 'Pentecostals and Charismatics in America'.

Volume V of the series, the closing volume, edited by Mark Hutchinson, presents twelve contributions from a wide variety of scholars. The historical research is basically oriented to spatial, cultural, and identity changes European ecclesial traditions underwent when they globalised in previous ages. Consequently, the themes also changed, as one of its emphases is retained for postcolonial theology. Laura Rademaker's discourse about 'Gender, Race, and Twentieth-Century Dissenting Traditions' is an outstanding contribution (but why does her bibliography stop at 2012?), as she deservingly clarifies the 'shift to the global South', a global ecclesial turn commencing at the end of the twentieth century. With secularism flooding western Europe, the typical

global Christian is changing from a white, privileged male person, into a young black, African or South American woman. Already in the first half of the twentieth century, Christian women saw their possibilities and opportunities increase:

> Women, a numerical majority in nonconformist churches throughout the twentieth century, claimed and expanded opportunities available to them in religious contexts and beyond. In many dissenting denominations they gained the right to full equality in leadership offices. (p. 416)

Because of the shift to the global South, the female input, and importance, simply became more obvious.

In addition, the contributions of K. K. Yeo, 'Biblical Interpretation in the Majority World', and Atola Longkumer, 'Mission, Evangelism, and Translation: From the West to Elsewhere' are also very informative. The editor Mark Hutchinson wrote extensively in the volume, with five contributions, altogether making up 30 percent of the content.

The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations, edited by Ulinka Rublack and published in 2017, marks the five-century celebration of the Reformation. The front cover of the volume shows the hand-coloured etching of the 'True Likeness of Dr. Martin Luther on his Death bed, ca. 1556'. The 37 articles altogether cover a wide variety of dimensions and aspects of the Protestant Reformation and have been explored and explained by an impressive list of experts from different continents. Two names are connected to the Low Countries: Guido Marnef, from the University of Antwerp, and Herman Roodenburg, from the Free University of Amsterdam.

Part 1 opens with the 'New Theology', which is approached by discussing some of its major features, such as the new stances on the issues of evil and grace, 'the nature of spiritual experience', and political obedience.

Part 2 explores the 'geographies and varieties of reformations', among which the Bohemian, and the de radical, are a 'Fundgrube' of information (the 'radical' by C. Scott Dixon, Queen's University Belfast). Of course, Lutheranism and Calvinism are extensively described, as are the English and Scottish Reformations, the Catholic

renewal, Pietism, Protestantism outside Europe, and Protestantism and non-Christian religions.

Part 3, quite uniquely so, investigates the means by which ideas, ideals, and renewal developed and were carried on: 'Communicating the Reformations'. In particular the chapters on the 'word', 'liturgy', and 'print workshops and markets' are full of insight. For example, Andrew Pettegree writes,

> In the new Dutch Republic the market was never unconstrained; but rivalry between Amsterdam and the major cities, and between the House of Orange and the city regents, ensured that effective censorship was difficult to maintain. The new state would develop a market in religious publications of unrivalled richness and diversity, a mainstay of a vibrant commercial culture where the problems that had so afflicted print in the early years, poor communications, and a lack of capital, were largely absent. (p. 386)

Finally, Part 4 recounts the sites, the institutions, its societies, scholars, education, legal courts, and its nobilities. Part 5 develops a description of 'identities and cultural meanings of the respective Reformations', which is mirrored in involvements in commerce and consumption, music, the body, and its stance on sexual difference. Part 6 closes with a tentative assessment of the Reformations, the global perspective in hindsight, and a methodological discussion of complexities of history and memory.

I wholeheartedly recommend *The Oxford Series on Protestant Dissenting Traditions* and *The Oxford Handbook on Protestant Reformations* to the world of academicians, and to all interested in the fruit of sound historical research.